

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

صعوبات تعلم اللغة العربية لدى الأطفال الناطقين بالأمازيغية: دراسة حالة في مرحلة التعليم الابتدائي (دراسة ميدانية)

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Received: 01/12/2024 Accepted: 18/01/2025 Published:01/02/2025

Abstract:

This research study is incorporated within didactic researches concerned with the educational field. Through this study, we've addressed the topic of teaching Arabic to Amazigh speakers. The sample of this analytical study consists in primary school pupils. This study objective is to make, who's interested in this field, able to understand the pedagogical principles used in teaching a language to overcome learning difficulties. Whereas, the importance of the topic lies in achieving knowledge accumulation and providing an overview about the educational curriculum in accompanying children while learning Arabic to avoid learning difficulties.

Keywords: Learning difficulties, Arabic, Amazigh-speaking children, Amazigh language, language acquisition.

ملخص:

تندرج هذه الدراسة البحثية ضمن الأبحاث التعليمية المعنية بالمجال التربوي. من خلال هذه الدراسة، تناولنا موضوع تعليم اللغة العربية للناطقين بالأمازيغية. تتكون عينة هذه الدراسة التحليلية من تلاميذ المدارس الابتدائية. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تمكين المهتمين بهذا المجال من فهم المبادئ التربوية المستخدمة في تعليم لغة ما للتغلب على صعوبات التعلم. بينما تكمن أهمية الموضوع في تحقيق تراكم المعرفة وتقديم نظرة عامة حول المنهج التعليمي في مرافقة الأطفال أثناء تعلم اللغة العربية لتجنب صعوبات التعلم.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a social product that emerged to facilitate communication between people in society, helping them meet their needs and fulfill their desires. Languages diversified with the diversity of societies, even when societies were similar and their languages appeared to resemble each other. Nevertheless, differences often outweigh similarities. While linguistic universals, as Noam Chomsky suggested, are similar and sometimes even identical, the components of languages are comparable in terms of sounds or letters; what varies is the pronunciation or writing form. He posited that learning a first language may facilitate the acquisition of other languages as long as the linguistic universals are comparable.

On the other hand, many studies have explored whether learning other languages can be as easy as acquiring a first language, which is often learned spontaneously and effortlessly. Some responses indicate that for a child to easily learn additional languages, they must be practiced within the family or close environment. Conversely, if these languages are formal and imposed, their acquisition becomes more challenging, as learners encounter difficulties in the learning process. The first language develops from the environment toward the language, while the opposite applies to other languages, leading to a reversed direction of influence.

In this context, can an Amazigh-speaking child entering school easily learn Arabic according to Chomsky's theory, or will they face challenges?

This study aims to explore this notion and determine whether it applies to Amazigh-speaking children in the primary education stage. It also seeks to identify the specific difficulties they encounter in learning the Arabic language

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

2. The Problem of the Study

Every human being is equipped with a more advanced nervous system than any other creature. Within this system, there is the Broca area responsible for spoken language and the Wernicke area responsible for the meanings of words and language. These two areas are capable of acquiring all human languages, allowing a person to learn multiple languages. These regions are responsible for language usage regardless of how many languages are learned.

Humans are naturally equipped with the necessary organic and neurological mechanisms to acquire any first language or to learn a second, third, fourth, or more languages, provided these languages are prevalent in their close social environment. If the languages are not part of the immediate environment and are imposed, such as foreign languages introduced in schools, language acquisition becomes more challenging.

If a child's environment naturally exposes them to a second or third language—such as when the mother's nationality and language differ from the father's—it becomes easier for the child to practice and acquire these languages spontaneously and practically, as noted by Ronjat Titone in his book *Early Bilingualism (Le Bilinguisme Précoc)*, 1973, based on his experiences with his own children. Conversely, if a language is imposed on a child, it often results in significant learning difficulties, including mixing between the first and second languages on various levels such as linguistic interference, incorrect usage of both languages at the structural level, and inappropriate semantic transfers.

