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Title: Modern Standard Arabic as a Second Language for Its Own Speakers

Abstract

Algeria is a diglossic community, the existence of MSA as the only means of instruction on one hand and AA, the mother tongue of the Algerian learner on the other, makes the process of learning an arduous one. This reseach examines the classroom environment in primary school. It first describes how primary school teachers have constructed the environment of their foundation phase classrooms. It then considers why the teachers have assembled their classrooms in such ways by exploring their awareness, knowledge and understanding of, and attitudes and feelings towards, monolinguilism, bidialectalism and Second Language Acquisition. The study also briefly considers whether teacher training has amply prepared these teachers for the confrontation of a bidialectal classroom. The data is discussed in terms of education and Second Language Acquisition theory and the Algerian education and language policies. The results of indicate that the teachers have two fundamental suppositions that support their action and classroom construction. The first is that a lack of exposure to MSA is the primary cause of language problems for learners and the second is that AA, the mother tongue, does not need to be maintained or promoted in the school environment because learners are sufficiently exposed to their L1 in the home. The thesis concludes that shortcomings in training and information encourage teachers' assumptions to take root and that the founding of two years of pre-schooling in which the instruction will be in both AA and MSA is necessary.

I Introduction

Modern Standard Arabic, (henceforth MSA) the language of instruction in Algeria, can be seen as disconnected, as it were, to a large extent from everyday reality of learners' needs. As a matter of fact, Algerian children come to the formal school setting with knowledge in the mother tongue and mastery in communicative competence. This is the sound basis on which learning is usually built. But, because they are never in contact with the Standard form of Arabic in normal conversation with parents or friends, and in real-life activities within their home and out in the environment, Algerian children's experience with their oral language does not serve as a satisfactory vehicle for the learning process. Instead, this proficiency in their mother tongue seems to create confusion and difficulty for learning the connections between the various sounds of their native language and the written form of the letters presented to them at school. In the classroom, Algerian children learn to use spoken MSA but this does not usually happen without the appearance of artificiality and lack of spontaneity. Not only do they find great difficulty in putting their inherent native linguistic competence in Algerian Arabic, (henceforth AA) to task but they are also not allowed to use their lexical 'stock', native basic Arabic forms and structures, because these are not identical with MSA patterns. The linguistic relatedness which exists between MSA and the colloquial does not provide helpful indications and does not contribute at all to successful reading. In spite of their familiar structure, MSA words are not easily understood because they show varying degrees of phonological and semantic differentiation.

The aforementioned issue is of great significance to Algeria, and to other Arabic-speaking countries, because of the diglossic character, with the colloquial forms as the real mother tongue used in everyday communication and the high variety, MSA, as the language of education. For both teachers and learners, this situation can be regarded as a source of problems which have not been sufficiently and adequately addressed by the authorities for many years.

The present research examines the classroom environment of a primary school in which MSA is the only means of instruction. The results of this study indicate that, for the most part, the components of the classroom discourse are distinctly bidialectal and that the teachers have two fundamental suppositions that support their action and classroom construction.

The first is that a lack of exposure to MSA outside of the school is the primary cause of language problems for learners and the second is that AA does not need to be maintained or promoted in the school environment because learners are naturally exposed to their L1 in the home. The investigation concludes that shortcomings in training and information encourage these two assumptions to take root and that more in-service teaching that specifically emphasizes the nature of Second Language Acquisition and bidialectalism is necessary. It essentially explores how bidialectal education should be, could be and is practiced in the Algerian classrooms.

The research focuses particularly on the impact of the teacher and the influence he or she has on SLA (MSA as an L2) processes and bidialectalism. We reflect on how they might help or hinder a learner in their acquisition of MSA and show that successful bidialectalism, whereby the Algerian young learner can function in two dialects, is affected by whether a school and its teachers are practicing additive or subtractive bidialectalism. We also consider the teacher's role in implementing bidialectal or

diglossic education and how a classroom environment may or may not validate, explore and accept two dialects.

We are also particularly interested in whether the operating training that is offered to teachers is appropriate to the areas of SLA and bidialectalism. Lastly, we have noted that the role of the teacher and his/her attitudes towards, and understanding of, MSA as a second language is an issue that has often been undervalued in the Algerian educational context.

Our research intends to explore teachers' understanding of SLA across the curriculum as well as their attitudes towards learners within the Algerian context, and the impact these have on their behaviour towards learners in their classrooms. It is important to note that we do not specifically study a class where MSA is taught as a subject as such but rather consider how language is taught across the curriculum in a primary school classroom and observe all teaching activities in that class, with a particular focus on the language activities.

Within SLA, the study focuses predominantly on the impact of a teacher on learning MSA as a second language. Within bidialectalism, it considers the effect a teacher's knowledge and understanding of, and attitude towards bidialectalism has on whether it is promoted and practiced in the classroom environment.

The core assumption that is linked to this research is that inserting the dialect in the Algerian educational system, mainly during the pre-schooling, particularly in the listening and speaking skills, is advantageous and is something that should be developed and pursued. In our opinion, using the colloquial variety should be viewed as an asset and a right, not a weakness, a disadvantage or a problem that needs to be overcome.

1.1 **Linguistic situation in Algeria**

The Algerian society is characterized by overall bilingualism as a result of the French occupation which lasted for more than a hundred and thirty years and did all its best to impose its language in all public institutions. The operation was successful to a large extent as a great number of Algerians, particularly in cities and big towns, progressively learned to communicate in the foreign language in addition to their native tongues.

One of the obvious consequences of such language contact is code-switching which represents a central aspect of language behaviour among the Algerians. The aspects of the French linguistic influence can be seen at different levels: phonetic, lexical and syntactic. The types of code switching can be identified as the following: Tag-switching, intra-sentential, and inter-sentential Poplack (1980). All the three types are present in French and Arabic switching. In the same vein of thought, Dendane (2007:144) states the following:

> "What is interesting in the Algerian context is that when listening to people talking about any topic, be it serious or trivial, one will hear many back-and-forth switches between AA and French. It is even difficult sometimes to say whether the base language is Arabic with insertion of French constituents or the other way round."

Algerian Arabic is the language of communication in everyday life, but it also tends to be used in the media, particularly in a number of local radio stations and specific television programmes. AA is a spoken form with a variety of mutually intelligible regional dialects, including a countrywide urban/rural distinction signaled most clearly by the unvoiced/voiced velar stop [q/g].

