

Local Governance and Classroom Approaches to Multilingualism and Intercultural Competence in Algerian Universities

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RECEIVED : 15/08/2025

ACCEPTED :05/12/2025

PUBLISHED : 07/03/2026

Abstract

The article analyzes the crossing of classroom multilingualism and local education governance in Algerian universities. Based on a descriptive-analytical synthesis of published literature, the article positions multilingualism and intercultural competency in the architecture of governance, policy direction, and institutional dynamics. This literature review combines Norton's investment model and Byram's intercultural communicative competence model to identify the ways in which local-level policy scaffolds and delimits classroom practice. The study was directed toward following tensions between bottom-up multilingual praxis and top-down policymaking and discloses how they make their presence felt in intercultural learning, pedagogical practice, and identity negotiation in higher education. It indicates that making classroom praxis fit into local governance mechanisms is crucial to creating inclusive, responsive, and globally positioned higher education. The article ends by emphasizing policy and education implications, requesting measures of governance–pedagogy complementarity in developing intercultural competences and multilingual competence in Algerian universities.

Keywords: Local governance, Educational policy, Multilingualism, Intercultural competence, Algerian universities

1. Introduction

Algeria's colonial legacy, Arabisation plans, and globalisation strategies have been the most important drivers of its sociolinguistic position. Accordingly, there is only a single multilingual space in the nation that is occupied by Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Algerian Arabic (Derja), Tamazight, French, and lately English coexisting side by side in symbolically as well as pragmatically linked spaces. They are not communication means but instruments of ideology, identity, and symbols of power for the battle of tradition and modernity, national identity and colonial past, and local citizenship and globalization (Belmihoub, 2018; Rouabah, 2022).

Universities are the most resourceful of contexts where such sociolinguistic contact is conceivable. Multilingualism is simultaneously a fact of Algerian universities and a replication of broader social reality. Pedagogy or practice of teaching—hybridity, code-switching, and linguistic negotiation—are in an ongoing state of tension with official state policy upholding Arabic. Students and teachers must both negotiate these facts to institutional

regimes that themselves refuse to make concessions to linguistic diversity. This generates tensions between regimes of top-down control and bottom-up class practice, positioning the university as an intersection point of confluence where language policy, education governance, and identity are synthesized.

All of these have been researched previously: Algerian higher education multilingualism, pedagogy, and identity. Much of the effort remains within disciplinary boundaries and is not readily understandable in terms of explaining the impact of local education governance on such practice. National law and policy and local policy habitually determine the setting and boundaries of multilingual education, but classroom practice evades or contextually quietly reformulates such policy. Enacted multilingualism's gap and policymaker governing policy need to be more clearly addressed in theory and policy-level work.

This article bridges this research gap by conducting a descriptive–analytical characterisation of intercultural competence and multilingualism in Algerian higher education institutions, in local terms of governance of education. It is concerned with how institution-level governance machinery and policy intertwine to take shape as classroom practices, how identity and intercultural competence are enacted in these multilingual classrooms, and with what effects policy reform and higher education practice. Relying on Norton's investment theory of learning and Byram's intercultural communicative competence (ICC) model, the research is seeking to contribute to the existing knowledge base concerning how multilingualism in universities can be regulated by world-ready governing regimes, inclusive, and just.

2. Local Educational Governance in Algeria

Local education governance in Algeria was traditionally founded upon other political identity building, culture maintenance, and world integration globally. After gaining independence in 1962, the country embarked on an Arabisation policy advocating for Modern Standard Arabic as a vehicle of educational promotion as a means of reinforcing national identity and departing from colonial French culture (Mostari, 2004; Le Roux, 2017). Politically symbolic, the policy succeeded in sweeping under the rug the linguistic character of Algerian everyday life whereby scientific discourse continued to be controlled by French and Tamazight as cultural heritage.

The recent reforms have witnessed English become a new emergent language of teaching, particularly higher education and science (Berrabah & Toubaida, 2024). Such top-down policy reform is, however, even followed by implementation issues at times. Teacher training, mobilization of resources, and institutional reform have not always been lagging behind policy reform, because this has led to contradiction between espoused regulation and classroom practices (Makhlouf, 2023). It is these forces that are used to construct the argument to consider governance on a level beyond policy-making, but of an intricate phenomenon interlacing the state powers, university governments, and teacher training communities.