When a child's first language differs from the language of instruction or if they are introduced to a foreign language before mastering their first language, this creates a significant barrier to acquiring both the first language and the language of schooling or foreign language. Numerous studies have supported this view. Amazigh-speaking children, whose first language differs from the school language, fall into this category.

Upon entering school, the Amazigh-speaking child faces a new language and gradually learns it despite the challenges encountered. This process differs entirely from how they acquired their first language, due to

PhD student. Adjou Amel, Dr. Bournane Amar

different conditions and contexts of learning, including teaching methods, the language of instruction used by the teacher, communication between the child and the teacher as well as the school staff, and assignments required by the teacher for completion at home.

It should be noted that if a child has attended pre-school or Quranic schools (kuttabs), they may experience fewer challenges compared to peers who have not, though there is still a period of adaptation required to fully grasp the language imposed by the school. This adaptation arises due to the disparity between the home environment and what is presented at school. Furthermore, even though Arabic—the language of education—may not be entirely unfamiliar to the child, they may still feel estranged and forced into imposed situations, such as oral expression topics covering aspects of the curriculum unfamiliar to them.

Additionally, the child often develops an interlanguage, a linguistic state that combines their first language with the new language, leading to several issues, such as: Applying rules from their first language to the second language, resulting in errors related to gender, singular and plural forms, linguistic interference, and awkward sentence structures in Arabic due to the influence of the first language. This phase may last for months or longer.

Based on these realities, the following questions arise as potential paths of inquiry for this study:

Does the first language of an Amazigh-speaking child affect their learning of Arabic as an academic subject and as a medium of instruction?

If so, what linguistic aspects are influenced?

What types of errors do these children make in the Arabic language?

3. Study Hypotheses

These questions lead to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

-The first language of the Amazigh-speaking child affects their learning of Arabic as an academic subject and as a medium of instruction.

-The first language affects the following areas in Arabic: linguistic interference, applying structures from the first language when using Arabic, resulting in awkward syntax and meaning, and linguistic contrast.

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

-Amazigh-speaking children make mistakes because they think in their first language and express their thoughts in Arabic. These mistakes occur in morphological, grammatical, and semantic aspects.

4. Concepts Used in the Study:

First Language: This refers to the language that an individual acquires after birth from their family and social environment in their native setting.

It is defined as "the first language that a child acquires in their environment and uses to communicate with those around them, referring to the primary source from which the child learned their language" (Rashdi Ahmed Taima and Mohamed El-Sayed Manna, p. 33).

According to Mohamed Al-Maamouri and Abdel Latif Obeid, it is "the language that a person begins to comprehend from birth, becoming their first language that they use naturally for daily communication and thought. Thus, it is the language with which they are raised in their first environment, particularly within the family" (Mohamed Al-Maamouri and Abdel Latif Obeid, 1983, p. 11).

Therefore, we can conclude that the first language is so named because it is the first language that a child discovers and acquires from the initial social environment they experience from birth and uses naturally and fluently in all aspects of daily life.

Key characteristics of the first language include:

- It is acquired from the child's first social environment.
- It meets all the child's needs and desires effortlessly.
- It is acquired and used without significant effort.
- It is used to express all aspects of life.
- It forms the basis of the individual's cognitive world (perceptions, encoding of objects, people, and situations)
 - It is a spoken, not written, language.
 - It is used with individual variations and unique rules.
 - It is limited in terms of vocabulary, scientific, technological, and literary concepts and meanings.

-Second Language:

This term also has various definitions. Some define it based on its national use and consider it the national language, others regard it as the official language, while some define it based on the place where it is learned, viewing it as the language acquired in school or used for education. Below are some key definitions:

"The second language is the language learned by a person after acquiring their first language. This learning may occur within the cultural environment to which the language belongs (e.g., a Berber from the Kabyle region living in the city of Ouargla or Algiers, learning Algerian Arabic dialects, or a Palestinian living in Kabyle regions).

Alternatively, it may be learned within the individual's local environment where the language is used as a medium of interaction or education (e.g., children of some Algerian families using French alongside Algerian Arabic or Amazigh)" (Mohamed Al-Maamouri and Abdel Latif Obeid, 1983, p. 33).