Modern Standard Arabic, on the other hand, is the official language of the state. It is the language of religion and Islamic tradition, government and law, education and the

official written and spoken media, and it is practically the only form that is written. Dendane (2007:98) describes such situation as follows:

> This sociolinguistic phenomenon, in which an obvious form-function mapping is at work and in which the status of each variety is overtly recognized in the community, has been referred to as diglossia.

However, the distinction between AA and MSA is far from being clear-cut. MSA itself, which has evolved, now represents a gradient of varieties. It extends from Classical Arabic (CA), embodied in religious and legal texts and classical works of literature that are still in use, to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) which is the language of modern literature, school manuals, official documents, the written media, and some political speeches and radio/TV programmes. In this respect, Daoud (1991a:19) writes:

> The extent to which the language of these sources tends towards 'pure' CA or 'low' MSA depends very much on the educational background and language mastery level of the writer or speaker, his/her cultural affiliation and attitude towards the language as well as the audience and the topic at hand.

1.2 Arabic Instruction in Basic Education

The early Algerian initiative when dealing with the choice of the language of education at the period of the post Arabization was the abrupt decision about MSA as the only means of instruction. It was the schools' task to correct a child's language. Furthermore, the teacher's handbook dictates:

> Our job will be two-fold. We must use the child to correct the language of its family… This will be possible only when we have closed the gap between the written grammatical language and the anarchic spoken language… We shall express ourselves in writing as we speak orally, and we shall speak orally as we write. (Teacher's handbook for the first stage of basic education, Year 1980/1981).

A number of Algerian intellectuals analysed and denounced this teaching approach designed to make children feel guilty about their mother tongue. Khaoula Taleb-Ibrahimi (quoted in G.Guillaume 1983: 10) had the following criticisms to make:

> "The clearest manifestation of this sociolinguistic split is the inflexible and obstinate negation of a child's language experiences and achievements during its pre-school years, a negation very much apparent in the Algerian education system's stated goals with regard to language."

Whatever has been said or made the ideal solution to the problem should be dealt with in such a way to bring the low variety to accommodate and merge into the high variety. Vernacular Arabic accommodation to (H) helps reduce the linguistic dissimilarities by engaging in the process of interaction with (H) variety. Reducing the gap between H and L varieties bridges also the gap between the social and the educational environment; to the extent that the school environment becomes an extension of the family environment concerning the language acquisition process.

1.3 The Actual Status of MSA

The curriculum in the primary cycle (years 1 to 5) of basic education has been completely Arabised. It includes teaching MSA (reading, writing, oral expression, and grammar) to children whose native language is AA and most of whom would have developed some knowledge of MSA (the alphabet from preschool as well as some oral

comprehension ability from children's TV programmes). Proficiency in MSA among these children varies depending on the child's family situation (the parents' level of education, in particular), but it is supposed to develop rather quickly so that the child can study the other school subjects that are taught in MSA.

In an attempt to prepare the students for the language switch, the textbooks present the equations from left to right, following French writing, while the rest of the text (presentation, explanation, problem, etc.) is in MSA, written from right to left. Furthermore, the terms of the equations are in French, while the teacher and learners read the signs (+, =) in Arabic. For example, the equation:

a + b = c is verbalised as a zi?d b yussaawi c

((French /a/) (Arabic for 'plus') (French /b/) (Arabic for 'equals') (French /c/)). Similarly, geometrical figures are uttered in one language and named in another (e.g. line (AB) is printed as such and read in Arabic as (khatt AB). It is very difficult to understand how such a manoeuvre would prepare the learners for the switch to French in the university.

Several other problems remain unresolved at the level of planning and implementation. Teachers are not properly retrained to teach with the arabised textbooks, which not only causes mistakes in communication, but results in contradiction among classes and, eventually, inadequate competencies which are carried over to the higher levels.

1.4 Which Language Do Teachers Use in the Classroom?

Learners in the lower grades in basic school reported less than spontaneous use of MSA and French by the teachers and a predominance of AA in explaining or giving instructions and managing the classroom. As for the arabised subjects in the humanities and sciences, while teaching materials and examinations are in MSA, the language spoken by teachers and students in the classroom reflects very much the diglossic continuum, and may involve a variable degree of code-switching and code mixing, depending on the subject taught and the teacher. Overall, teacher talk in the humanities is predominantly in MSA during lectures, but it shifts towards EA and AA during question, answer and discussion periods. Students report that their overall participation in class is very limited and that they use AA exclusively, the students agree and reveal that they are unable to manage in MSA.

They add that all Algerian students lack spontaneity while speaking in MSA. It seems reasonable to argue that the situation just described trigger a serious language-related dilemma that Algerian educational policy makers will have to face sooner or later.

1.5 The Impact of Diglossia on Education

The impact of diglossia on education can be felt by the fact that for many speech communities, the high variety (H) is learned as a second language through formal education (Baugh 1997:33). This can be problematic because:

> Schools advocate the dominant literate and linguistic norms of a given society and students will not acquire the most influential linguistic standards

This means that learners from a mother tongue background will, therefore, be at a serious disadvantage when compared to children who are born into well-educated families where the official language is the first language (Baugh 1997). Schools that choose to use both the standard and the informal languages, that is, attempt bidialectal education, have a number of difficult questions to consider (Baker 2001), such as:

i. At which stage of schooling is the high or low language going to be used and in which curriculum areas?
ii. Is the low language just used for oral communication or is biliteracy a goal of the school's curriculum?
iii. Are science, technology and computing taught in the high or low language?
iv. Is the low language going to be allowed for a year or two in primary school?
v. Does the school deliberately exclude or include the low language as a medium of instruction?
Answering these questions is necessary because as stated by (Baker 2001: 48).

> The purpose and functions of each language in a diglossic situation are both symbolized and enacted in the school situation.

The gap between MSA and the vernacular spoken at home and most everywhere outside of school walls seems to be a major cause of low learning achievement in schools everywhere in the Arab region (Ibrahim 1983; Maamouri 1998). The mixture of language structures in the classrooms (MSA and dialectal Arabic code-switching) is a cause of serious pedagogical problems, sometimes leading to lack of adequate language competence, to low linguistic self-confidence, and usually to consequent social problems. The learning difficulties that relate to MSA stem from its lack of immediate application to the learning process and to the environment of the child. There is an important linguistic distance which separates MSA from the learners' experience, familiar topics, and concrete real world materials (Ibid). The experience of learners with MSA is that of an abstract and decontextualized language learning situation, which brings with it "linguistic insecurity" and often results in learner suffering at error or failure to remind correct structures and patterns.