Institutionally, each is a national policy interpreter and maker. Pedagogic practice in most cases is pragmatically teacher and student preference, strategically using and negotiating multilingual repertoires in particular ways to achieve academic and communicative objectives (Benaboura, 2020; Adder & Bagui, 2020). Practice thus deviates, in some cases, quite significantly from formal governance provision, with an endemic mismatch between pedagogic reality and policy intention.

Local government thus has much to contribute to the intermediation between embodied multilingualism and national language policy. Government institutions regulate the manner in which languages come to be established and operated in higher education by means of assessment regimes, teacher training programs, and curricula. Sensitivity of systems of governance towards sociolinguistic facts remains unbalanced. To bridge this divide, classrooms must be imagined as the space in which policy is practiced, subverted, and re-negotiated in a way that they become inherent spaces of inquiry-based governance.

3. Classroom Approaches to Multilingualism

University classroom multilingualism in Algeria is a continuing intersection of policy necessity, organisational planning, and daily life for teachers and students. Although national government has long had a tradition of preferring Arabic and increasingly now English as flag languages, classroom realities are pragmatic and inclusive in their management of language. Practice indicates that multilingualism is not an educational choice but a response to governmental organisation which can handle Algerian linguistic diversity only partially.

Evidence shows Algerian students in general hold positive attitudes towards multilingualism as enrichment in their own culture and passage to intellectual and professional progress (Belmihoub, 2018). This is practiced by adopting strategic use of Modern Standard Arabic, French, English, and sometimes Tamazight, according to the needs of the discipline and classrooms. These strategies put aside the conflict between top-down and bottom-up models of institutional governance and pedagogic practice, and that governance models must function to more effectively manage the learner's dynamic multilingual repertoire.

Pedagogic research provides *in vivo* proof of such practice. Fatima (2016) illustrates the way German-as-a-Foreign-Language learners appropriate multilingual text analysis in order to construct metalinguistic understanding and stylistic sensitivity. Similarly, Benaboura (2020) supports the way learners appropriate French scientific material as proof of their metacompetency for handling rich repertoires in an attempt to access university knowledge. Such practice is a testament to learners' agency in mediating language hierarchies through governance and communicative requirements.

Governance tensions are overtly exhibited in policy-driven movement, i.e., the transition to English Medium Instruction (EMI) of sciences. While with a vision towards internationalization, emergent instant policy change has destabilized hardwired bilingual structures and placed pedagogic burdens on teachers and learners (Berrabah & Toubaida, 2024). This is evidence of the way symbolic or strategic goal-oriented governance systems can place classroom-level instability if not supplemented with adequate resources and professional support.

Teachers must also negotiate pedagogical decision-making governance conflicts. Adder and Bagui (2020) report resistance from teachers against the use of Algerian Arabic in English classes. Where official regulation prohibits the use of indigenous languages, teachers have employed code-switching as a pragmatically effective means of understanding promotion. These occurrences are the manner in which language hierarchies initiated through governance are brought to operate within classroom reality, where teachers must mediate institutionally predicated requirements and learners' learning needs.

Virtual spaces advance these processes. Ammour (2024) determines that Algerian students carry multilingual practice beyond the classroom into the virtual learning space, where there is less stringent control over regulation. Students use English and other languages in informal contexts beyond regular classroom teaching for reinforcement and augmentation of official school and sustaining multilingual repertoires. These practices seek to advance the boundaries of governance in coping with language practice outside mainstream classroom space.

As a system, Algerian university multilingual classroom practice ironically illustrates a regulation paradox: national policy is trying to stabilize language use around some chosen official languages, while classroom life generates flexible, hybrid, and negotiated practice. This disconnect must be filled so that mechanisms of governance continue to be linked with the multilingual identities and strategies that construct higher education in Algeria.

4. Identity, Intercultural Competence, and Governance

Language practice, intercultural competence, and identity interactions in Algerian universities cannot be separated from governance systems that facilitate, condition, or limit multilingual practices. Sociolinguistic and education theory provide rich theoretical contexts for exploring teachers' and students' negotiation of identity in multilingual classrooms responding to the effects of governance systems biased towards looking for hierarchical language policies.