Another definition considers it as the national language: "This refers to the language specified in the constitution, learned by members of a society with diverse mother tongues and dialects. It serves as a unifying medium for communication, bringing people closer in terms of expression, thought patterns, and fostering the desired connection among them" (Rashdi Ahmed Taima and Mohamed El-Sayed Manna, 2000, 1st edition).

Language of Instruction: This refers to the language through which students receive lessons in various subjects and at different educational levels. In this context, it is the Arabic language.

5. Study Objectives:

- To understand the impact of the first language that a child brings to school, which is different from the language of instruction, on their learning and comprehension of lessons in this new language.

- To seek appropriate solutions for the difficulties that the first language may cause in learning Arabic among Amazigh-speaking students.

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

6. Previous Studies:

Maaty Mohamed's 1993 Study on common oral expression errors among fourth and fifth-grade students in the first stage of basic education and their teachers, and the development of a program to address these errors. The researcher selected a sample of 200 male and female students from the fourth and fifth grades, from three different governorates: Sharqia, Minya, and Damietta. To collect data, the researcher used two forms—one to stimulate oral expression from two equivalent versions (A) and (B), and the other to analyze linguistic errors and to develop a proposed remedial program. After sorting, classifying, and analyzing the data, the study concluded the following:

The prevalence of linguistic errors in oral expression among Arabic language and social studies teachers who taught fourth and fifth-grade students. These errors included:

- Pronunciation of consonants and vowels.
- Inflection of nouns and verbs.
- Grammatical accuracy.
- Use of general syntactic and semantic structures, and inappropriate vocabulary usage.
- Adding unnecessary words in context and using terms not found in linguistic dictionaries.

Among the topics with frequent errors in teachers' speech were numbers, interrogative words, simple and derived forms, vocatives, derivatives, sources, plural forms, attributives, and the active and passive voices.

The study also highlighted the effectiveness of the remedial program in reducing the rate of linguistic errors, which relied on "reciting the Quran, training exercises, 'Say this, not that,' and 'Where is the error'"

This study demonstrated the diversity of common linguistic errors among both learners and teachers, regardless of whether they taught language or social subjects—a new finding unique to this study. It showed that if errors arise due to the influence of the first language in learning the

PhD student. Adjou Amel, Dr. Bournane Amar

second language, similar issues may occur when learning other academic subjects since these subjects are understood only through linguistic coding.

Ali Taouinat's Study titled "Difficulties in Learning Arabic Among Students of the Second Stage of Basic Education in Amazigh-Speaking and Arabic-Speaking Areas" for his doctoral thesis in 1997. The study involved a sample of 3,409 Amazigh-speaking students and 1,478 Arabic-speaking students. It aimed to answer the central question of whether difficulties in learning Arabic represent a problem for most Amazigh-speaking students at various levels: linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-psychological. After analyzing the results, the study concluded the following:

The scores of students from Amazigh-speaking regions were noticeably lower than those from Arabic-speaking regions, indicating greater prevalence of weakness and difficulties among the former.

Sixth-grade students outperformed their fifth-grade peers in both groups (Amazigh-speaking and Arabic-speaking).

The percentage of high achievers was higher among Arabic-speaking students compared to Amazigh-speaking students. face considerable difficulties in learning Arabic, as reflected in their scores, whereas such difficulties are less prevalent among Arabic-speaking students.

The first hypothesis of the study was thus confirmed: Amazigh-speaking students encounter greater challenges in learning Arabic compared to their Arabic-speaking peers (Taouinat, 1997, p. 393).

The source of these difficulties was attributed to pedagogical and didactic factors, as well as the content of the Arabic language curriculum in the initial stages of education. This curriculum focuses primarily on the structural aspects of the language, neglecting other important areas such as vocabulary acquisition, content knowledge, and pragmatic language use. As a result, it became apparent that the actual content level of the curriculum was significantly below the level of students when they first entered school.

Taouinat's study took a more educational approach rather than a purely linguistic one. However, in our study, we will concentrate on the linguistic aspect, focusing on the relationship between the first and second

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

languages and its connection to cognitive processes and individual learning strategies.