1.5.1 Cognitive development

Ellis (1994:21) states that:

> Mental processes enable learners to work on input, and for the knowledge systems that they construct and manifest in output.

The result is an Interlanguage which refers to the intervening grammars constructed by second-language learners on their way to the target language (McLaughlin 1987). The interlanguage is distinct from both the learner's first language and from the target language and that it is the product of language transfer of L2 learning strategies, L2 communication strategies, and overgeneralization (McLaughlin 1987). The relevance of this process lies in the fact:

> To ensure cognitive and academic success in a second language, a student's first language system, oral and written, must be developed to a high cognitive level, at least through the elementary school years. (Collier 1995: 2).

In addition, teachers may view certain L2 learners, as problematic This attitude may then have a negative impact on the learner, in that if a child's production of MSA deviates from what society has set up as standard language, or if he/she appears not to

acquire it in the 'accepted' way, that child may be viewed as a problem that needs a solution. Edelsky (1996:36) claims that:

> Schools and what goes on in them are mirrors and reproducers of society and consequently, a teacher's attitude and understanding is to some degree developed by surrounding social structures and then reproduced in their classrooms.

1.5.2 Bi-Dialectal Education

A bidialectal situation is defined for the present purposes as one where the varieties in contact are the standard and a genetically related dialect of the same language. Bidialectal learners often have a dialectal mother tongue which is different from the standard variety that the educational system treats as their mother tongue. Nevertheless, bidialectal learners do need to be taught new language elements if they are to master their second dialect. Both teachers and learners are expected to use MSA for formal learning within the classroom boundaries. The total absence of one of the two linguistic varieties that co-exist means that Algerian schools treat pupils as being monodialectal. It is agreed by academics, linguists and educationists in Algeria that dialect affects speakers' attitudes and performance in the standard variety and causes learners to include dialectal terms when using MSA at school. This interference is especially evident in learners' oral production.

Thus, through this study, the researcher aims to give a general sight into primary classroom and to test whether to implement the Algerian dialect in the education system, mainly from the first year of the nursery school until the young learner reaches the right age of schooling, will be advantageous.

However, some issues may rise whilst inserting the nonstandard code into education; this will be discussed in the next section.

II Methodology

2.1 The Procedure: This study is based on a qualitative investigation, a mode that explores effectively the individual behaviour of both teachers and learners and their respective attitudes.

The research took place over a period of three months in which we observed T1's and T2's classrooms (Unfortunately, during this period, the school prepares their final year-end exams and this made observations difficult). During these observation periods we made extensive field notes relating to the teachers' behaviour in class and attempted to describe the classroom environment in as much detail as possible, including all pictures and posters, books and other supplementary material. Both teachers had the syllabus and used it mainly in their teaching procedures; otherwise they used some of their own methods which they had tried and tested and found suitable over the years.

We conducted four interviews, two with each of the teachers. The first focused predominantly on the background of the teachers and considered their experience of teaching and some of the difficulties they faced. The second interview asked questions based on our prior observations and also obtained other important information related to their training, attitudes towards the learners and understanding and knowledge of various language acquisition concepts. We also conversed with the principal with regard to school policy and his understanding of education (knowing before that he was a teacher, too). All the interviews are taped and transcribed. The four interviews and

observation periods, along with the various artefacts collected from the classrooms, are then critically analysed with reference to the research goals.

The research was qualitative and had a single case study design within a broader ethnographic approach. It was a case study because of its limited focus (one school, teachers and learners) and was ethnographic because if focused on the environment of the classrooms. Multiple methods of data collection were utilized, namely, observations, interviews and the analysis of physical objects. Each of these methods was described in detail. The process of analysis for each method used was then discussed. The strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research from an ethnographic perspective were considered and various ethical issues were mentioned.

Having outlined the design and methodology, we now turn to the actual data that was produced through these methods. The next chapter documents the findings, which are a combination of the interviews, observations and the analysis of physical objects. The aim is to give a detailed picture of the classroom discourse and then to comment on it.

III FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Teaching Activities

Below is a description of the various teaching activities that were observed during our sessions. The intention is to show how the three learning areas that are covered in grade 1, namely, numeracy, literacy and life skills are taught on a daily basis in these classrooms with specific reference to the various language activities we observed.

Regularly, a day would start with revision of the previous day's work, either phonics or maths. For example, during my first observation session T1 did the sound *Taa'* as in [Ta:'ira] ('plane') (T1: Obs 1: 11/4/06) and T2 revised the sound *hamza*, the glottal stop, as in ['a:latun] ('instrument') (T2: Obs 1: 12/4/06). During our second session, T1 went over the letter *kaf* /k/ explaining its realisation in association with the three short vowels /a, u, i/ giving /ka/, /ku/, /ki/, as in [**ka**lbun], [**ku**ratun], [**ki**ta:bun] (respectively 'a dog', 'a ball' and 'a book'); and then he explained that that day they were going to do the sound /k/ in final position, as in [ma:li**k**] (a first name in Arabic) (T1: Obs 2: 27/4/06). T2, on the other hand, went over the difference between the letter *waw* in [**w**aladun] and ['awla:dun] ('boy vs. boys') (T2: Obs 2: 18/4/06). Both teachers' primary method of teaching a phonic sound is through words like those provided, which the learners first write out in their phonics book and then they learn the phonic sounds by heart. Later in the week, the teachers will give the learners a spelling test consisting predominantly of the words taught.

After a revision, T1 and T2 set work for the whole class, normally maths activities or writing practice. While all the learners are working on their maths activities, the teachers select the different maths and reading groups and work with them separately. Group teaching for maths consists of various mathematic games and flash activities that focus on developing mental arithmetic. Group teaching for reading generally involves letting each learner read a section of the selected text aloud and then using flash activities with individual words to develop word recognition skills.

In T1's classroom, the learners occasionally discuss critically each other's performances, according to whether they paused at commas, raised their intonation at exclamations and generally read with varying tones (T1: Obs 2: 27/4/06). Both T1 and

T2 sometimes take learners individually for reading at this point. On the whole, maths is done before the break and reading and language is set for the period after the break. The school day morning officially ends for grade 1 at 11:30.