Postmodern and poststructuralist discourses articulate the fragmentary and unstable character of identity in multilingual contexts. Gu and Tong (2021) highlight that students constantly negotiate their identity in contrast with the forces of cultural and sociopolitical pressures in a manner that serves to undermine hegemonic discourses. In the Algerian context, that means students are brokers in-between state-supported orders of languages such as the promotion of Arabic and English and habitual multilingualism of the social and academic worlds they inhabit. Policy and governance then become not merely administrative fiat but also ideological forces that shape how identity is made and contested in the classroom.

Sociocultural theory also places identity construction within institutional orders and discourse communities. Morita (2012) and Roy (2006) illustrate how academic engagement is mediated within the sociopolitical and broader history. In Algerian universities, this implies that classroom identity negotiation is tied directly to governance structures that determine which languages become mainstreamed and minoritized. Decisions related to curriculum, examinations, and instruction language choice have immediate effects on what is taught but also have effects on students' identification with and belonging to the learning community.

Norton's investment view of language learning (2000; Darvin & Norton, 2015) is particularly useful in explaining the intersection between governance and identity. Theory would have it that students' investment in learning a language is attached to preferred identities and future access to material and symbolic capital. Algerian English expansion policy can be read to make space for capitalist accumulation on the global stage but to exclude and marginalize local languages and identities and limit equal access. Students' linguistic repertoires are legitimated or delegitimated by the regime of the rules facilitating the practice of a language. Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model concurs with this by highlighting the role of education to cultivate intercultural sensitivity, empathy, and critical awareness. Policy frameworks with the incorporation of intercultural objectives within the curriculum can upgrade the capacity of universities to educate students who will be global citizens. But, as evidence in Algeria has testified (Nemouchi & Byram, 2019; Ghaffour & Chehri, 2024), models of governance focus on linguistic correctness and test results rather than intercultural competence. This is a governance orientation that constrains teachers' autonomy in classroom instruction of ICC despite evidence of its viability.

Taken together, these theoretical accounts render governance arrangements vulnerable to being more than passive milieus but rather actors for promoting how multilingualism and identity are enacted in Algerian higher education. Policy based on monolingual or two-language premises can lose sight of the hybrid, negotiated nature of identity making in classrooms. Governance interventions, however, that take on and value multilingualism as an asset can allow higher education systems to be more inclusive and interculturally adept.

5. Discussion

Algerian multilingualism research within higher education also necessarily refers to a discrepancy between governance top-down policy and classroom pedagogy bottom-up. National policy promotes the development of Arabic and, more specifically, English as a pedagogical language, whereas classroom practice bears witness to pragmatic and hybrid types of multilingualism such as code-switching, translanguaging, and instrumental use of different means by learners and teachers (Adder & Bagui, 2020; Belmihoub, 2018).

It captures a primal struggle of governance. National language strategies, for instance, seek to attain symbolically-oriented goals such as international integration and cultural integration. Colleges, by contrast, have to adapt to students' practical interests in which they deploy multilingual repertoires in an attempt to obtain academic and professional success. Recent spread of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in science is a scorching expression of this contradiction. In spite of the desire to position Algeria on the global academic map, EMI reforms were enacted without sufficient training of teachers, curriculum transformation, and institutional support and resulted in disturbance and pedagogical breakup (Berrabah & Toubaida, 2024; Makhoulouf, 2023).

Practice-governance imbalance has gigantic implications for identity and intercultural awareness. In Norton's investment model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015), students' investment need to acquire new languages is facilitated by the material and symbolic capital that they find in them. Where English and French are elevated by the dominant orders and Others have Tamazight or Algerian Arabic discredited, the students can expect uneven possibilities for advancement and recognition. Byram's (1997) ICC model also assumes that intercultural competence will be institutionalized in higher education. Governance systems, however, remain more concerned with linguistic correctness and normative testing than with intercultural development (Hamadouch & Aoumeur, 2024).