Khaled Abdel Salam's Master's Thesis (2003) titled "Difficulties in Learning Oral Language Among Third Grade Basic Education Students (Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking)" aimed to understand the influence of the first language (colloquial Arabic and Kabyle) on the learning of the second language (Standard Arabic). It also sought to identify whether learning difficulties stemmed from the first language or other factors and to determine whether these difficulties were unique to Kabyle speakers or shared with Arabic speakers and why. The study was based on the following hypotheses:

- The first language has no negative influence on the learning of the second language.
- Oral language learning difficulties are similar among Arabic and Kabyle speakers.

A random sample of 32 students (16 Arabic-speaking and 16 Kabyle-speaking) was selected. The sample underwent oral expression tests in two forms (guided expression and free expression using picture scenes). After analyzing and interpreting the results, the study concluded the following:

The first language (colloquial Arabic and Kabyle) has a clear influence on learning spoken Arabic. However, this influence should not be considered negative, as students use their first language as a support to compensate for deficiencies in their vocabulary and expression forms. It should not be assumed that there is a linguistic void for students at the start of their learning. Learning difficulties primarily stem from educational strategies, which partially confirms the first hypothesis.

There is also a significant similarity in oral language learning difficulties between Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students. In certain linguistic areas, difficulties were even more prevalent among Arabic speakers, thus confirming the second hypothesis of the study.

PhD student. Adjou Amel, Dr. Bournane Amar

Key Findings in More Depth:

Phonetic Level:

There was a significant similarity in the percentage of phonetic difficulties among Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students, such as the failure to pronounce vowels at the end of words or inappropriate use of vowel lengthening. This was evident in the exploratory study and the oral expression test.

Most phonetic errors revolved around the failure to pronounce vowels at the end of words, followed by the inability to articulate the "taamarbouta" at the end of words among both Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students.

The source of these phonetic errors was predominantly the influence of the first language in both groups of students and the nature of oral expression, which involves simultaneous planning and execution of speech. This can lead students to make hurried or hesitant speech, sometimes shortening their expressions and consequently making pronunciation errors.

Lexical Level:

There is a significant similarity between the percentage of Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students in terms of the difficulties and errors encountered at the lexical level.

The greatest challenge faced by both groups is borrowing from the first language and then using incorrect or misplaced vocabulary at closely similar rates.

The source of lexical difficulties stems from weak teaching strategies employed by educators, such as the lack of exercises for using the language in various contexts. This has resulted in a deficiency in students' vocabulary reserves in the second language, preventing them from distinguishing between word meanings and their appropriate uses. Consequently, they often rely on their first language. Moreover, oral expression necessitates quick thinking and speech production, in contrast to written expression, which can further exacerbate these issues.

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

Syntactic Level:

-There is a similarity in the proportion of students experiencing difficulties in constructing correct sentences among both Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students.

-The most prevalent challenges and errors include forming incomplete sentences, followed by constructing sentences according to the structure of the first language, with comparable rates between the two groups.

-The source of these difficulties lies in the teaching methods used in educational institutions, which emphasize rote memorization of incomplete sentences and parroting specific sentence structures and expressions.

7. Grammatical Level:

-Most students from both groups (Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking) exhibit similar grammatical difficulties, with a slightly higher prevalence among Arabic speakers.

-The most challenging grammatical issues for both groups include the use of prepositions within sentences, followed by the use of demonstrative pronouns, inflectional markings, and verb tenses. Most of these difficulties are clearly influenced by the first language, particularly "inflectional errors." They may also be attributed to teaching strategies that overlook students' language backgrounds.

-There is a significant similarity between Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students in many grammatical difficulties.

8. Morphological Level:

-Most students from both groups (Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking) face similar morphological challenges, with greater intensity among colloquial Arabic speakers.

-The most common morphological difficulty is the inability to distinguish between singular and plural forms in both groups at roughly equal rates.

-The source of these morphological challenges is the influence of the first language, caused by developmental errors stemming from a lack of mastery of the second language's (Standard Arabic) linguistic system.

9. Semantic Level:

-There is a significant similarity in the percentage of Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students' semantic difficulties and the extent of their prevalence.