The afternoon programme is interspersed with religious instruction lessons, language performance and speaking skills. Teachers occasionally organize different activities that relate to the syllabus in some way. For example, during my third observation session, the class made a kind of a play performed by children in which they learn how they should deal with pets mainly dogs because of the /k/ sound in [kalbun, kila:bun] that they were learning at the time. Each learner performs his role and tries to narrate his experience with his/her favourite animal using of course MSA. (T2: Obs 3: 20/4/06).

The language syllabus consists of phonics, vocabulary skills, grammar based worksheets, writing, reading and numeracy which are also reflected in the posters that decorate the walls of the classrooms. Each of these areas will now be discussed.

3.2 Phonics

To teach reading and spelling both teachers follow a phonics approach, which is based on the sounds in MSA. The learners practice how to break down and build up words based on these sounds, which they then learn by heart. Both teachers introduce a new sound with a 'story' and use these stories to help the learners remember the sound and to learn to recognize and spell a number of words with that sound.

The 'story' method is used because, according to T1, it helps with sentence construction and gives the learners some practice with punctuation and so on, while at the same time it encourages more creativity than just a list of words (T1: Obs 2: 27/4/06). What is interesting about these 'stories' is that they often have very little meaning as stories. Also, they are often not really stories, but rather a set of sentences.

The other point worth noting is that often the vocabulary, style and context used in the stories are very complex and strange for the learner. For example, the *ghazwu l fadaa'* story (the space conquest) has an arduous style and vocabulary with '*makouk'*, '*qorsan el fadaa*'' and '*konpyuter*', '*majarra*', is very particular, something most children would be unfamiliar with; '*tubba:n*' is a kind of short pants for kids no longer very common to wear by little boys; '*wasi:datun*', '*dou*'*souka*', '*kabsoula*' (Appendix 10) are also all words that are not commonly used in Algerian speech.

Generally the 'stories' do not flow easily and often use words or portray concepts that most learners would not have encountered outside of the classroom. This could possibly be a reason why T1 finds that the learners struggle with phonics (T1: (i)). The words through which the sounds are taught are perhaps far removed from anything these learners have experienced or are likely to experience.

As they are invented, these stories present an ideal opportunity for bi-dialectalism to come through in the lesson content. They can still be written in MSA but involve more Algerian ideas and concepts, and should be discussed in AA which may makes them easier to understand and learn at this fundamental stage of their development.

3.3 Vocabulary Skills

In T1's class, teaching vocabulary consist of three learning activities. First, each learner has a small notebook, their personal 'dictionary' '*kunna:ʃ'*, with vocabulary lists assembled by T1, which they can refer to when trying to spell and explain certain

words. Every time they ask T1 how to spell a word and what is the meaning of a word that is not in their lists, they take their 'dictionary' with them and T1 writes the word down for them. Second, each child has a seventeen-page activity book called "Dictionary Skills".The book consists of sections related to the alphabet, putting words in their functional order, finding words and the definitions of words and each section is made up of appropriate activities (T1: Obs 4: 13/05/06). In T2's classroom, the main vocabulary skills activity that we observed involved the activity book called "Dictionary Skills". T2 often relates the activities to a particular theme such as transport and the learners have to think of words related to transport that begin with various letters of the alphabet, for example, [qit:ar], [qa:tira], [sayya:ra], [ta:'ira] and so forth (train, car, plane...) (T2: Obs 2: 18/05/06).

3.4 Grammar Worksheets

In both classes most of the practices involve language activities. Exercises for conjunctions, but there are also activities for nouns and adjectives (T1: Obs 4: 13/05/06). The learners also have worksheets that involve filling in the missing letters and full stops (T1: Obs 5: 14/05/06). Also, T1 and T2 occasionally use stories: for example, during my second observation session, T1 used a story entitled "*Tariq essalaama*", which was about riding a bicycle safely (T1: Obs 2: 27/04/06). He read the story aloud without any adjectives and then gave copies to the learners who then had to fill in suitable adjectives for the nouns and the missing letters.

During my fifth observation session, T2 used a story entitled "*Sabaahu l 3iid*" (the morning of the feast). The teacher also read the story aloud and then gave copies to the learners, who then had to add the letters *alif* and *nuun* to express duality in MSA, and sometimes only *alif* to some words in the story for the same morphological function. (T2: Obs 5:20/05/06).

3.5 Writing

In both classrooms, writing is not taught but rather practiced. All the learners can basically write and what we observed was practice. They are, however, learning the cursive style or small dashes in their possible positions but are not actually writing words or sentences in it yet. The learners are still at the letter stage and make patterns in their workbooks that look like the cursive letter. For example, T1 instructed the learners on a new writing pattern: the cursive 'ب' and described it as 'a small box without a cover or a top' (T1: Obs 2: 27/04/06).

Writing, in this way, consists of making the learners realise cursive patterns in their book and then practice letters in the print style. So, for example, they would draw a cursive pattern and then write "... ب با ب با ب با and occasionally a sentence like "*baaba wara' al baabi*" (Daddy's behind the door) across the line (T2: Obs 1: 4/5/06) or "*laila fi ddaari*" (Leila at home) as practiced in T1: Obs 2: 7/5/06.

As can be seen, there are numerous activities that involve language skills that the learners participate in and whilst a number of them appear to purely involve grammar or language structure, there are still opportunities for teachers to make use of AA dialectal forms to portray these concepts, even though they need to concentrate on MSA. Switches to Algerian Arabic in oral explanations or comments will certainly trigger more involvement and motivation from the part of the children as it is the variety which stimulates their emotions and feelings.

3.6 Reading

One of the purposes of the reading skill as implemented in our schools is to expose learners in the early stages of schooling to new, interesting and exciting concepts existing in the world. It is also important to provide a platform for learners and this is achieved through familiar concepts and the representation of day-to-day events in an Algerian context. Mainly, the texts of the first and second grades will now be briefly discussed in order to illustrate further how a language can be acquired and reinforced by reading.

With regard to *ghazwu l fadā'* and *badlat rajul al fadā',* the first thing that caught our attention is the fact that such texts are very complex, as they are beyond the scope of knowledge of the Algerian children. The texts consist of information, mostly about the man who first walked on the moon, reinforced with a picture and names of things that were overtly strange and seemed bizarre to them (The contents of the pages can be found in Appendix 9). What is non-evident about a text entitled *Portrait* is that both the word "portrait" itself and the voiceless plosive [p] that it starts with do not exist in MSA. On the other hand, we notice that the majority of the stories like *fi l matjari l kabīr* in Grade 1 and *al mahallāt el koubrā* in Grade 2 are translated and firmly rooted in a Western ideology. Furthermore, some texts imply certain things about a typical family which should consist of a father who paints patios and takes his son fishing, a mother who reads a magazine, a boy who plays practical jokes while playing with a dog, and a girl wearing pretty dresses and playing with a cat. All of these assumptions are strongly reinforced in the pictures that illustrate the text. However, one can ask: is it really the type of Algerian family?