Governance systems facilitate and limit towards this. They limit where they place classrooms under monolingual hierarchies irrespective of classroom contexts. They facilitate where they validate multilingualism as a way of creating intercultural capacity and inclusive identity. Research in literature teaching to language teaching (Nemouchi & Byram, 2019) or in adding intercultural learning to spoken lessons (Ghaffour & Chehri, 2024) has demonstrated the way pedagogic innovation as a response to governance can bridge the distance between policy intention and practice in the classroom.

Lastly, the argument calls to mind the possibility of local government to overcome such tensions. By internalizing national policy and re-working it in a way that accommodates the everyday multilingual reality of teachers' and students' lives, local school district administrators and university administration can make governance a source of change instead of an instrument of resistance. Closing the gap involves multilingualism and soft policies as potential to be utilized, and not to be solved.

6. Implications for Higher Education and Local Governance

The implications of the review are that classroom teacher practice must respond to governance structures responsive to Algeria's intercultural and multilingual contexts. Reform of policy in higher education must move beyond symbolic intent to engage with student and teacher constituencies' quotidian and pedagogic needs. The resultant implications are of specific interest to university-level decision-making and local governance:

6.1 Policy Reform and Responsiveness

Students' real multilingual practices must be taken into account, non-prescriptively, in double-language or monolingual models of language education policy. Multilingualism as a resource to optimize academic success, identity, and world-readiness is something government must take on.

6.2 Teacher Training and Professional Development

The national and subnational authorities need to make courses in multilingual pedagogy and ICC a priority in teacher training as a national priority. Teachers should be trained on modules that provide them with tools for the management of multilingual classrooms and building intercultural sensitivity to bridge the gap between policy recommendation and classroom practice.

6.3 Curriculum and Pedagogical Innovation

Universities need to integrate interculturally textured literature, texts, and intercultural learning exercises into translation and language study curricula. By facilitating governance systems, these interventions are able to turn classrooms into sites of intercultural communication and competence construction instead of sites of linguistic standardization.

6.4 Reform of Assessment

Current systems of governance place more emphasis on linguistic correctness than on intercultural competence and communication. The development of tools of measurement that cover linguistic capacity as well as intercultural ability will commit education to being goal-oriented in world citizenship and openness.

6.5 Research and Evidence-Based Governance

Governance systems must facilitate and fund empirical study of teacher practice, teacher dispositions, and student identities. Evidence-based policy within local context has the potential to bridge governance intention and multilingual practice. By the functioning of such implications, governance structures can liberate themselves from enforcing top-down language hierarchies and towards inclusive, context-sensitive, and innovative ways. Not only do these innovations improve the quality of Algerian tertiary education but also the ability to equip learners for effective functioning within a multilingual global space.

7. Conclusion

Algerian higher education mirrors the linguistic, cultural, and political pluralism of society in general. Multilingual practice—negotiated in Arabic, French, Tamazight, English, and Algerian Arabic—is pedagogic reality and at the center of identity-making and intercultural communication processes. Between top-down system government and bottom-up classroom practice, however, there is a restrictive gap for the emancipatory potential of multilingualism in the university.

This article illustrates how governance arrangements are the deciding factor in establishing how universities embrace multilingualism and intercultural competence. Language-supportive policies that are not sensitive to classroom hybridity require creating dissonance among institutional demand and student life. But governance arrangements that safeguard multilingualism as a resource can harvest the highest degree of learning dividend, solidify identity negotiation, and construct intercultural competence.

Theory models like Norton's investment theory and Byram's intercultural communicative competence model refer to the importance of matching pedagogy to governance and identity. Investment theory outlines how students' capacity to invest in languages is conditioned by opportunity and constrained by governance forces, and ICC refers to the necessity of locating intercultural competences within curricula. Both refer to the importance of governance strategies in mediating symbolic policy intentions and gritty classroom reality.

In the case of Algeria, it is not intellectual fixation but national imperative to overhaul local education governance. The universities must be institutions where pedagogy and governance converge to output inclusive and internationally capable graduates. This requires adaptive policies, teacher training, intercultural training, and creative exams that take into account the multilingual environments of the country. By putting multilingualism and intercultural competence right at the core of its governance model, Algeria is well-positioned to place its higher education system as a major force of international integration, justice, and social cohesion.

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