-The primary challenge faced by both groups at the semantic level is using words out of context, which either changes or complicates the meaning of a sentence.

-The source of these difficulties arises from confusion in using vocabulary and connectors within a sentence due to a lack of proficiency in the second language. This is often linked to the students' educational level and may be considered developmental errors or errors related to the nature of oral expression.

The overall result suggests that differences between Arabic-speaking and Kabyle-speaking students in certain linguistic levels are not necessarily related to the first language. Instead, they are often attributed to individual differences, educational strategies, or cultural and social factors unique to each individual.

Field Study

Field Study Procedures:

The procedures of the field study encompass the study area, the sample taken, the study method, tools, and the practical application of the study. These components are detailed below:

Study Field and Sample:

Study Field:

The study was conducted in two primary schools in the municipality of Beni Mansour, Bouira Province: Martyr Ziane Mohamed Tayeb School and Beni Mansour Station School, where the population predominantly speaks Amazigh.

Study Sample:

Student Sample:

The study sample consisted of students in grades 3, 4, and 5 from each school. All students who had repeated years or were enrolled with age exceptions were excluded from the study. Only students who enrolled at the

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

appropriate age were included. The following table shows the study sample's distribution:

Table (1) Number of Sample Members

Table (1) shows the number of sample participants.

Level School	Total All	Total		5th grade		4th grade		3rd grade		Observations
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
Martyr Zianemohammed AL-tayeb	38	24	14	10	5	8	6	7	4	Girls are more outnumbered than Girls
The primary school of Beni Masour-the station	32	21	11	7	3	6	4	8	4	=
Total	72	45	25	17	8	15	10	15	8	

The table displays the distribution of the sample by gender and school.

Teacher Sample:

teacher sample consisted of those teaching the selected students, totaling 6 teachers, plus an additional 9 teachers, bringing the total to 15 teachers.

Study Tools:

The study tools included a written expression test for the students on a topic related to their personal experiences, encouraging them to use their own words and expressions, not just those memorized. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to teachers regarding the students' proficiency in Arabic and the challenges they face.

Written Expression Topics:

Grade 3: "You dreamt of going on a pilgrimage (Hajj). Describe your journey and what you did until you returned to your country."

PhD student. Adjou Amel, Dr. Bournane Amar

Grade 4: "You dreamt of becoming a football star. How did it feel, and how did people cheer for you?"

Grade 5: "What do you wish to become when you grow up, and why do you wish that?"

To facilitate scoring, a unified grading system was established for the three topics. After correcting the papers and identifying the students' errors, a total score of 15 was assigned for each topic, with partial scores assigned for each type of error.

Questionnaire:

The questionnaire included a series of questions about the students' level in Arabic and the challenges they face in learning the language.

Study Results:

Results of the Written Expression Test:

After conducting the written expression tests for the three grades and distributing the teacher questionnaire, the following results were obtained:

Table (2) Results of the Written Expression Test for the Three Grades

Total of repetitions Total of grades		5th grade	4h grade	3rd grade	Level Grades categories
13		2	4	7	3-1
39		12	15	12	6-4
19		11	5	3	9-7
1		/	1	/	12-10
/		/	/	/	15-13
72	tech	157	126	97	Totality of grades
380	Grade- mark				

The results of the written expression tests were presented in terms of scores obtained by the sample across the three grades. The scores were categorized into five groups, as shown in the table above. The scores mainly fell within the 7-9 range across all educational levels, despite sufficient time being given, allowing all students to complete their tasks without haste.

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

It is true that the topics presented were unfamiliar to the students, as we chose them to ensure that the linguistic stock used by the child is selected from their personal vocabulary, which they organize according to the topic. This is the vocabulary from which they construct sentences expressing their thoughts about what is asked of them, rather than using stock phrases and ready-made structures they have learned and use simply to repeat what the teacher asks. The personal construction of the topic forces them to select words, phrases, and linking tools to use, as well as the written content that answers the question posed.

We observe that the grades decline from year 5 to year 3, knowing that the correction process was based on the accuracy or error made. As mentioned earlier, those who repeated a year or more were excluded, as well as those with age reductions. We also focused on students of Berber origin who use their language at home.