The second part of the book designed for grade 2 consists of short stories and poems that all relate to city content in some way. It is interesting, because as T1 points out in his interview, one takes for granted that the children understand and have experience of concepts like museums, harbours, airports, snow and so on. But often they do not. In this book, there is a short story about a young boy who travels by bus and sees the sights of the city and visits a museum, the harbour and the airport. Another story is about snow in the city and portrays children skiing, something which most Algerian children have never experienced.

The most interesting thing about these texts is that the vocabulary and stories are very clearly non-Algerian and contain many concepts and ideas that most Algerian learners would not be familiar with. Furthermore, the pictures that illustrate this book, such as the pictures of the tram and the satellite, do not make the concepts easier to understand, if you have never encountered these objects.

On the whole, all of the books are clearly non-Algerian and this is felt in the concepts and ideas in the stories and some of the vocabulary. All the books have vocabulary and concepts that the majority of Algerian learners might suffer to understand, as they have no personal experience of them. At the same time it is important to acknowledge that obviously one of the purposes of reading is to introduce new vocabulary and teach learners about the wider world. However, in the initial developmental stages, for the sake of tracing and allowing learners to connect sounds to familiar concepts thus providing learners with a solid foundation from which to grow, ordinary day-to-day Algerian life should possibly be the foundation and the focus. The use of books with such foreign concepts could make reading with understanding difficult for Algerian learners as they have nothing in their immediate experience to draw from or to refer to that would help them make sense of these texts. This may

further slow down their reading development and could lead learners to read without understanding and they may not fully acquire the necessary reading skills.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the current situation. For example, there is a lack of suitable Algerian texts for grades 1, 2 that learners actually use; also difficult decisions have to be made regarding which kind of books is eventually chosen and how they are distributed. These factors must be taken into consideration and it is important to realize that these teachers are doing a hard job under what must be difficult and challenging circumstances.

3.7 Numeracy

Both teachers commented on the difficulties they experienced on a day-to -day basis in these environments. These related to the language difficulties that they experienced; that is, teachers need to relate all their examples to relevant real world contexts: the use of a variety of visual aids needed to allow access to the ideas, the tension between what they perceived as "talking about mathematics in MSA" and precise mathematical language, for example, using the symbols > and < ("big" and "bigger than") for 'tall' and 'taller', and the need to ensure that the children had the opportunity to communicate in "proper mathematical language".

The teachers perceived that teaching in these classrooms required a high use of oral language, gestures and a range of representations and abilities to continually adapt and ease the way to the learners' access to mathematical concepts.

The data reported in this study is one excerpt from the first grade classroom and one short excerpt chosen from the second grade classroom. The first illustrates the use of different representations and contexts to assist learners solve a problem involving comparing the heights of two children, (T1: Obs 2: 10/5/06), and the second illustrates learners' and teachers' "code switching" as they engage in an activity involving calculating volumes of a variety of shapes made from blocks (T2: Obs 2: 11/5/06).

As T1 proceeded along this path, he also changed the object itself from a comparison problem to a subtraction problem (by dropping previous explanations and introducing expressions of difference). Finally, he switched first to AA then to the context of money, and thus the original object changed from how taller Walid is than Samir to 'if you had 120 dinars and gave away 100 dinars, how much would be left?'.

This process illustrates a common strategy used in many primary classrooms, the context of money as a bridge to understanding mathematics, for the children seemed to assimilated more easily the difference between two sums of money, i.e., 120 Dinars– 100 Dinars = 20 Dinars. While the pupils successfully answered this problem, we still wonder whether this may really assist the learners in reaching an understanding of the original problem and if they see the analogy between each.

Also another common characteristic of this conversation was the lack of on-going dialogue about the problem itself. The pupils volunteered answers (which were often incorrect) but there was no on-going conversation about their thinking. One concern that these teachers had was the "lack of spontaneity in using MSA and shame factor", as the teacher himself acknowledged. He was indeed aware that young children do not have the necessary vocabulary and do not like being asked questions in front of the whole class, and especially do not like their incorrect answers to be criticized, and hence, the teacher's continual positive reinforcing comments such as "good try" as the

lesson advanced. In some instances, it appears that pupils are unable to go beyond the written mark, that is, the literal interpretation of the problem.

The tasks presented in this research induce an interaction between these three dimensions: object, representations and interpretation; but in this instance, whether the interaction between different signs and their interpretations bring deeper meaning to the object itself, is the key question.

The use of gesturing was also explicit throughout the lesson. In fact the role of gesturing within an environment with a strong oral language (mother tongue) may in fact prove to be an important representation in the interpretation process. Most of the lesson occurred within the bi-functional register, crossing across registers, use of MSA and AA with the addition of diagrams to represent the problem at hand. This is considered to be an easier process. This strategy is cognitively easier, and using the two different codes, MSA then AA and vice-versa, gives insight into how to work effectively within each variety in addition to the role of gestures in creating meaning.

IV Data Analysis

The interview data will now be presented in an effort to explain why the teachers have constructed their classroom environment in the ways that they have. Each teacher was interviewed twice. The interview transcripts were studied and particularly enlightening passages highlighted and eventually placed in various categories. The categories were then analyzed and summarized, in order to simplify the data and to reveal the important arguments that arise out of the data.

4.1 Training

The training courses did not cover techniques related to second-language learning, bidialectalism and the diglossic situation in any way, which is a concern because teachers have to cope with learners whose mother tongue is not MSA, and thus may be considered as second-language learners.

This indicates that both teachers have received little assistance and training with regard to the dreadful challenges they face in teaching in a diglossic environment and they have in fact been left to manage for themselves.

We find it quite surprising that neither of the two teachers mentioned the issues they are faced with resulting from the gap between the pupils' mother tongue and MSA, the school language. Both did not appear to be aware of the challenges associated with diglossia and education. Neither of them seemed to believe that the difficulties brought about by the shift from the mother tongue to the school tongue presented a significant challenge to teaching.

4.2Language Problems in the Classroom

T1 considered the learners in his class as having various language problems but is unclear about defining these problems. He says that all the learners need work on their grammar and need language enrichment. He goes on to clarify that all those who have not made the pre-schooling phase have language problems. Furthermore, when asked about the length of time needed for MSA acquisition, T1 he explains that it is important that language is well established prior to Grade 2 because weak language skills not only hinder a learner's essay writing but as they also do not have the vocabulary it hinders their grasp of mathematical concepts (T1: (ii)).

From this it may be deduced that both T1 and T2 appear to have two basic assumptions. Firstly, they assume that a lack of exposure to MSA is the primary cause

of language problems in learners and the extracts also suggest that T1 may have expectations that learners may fail sooner or later if they have not grown up with MSA from a young age. They also give the impression that this can be counteracted to some degree, if a learner is exposed only to MSA in the classroom, and is also exposed to MSA in the home environment. Their second assumption is that their mother tongue does not need to be maintained or promoted in the school environment as neither of the teachers mention maintaining the first languages of their learners. The learners are further discouraged from speaking any other language besides MSA in the classroom and on the playground and the parents of learners are also encouraged to expose their child to as much MSA as possible in the home environment.

According to both teachers, the home environment also plays a very important role. T1 specifically commented that children who might be in an average level of learning can actually be closer to the top if they get additional help at home. In his view, homework is very important:

It is clear from this comment that T1 is aware of some of the challenges that learners face and he is trying commendably to assist these learners with whatever strategies he may think of as there is very little support from the education authorities in the form of training and resources.

Furthermore, if a learner is struggling, there is a solution. On some occasions, if a child is really struggling with MSA, then the teachers suggest to the parents that they send him or her to a pre-school place (what is usually called *al hadana*, meaning 'nursery') for extra lessons.

The teachers are aware that initial instruction in a learner's mother tongue is beneficial and give the impression that if nursery schools offered the same standard of education as in real schools, particularly by trying to draw learners' language perception and production towards the school language, they would perhaps encourage those who are really struggling to rather attend those schools to ensure a better foundation. Unfortunately, they feel that currently this is not an option, since the quality of education in the actual pre-school system is not at a similar standard.

Both teachers emphasize the importance of building strong foundations in their learners thus allowing them to succeed in the schools they will attend once they leave this one. This means that both teachers are aware of the importance of scaffolding at this early stage of development.

In our opinion, both teachers are coping well with the many diverse challenges involved in teaching in an MSA/AA classroom. Unfortunately, it appears that little support in terms of appropriate in-service training has been offered and there are numerous factors such as financial shortages and lack of suitable teaching resources that contribute to and intensify a difficult situation.

However, both teachers have two basic assumptions that influence and motivate their behaviour, practices and attitudes. First, they make the common sense assumption that in order for learners to successfully acquire MSA; they need to be exposed to it as much and for as long as possible. Indeed, the creation of environments predominantly oriented towards exposing the learners to MSA is of crucial importance if we want to solve the problem of school failure as a whole. This is further demonstrated in the learning activities as they are planned and carried out, and in encouraging parents to expose their children to as much MSA as possible in the home.

Their second assumption is that anything other than MSA in their classrooms does not necessarily need to be consciously maintained or developed to any cognitive level. The Algerian child's mother tongue within their classrooms appears to be minimally acknowledged and does not seem to be overtly valued, affirmed or encouraged. This assumption can also filter down into the home environment, because the parents are encouraged to expose their children to MSA, for example by reading Arabic books in the home.

Unfortunately, both these assumptions cannot feed each other and, on the whole, produce an assimilatory environment whereby, in our opinion, the Algerian learners may be in the process of replacing their first language and behaviour as planned in the 1970s.

V. Discussion and Conclusions

A number of factors play an important role and deserve consideration in discussing the construction of the classroom environment:

- First, the demographics of the two classrooms;
- Second, the teachers' attitudes towards the discrepancies between the two varieties, MSA and AA, as evidenced by their practices;
- Third, their belief that exposure to MSA is vital;
- Fourth, the nature of 'diglossic' education in the classrooms.

Just as the Algerian society is linguistically very complex, the demographics of the classrooms reflect the same linguistic complexity. Indeed, MSA, AA and some French are the primary languages represented in the classrooms. Ironically, it is because of this diglossic and bilingual linguistic complexity that problems emerge related to language learning. We do not insinuate that a monolingual class would be unproblematic, but the problems would be very different in nature.

Both classrooms consist of a high number of pupils, 37 and 40 learners respectively. The children reach school age with a mother tongue that is apparently quite far from the school language, though, as we shall see, a careful analysis of everyday Algerian Arabic speech on phonological and morphological considerations reveals that this is not really the case: if French borrowings are stripped off from the low variety AA, and if its phonological, morphological and syntactic realizations are examined carefully, it will be clear that the gap between MSA and AA is not so wide.

However, the fact remains that Algerian pupils will always find difficulties in coping with the school language to a much larger extent than, say, a Cockney English child when he/she is faced with RP English in the school context. As a matter of fact, much of the apparent divergence between the High variety and Low variety of Arabic has led to controversies as to the language of instruction and to rather negative attitudes towards the use of the mother tongue in school.

5.1 Attitudes towards formal education in a diglossic context

There are many varying factors that impact the current situation in the Algerian school. These factors include a lack of appropriate in-service training, financial constraints and parental pressures which seem to result in a situation whereby the school does not prioritize bidialectal education and consequently does not make a concerted effort to achieve or pursue it. This is illustrated by the fact that at no point did either of the teachers clearly state that developing bilingual/diglossic or culturally aware learners is a goal in their teaching strategies.

Both teachers clearly assert that their primary intention for the learners in their classrooms is to help them acquire MSA as comprehensively and as quickly as possible to deal later on with other subjects. They both maintain that our schools are MSA-medium schools and that it cannot be claimed that formal instruction might be carried out in any other language variety. There is also the impression that T1 believes that basic communicative skills are sufficient in AA and that, while formal cognitive development may be beneficial, it is not absolutely necessary to ensure the success of the learner.

The general trend tended to reveal a lack of appreciation for AA and what it has to offer and there was a sense that speaking AA as an L1 may be a barrier to acquiring MSA. This view could possibly be due to the effect of the Arabization policy pursued by their initial training, where this was the case, and also due to the fact that all teachers have received more training based on MSA than on any other language variety.