Given that what is called the "average" in school assessment is calculated based on the arithmetic mean by dividing the total grades by the number of individuals in the sample, any individual who achieved this average or something close to it is considered acceptable, and vice versa.

The arithmetic mean was 5.3, which is a very low average, indicating that the grades achieved by the sample members are clearly low.

Table Breakdown (1.2.)

Totality of repetition Grades 'totality	5th grade	4th grade	3rd grade	Level Grades
13	2	4	7	3
9	1	3	5	4
17	5	5	7	5
13	6	7	0	6
12	4	5	3	7
6	5	1	0	8
2	2	0	0	+9

PhD student. Adjou Amel, Dr. Bournane Amar

72	"ta,"	157	126	97	Grades'totality
380	D				
5.3	Total				

As shown in Table (1.2.), the grades obtained by the Year 3 students are the lowest, followed by Year 4, and then Year 5 students. It was mentioned that learning Arabic for Berber-speaking learners goes through an intermediary language that combines both their native language and the new language being learned, which may take a year or more. Here, we understand that Year 3 students are indeed in this situation, and the same applies to Year 4 students, while Year 5 students have moved beyond this intermediary language stage.

It was concluded that the errors made by the sample members were varied. Some of them were related to the Arabic language itself, such as: the sun and moon letters, the elongation vowels that are pronounced but not written, the letters that are written but not pronounced, the different forms of "ta," plural forms, especially broken plurals, and conjugation of plurals with objects or animals, and verbs in the singular while the subject is dual or plural. Other errors related to the relationship between the first language and Arabic, which were mentioned by teachers in their responses. Additionally, spelling rules were often not followed in students' writing. All of these factors contributed to the low grades of the sample members due to their frequent mistakes.

Results of the Teacher Questionnaire:

How is the level of students in Years 3, 4, and 5 in Arabic?

We summarize the teachers' responses in the following points:

- The level of most students in Arabic is average orally and somewhat weak in writing.
- A small percentage have a good command of the language, while the majority face significant difficulties.
- Those who attended kindergarten or a Kuttab (traditional school) have an acceptable level both orally and in writing, while others are weak.

Difficulties in Learning the Arabic Language Among Amazigh-Speaking Children: A Case Study of the Primary Education Stage (Field Study)

- Students who have support at home perform better than those who do not.

- Students receiving private lessons perform better than others.

What are the types of difficulties faced by Berber-speaking students in elementary school in Arabic?

Most teachers agreed that the difficulties faced by these children are as follows:

For Years 3 and 4:

- Mixing the first language with Arabic, using structures from the first language in the second.

- Using words from the first language in oral or written expression.

- Weak expression and lack of cohesion in sentences to form a paragraph, sometimes mixing in colloquial language.

- Incomplete sentences.

- Incorrect conjugation of verbs and nouns in sentences and paragraphs.

- Frequent spelling, grammatical, and morphological errors.

For Year 5:

- Introducing words from the first language and basing sentences on the first language to write them in Arabic.

- Weak vocabulary in Arabic.

- Repetitive use of sentences, either orally or in writing.

Based on the results of the written expression test and the teacher questionnaire, it is clear that there is a match between the conclusions drawn from the written expression and what the teachers stated about the students' level in Arabic and the types of difficulties they face in learning the language. From this, we conclude that these students and others like them need proper preparation in Arabic language training before formal schooling to overcome the issues they encounter in learning Arabic.

CONCLUSION:

This study highlighted an important issue that has not been given attention by the official bodies of the Ministry of National Education: the

PhD student. Adjou Amel, Dr. Bournane Amar

lack of consideration for the differences and variations between environments and regions in Algeria in adapting education and even educational programs. The study revealed a problem affecting a significant proportion of schoolchildren who do not have the same opportunities as native Arabic speakers, and yet no thought has been given to how to ease the teaching process for them. Therefore, we call for serious consideration to end their suffering in school and to provide them with the same opportunities as other children, so they can overcome their difficulties in learning Arabic and other academic subjects.

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