Both teachers do, however, reveal an unconscious awareness of the necessary association of the mother tongue with cognitive development. Indeed, they do suggest that if a learner is really struggling with the classroom environment, then perhaps they should consider attending a pre-school period where they are instructed initially in their L1. However, one of the key factors that influence the way in which the teachers carry out their lessons is the belief that exposure to MSA is crucial.

5.2 Exposure to MSA

This study reveals that the mother tongue of the Algerian learners in the classrooms is often viewed as a challenge that needs to be overcome. The primary method employed for overcoming these challenges is to expose the learners to as much MSA as possible as early as possible, in the classroom, on the playground and even in the home to the exclusion of the L1(the aim of the Algerian decision-makers). This view appears to motivate and strengthen most teaching practices. For example, the learners are strongly encouraged to speak only MSA in the classroom. Furthermore, the parents are strongly encouraged to practice MSA with their children, for example by reading stories to them or by encouraging them to follow TV cartoon sessions or film stories in Standard Arabic.

The belief that exposure to MSA is the key, in our opinion, stems firstly, from a sizeable lack of suitable teacher training in this area and secondly, from observations that Algerian learners who have grown up with their parents dealing with MSA in the home from a young age, cope much better than those who have grown up using solely AA in the home. However, the difficulty with this view arises in the fact that there are numerous reasons other than exposure to MSA. One important reason is that most parents have no knowledge of how to help their children to cope with MSA, either because of semi-literacy or negative attitudes towards Arabic. Others do not feel involved in teaching and have no pedagogical tools to fulfill such a task; and even if they do attempt to do so, a difference may occur between structures of language and literacy in the home and what is expected in schools.

However, this over-emphasis on exposure to MSA is problematic: it is very clear that the teachers are motivated by a strong desire to help learners to acquire MSA as successfully and as quickly as possible; but unfortunately, when this desire is underpinned by misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge regarding education that takes into account the diglossic context, it can lead to language disorder, in spite of the teachers' good intentions. This is what is possibly happening in the classrooms described in this study, and it may prove to be disadvantageous for learners in general.

A very good example of this is the revelation of both teachers that some lessons are provided in AA in Grade 1. These lessons are totally handled in the children's mother tongue, which is at least one opportunity for them to excel and to have their language accepted and affirmed as valuable and interesting. In terms of our observations, this does indeed happen for the learners who were more lively and excited, and participated more during this kind of lesson than at any other time. They were also able to 'show off' and were commended for their skill. This is also evidenced in the teachers' reports and evaluations where the learners failed to meet the requirements and criteria for MSA.

This is unfortunate because lessons could possibly provide the learners with an opportunity to excel, to 'show off' their ability and for that moment, to be stronger and at more of an advantage. But, because the learners do not attend this kind of lessons and are instead taken out for a monolingual class, they are once again marked as being weaker and unable to cope alongside with the teachers' requirements.

This issue of exposure is particularly important because it has a far-reaching impact on the education that these learners receive. Both teachers state that their primary objective is to teach these learners to cope with academic knowledge in whatever stage they go to, and their responsibility is to produce well-rounded and confident young people with a sound basis from which to carry on.

This is an excellent objective and must be commended. However, in a study carried out by Heugh (2002) on the African children in USA indicates that L2 learners who are exposed to English from Grade 1 or earlier, and who thus receive no formal schooling in their first language, are actually more likely to struggle throughout their school career. Unfortunately, the teachers do not really see the school impact and the sole use of the standard form of Arabic have had on the learners and whether pupils are in fact able to cope in the higher level schools they go to. Thus, it is possible that the teachers might be wrong in their primary objectives and are unaware of the problems faced by the learners.

5.3 Language issues (MSA Vs AA) in the Classrooms

Encouraging learners in basic school grades to use their mother tongue in parallel with MSA – what we may perhaps term as 'bidialectalism' i.e. using AA side by side with MSA' instruction – is not actually an explicit goal or intention of the teachers, or of the school as a whole. The school does not fully acknowledge the teachers' powerful impact and important role in maintaining what the learners' have already acquired along with their first language, their cognitive capacities and experience.

As a matter of fact, the two classrooms under study do not reflect any bi-varietal education because, although the little children are naturally competent in their mother tongue, the teachers do not consciously support and affirm their cognitive capacities through practical work in class; that is, they tend not to enhance dialectal awareness and sensitivity, because they do not admit the value of language diversity. The suggestion is that the use of the low variety would only be a sort of 'bridging-the-gap' process that will help in drawing the pupils' linguistic competence towards the standard form officially implemented for school instruction.

Although the success of such a strategy, had it been incorporated in formal education, would depend largely on the availability of suitable curricula and teaching

materials that do not require substantial financial investment, teachers are first and foremost responsible for what to do with the children in order to make them go through it. This simply means that teachers have a pivotal role to play in the success of a type of education associated with diglossia. And consequently, for a classroom to become truly interactive and for learners to be really proficient, teachers must be aware of the diglossic character of the society and need to be trained for bidialectal and bilingual educational settings.

Research in psycholinguistics and psychology of language has shown the importance of the cognitive abilities acquired by the infant along with the process of the native tongue acquisition. Emphasizing the difference between language acquisition and language learning, Corder (1973:107) writes:

> Language acquisition takes place in the infant and the young child at a time when he is acquiring many other skills and much other knowledge about the world. Language learning, i.e. learning a second language, normally starts at a later stage, when language performance has already become established and when many other physical and mental processes of maturation are complete or nearing completion.

The point is that a child of three or four years old has already been 'naturally' provided with the grammar, the whole set of rules related to his/her native language, i.e. his/her linguistic competence. In school, by virtue of the fact that MSA is learned and not acquired as a mother tongue, the child may perhaps learn to be linguistically competent, but to develop communicative competence in him is a much harder task.

However, it should be born in mind that, in our context, learning the school language is not to be equated with learning a second language, for the gap between MSA and AA is not as wide as it is usually thought, first because they are varieties of the same language and have related linguistic structures; second, children today are quite often exposed to the standard form, particularly through TV programmes, well before they start going to school. The following two AA utterances that were produced in class, illustrate the close relation between the Low variety and the Standard form of Arabic:

- <u>*Pupil*</u>: [ma za:l ma nəmʃiw ləssa:ħa] = [ma: zilna: lam naðhab 'ila ssa:ħa(ti)]
  'We're not going out to the school yard yet.'
- <u>*Teacher*</u>: [qultəlkum ərqdu bəkri trəjħu] = [qultu lakum urqudu: ba:kiran tarta:ħu:]
  'I told you to sleep early you will feel better.'

On the whole, our research about the situation in the classrooms confirms that even though language research and language policy reflect an appreciation of the importance of diglossic considerations, classroom practices continue to be based on unilingual standards and the Algerian dialect tends to be viewed as an obstacle and source of negative interference in the learning of MSA.

Probyn *et al.* (2002) suggest a number of reasons for this, all of which ring true for the Algerian school. The first reason relates to parental attitudes: parents want their children to learn MSA. There is a very clear understanding that one of the reasons a number of parents send their children to school is that they want them to learn MSA immediately. Part of the solution could involve awareness campaigns to educate parents about the value of the L1 in early education. Secondly, the administrators do not have knowledge of the policies and do not clearly understand the extent of their powers and responsibilities; there does not appear to be any governmental encouragement for schools to sustain the language policy. The school lacks experience and expertise in

developing their own policies and this includes lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the nature of diglossic school preparation and SLA. Added to this are the current pressures of the job that weigh down on the teachers and the consequence is lack of desire to implement a policy that they are unsure of, have no knowledge about, and are not convinced is important or necessary. Furthermore, the school is unaware of what support (if any) the sector of education provides. This all points to lack of communication and in-service training about the language policies and about linguistic diversity in general.

There is an opportunity and a need to put measures in place to reduce the disparity between the planned guidelines and current practice, and therefore facilitate the promotion of dialect use within pre-school settings. This includes the provision of appropriate support and resources, which is crucial if a dialect is to be used and encouraged within the process of education. Exposing pre-school children to the dialect is especially important as, in their early years of life, they acquire language rapidly and easily from activities and experiences with a confidence that is difficult to achieve at later stages of their development.

This study begins to map the territory and provide indicators for the road ahead. As such, the research recognises the considerable capabilities of young Algerian pupils as they begin school and aims to assist them in engaging in a meaningful dialogue concerning the learning process in order to meet the challenge of improving long-term educational outcomes. Continuously, the teachers interviewed were asked to comment on the importance of promoting dialect in pre-school. The majority of them considered it to be important for a number of reasons both at a personal and professional level.

5.4 Measures that could be taken

There were a number of problems identified in the two classrooms, all fundamentally revolving around a basic short-fall in understanding and training. Neither of these teachers has been trained in theoretical aspects of diglossic situations or second language acquisition. They have not been trained in how to implement bidialectal use. Most of the in-service training that they receive at present is focused on methodology in general and that training does not include dialectal considerations. This imbalance of training has led to misunderstanding of bidialectalism from the part of teachers and their sticking to the conviction of the absolute need for exposure to MSA. Consequently, the primary measure that could address this problem is an improvement in the in-service training for teachers and schools. Currently, most of the training carried out in schools is focused on methodology, but this training should include increased emphasis on dialect use for a number of purposes. We will briefly mention some of the topics which, in line with the research, we believe could be usefully addressed:

- Bilingualism and its advantages.
- The distinction between additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism: what each is and why it is important.
- Models of bidialectal education.
- Second Language Acquisition in general and particularly the processes a learner goes through in acquiring MSA.
- Factors that contribute to the successful acquisition of a second language
- The importance of L1 maintenance.

- Bidialectal education: what it actually is, how to implement it and why it is important.
- Language in the Algerian society and its impact on the school environment.

Furthermore, the school does not have a comprehensive formal language policy regarding language use in the school. Their entrance policy explicitly states that the governing body has chosen MSA as the medium of instruction. However, there is an informal policy in terms of which, because the school involves MSA-medium instruction, the learners are expected to speak MSA only.

We believe that a formal policy that focuses specifically on language use in the school should be developed and implemented and that it should explicitly state whether diglossia should be taken into account and also how dialectal practices are to be managed which would allow L1 to be maintained while MSA is added. Some other practical measures that we feel the school could take into account in order to improve bi-dialectal practices include:

- Allowing learners to attend lessons in their L1 if they are offered by the school;
- Or else provide more opportunities for learners to talk about their native knowledge and experience;
- The education ministry should provide, and the school should purchase and implement, new syllabi, learning materials and readers that accurately reflect the diglossic nature of the classroom community;
- Finally the school could increase parental awareness and inform parents of the importance of maintaining their home language and culture and encourage them to develop their children's cognitive abilities in their L1 through various events.

5.5 Summary of the Research

As stated above, particular research goals formed the core of this work and so understanding the answers is essential to understanding the research. The first two goals were concerned with how the teachers identified and handled their classrooms. On the whole, they did not consciously identify or come to hold with bidialectalism at all. Neither issue was acknowledged as problematic, nor was there a desire on either teacher's part to actually foster or encourage dialect use in class. This lack of conscious acknowledgement meant that they subconsciously implement and enact a submersive model of education whereby learners are expected to assimilate MSA, which is explored and exposed in the classrooms, while their mother tongue and experience are ignored. The third and fourth goals sought to understand why the teachers described and identified dialect use the way they did. We believe that the teachers are excellent practitioners, coping remarkably well in the complex and demanding job they face on a daily basis. But they appear to be unaware of the various studies in place that are supposed to help them to better handle the challenges of a diglossic society. As a matter of fact, they are unaware of the powerful and important role they play in the changing Algerian context in which their young learners will ultimately find their place.

The fifth and sixth goals were particularly concerned with the training available and with other possible measures that could be taken. We highlight the fact that improved in-service training would have a substantial impact on this situation. The teachers need training that would particularly focus on education in a diglossic context. Other measures that would also assist include developing and implementing a more

understanding school language policy, encouraging a bidialectal environment through the availability of appropriate learning materials and readers and persuading learners to communicate more freely and openly about their particular experiences, and finally increasing parental awareness of the importance of L1 mother tongue maintenance which will ultimately lead to a better competence in MSA and school success as a whole.

It was particularly interesting to witness the impact that language in the broader society has on a classroom environment and to see the extent to which commonsense assumptions (such as 'exposure to MSA is the key' and 'the first language does not need to be maintained') influence the behaviour and practices of experienced teachers.

However, we think the main lesson that we have learnt is just how very important the teachers' role actually is. We feel that their contribution is often underestimated and it is our hope that this work has, in some way, revealed how much of an impact primary school teachers really have. We have enormous respect and admiration for teachers who face up to the challenges. We also hope to have gone some way to assist them by critically revealing some of the difficult issues in their classrooms and by proposing possible areas where more intervention would be beneficial.

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