


Navigating the Crossroads: English as a Medium of Instruction and Integrated Learning in Algerian Higher Education

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Received: 24/06/2025

Accepted: 25/12/2025

Published: 01/01/2026

Abstract

The recent top-down mandate for English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Algerian higher education, reflecting a global drive for internationalization, has rapidly created a critical and widening policy-practice gap. This systemic failure, rooted in decades of turbulent language policy history, requires specialized diagnosis beyond logistical challenges. This study employs a critical integrative literature synthesis, utilizing historical policy analysis alongside emerging empirical data, to diagnose the systemic root causes of this crisis and construct a robust conceptual framework. The analysis is guided by three interlocking theoretical lenses: the pedagogical necessity of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), the deep resistance stemming from ingrained teacher cognition, and the unrealized potential of translanguaging as a multilingual asset. The study argues that the crisis is a systemic collision resulting from four core failures: the historical repetition of a disruptive "policy shock" approach, echoing the past Arabization campaign; the profound cognitive dissonance where content lecturers' professional identity clashes with the complex, hybrid demands of CLIL; the pervasive suppression of organic L1 use, creating a deficit subtractive approach that increases student cognitive overload; and critical institutional misalignment within university structures. The study concludes that a sustainable path requires shifting the paradigm from EMI as simple language replacement to a deep, integrated pedagogical reorientation. It recommends comprehensive multi-level reforms, including a strategic pause for carefully monitored pilot programs, massive investment in sustained professional development targeting teacher cognition, and the critical realignment of institutional structures to leverage the nation's rich linguistic repertoire for truly equitable internationalization.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction (EMI); Teacher Cognition; Translanguaging; CLIL; Algerian Higher Education.

Introduction

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Journal of Languages & Translation © 2026. Published by University of Chlef, Algeria.

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The global push for internationalization in higher education has established English as the undisputed language of academic exchange, leading to a rapid proliferation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) policies worldwide (Dearden, 2015). However, this global trend is not without significant pedagogical and practical difficulties. Scholarly research has consistently documented the considerable "challenges and pitfalls" that emerge from top-down EMI implementation, ranging from threats to the quality of content instruction to increased anxiety for both faculty and students (Wilkinson, 2013). This trend is particularly pronounced in the Middle East and North Africa, where nations like Egypt (Abdel Latif, 2024) and Tunisia (Badwan, 2022) are also navigating the complex transition, making the Algerian experience both timely and regionally significant.

Within this context, Algeria presents a uniquely complex case, shaped by a deep and often contentious linguistic history. The nation's higher education system is a product of decades of reforms that have shaped its research and practice (Allab & Benstaali, 2009; Benouar, 2013). The system has been a site of ideological struggle, marked by the enduring legacy of colonialism and what Benrabah (1999) termed a "linguistic trauma" following a turbulent post-independence Arabization campaign. This history, characterized by abrupt and politically charged language policy shifts (Azzouz, 1998), created a persistent societal diglossia involving Arabic, French, and Amazigh languages (Belmihoub, 2018). Even before the current EMI mandate, challenges in language-for-specific-purposes teaching were well-documented (Belmihoub, 2016), setting the stage for the recent, sweeping government decree mandating a nationwide switch to EMI (Algerian Presidency, 2022). This decree was enacted as a "policy shock," triggering a profound disjuncture between official ambition and the lived reality of university classrooms.

The present research argues that the resulting policy-practice gap is not merely a technical challenge but a systemic crisis. This crisis stems from a fundamental collision between a reform that implicitly demands the integrated pedagogy of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and three deeply entrenched realities: 1) the historical precedent of disruptive, top-down language reform; 2) the established "teacher cognition" of content-area lecturers, whose professional identities are rooted in subject-matter expertise, not language facilitation; and 3) a pedagogical environment where students' rich multilingual repertoires are often viewed through a deficit lens rather than as a resource for learning, ignoring the critical interplay of language, power, and pedagogy (Cummins, 2000). The official goal of a "smooth shift" (Benadda & Bouguenous, 2025) is thus contradicted by the on-the-ground experience of cognitive overload for students and profound pedagogical uncertainty for teachers.

To diagnose this crisis, this chapter employs a critical integrative literature synthesis (Torraco, 2005). This methodology is designed to connect fragmented research, construct a new conceptual framework, and provide a holistic analysis of a complex, unfolding policy issue. The chapter first establishes its theoretical framework, then applies it to a systematic analysis of the Algerian context and concludes with a discussion of implications and recommendations.

To guide this analysis, the study is structured around the following research questions:

Overarching Question: What are the underlying historical, cognitive, and pedagogical factors that explain the policy-practice gap in Algeria's recent EMI implementation?

1. How does the legacy of past language policies, particularly the post-independence Arabization campaign, inform the challenges of the current EMI mandate?
2. In what ways does the established "teacher cognition" of content-area lecturers conflict with the integrated pedagogical demands of a CLIL-oriented EMI model?
3. How does the prevailing deficit view of students' multilingual abilities hinder effective EMI pedagogy, and what role could a translanguaging approach play in bridging the gap?

The current study employs a critical literature synthesis as its methodological approach. This design is intentionally distinct from empirical study; it does not involve the collection of new primary data from human subjects. Instead, its "data set" is the existing ecosystem of scholarly literature, official policy documents, and peer-reviewed research. This method is not only appropriate but arguably essential for analyzing a recent, large-scale, and rapidly unfolding policy shift like Algeria's 2022 EMI mandate. In such a dynamic context, where comprehensive, longitudinal empirical data have not yet been collected and analyzed, a critical synthesis allows for the construction of a timely and theoretically robust framework. Its primary function is to make sense of the emerging challenges and to provide a conceptual foundation upon which future empirical research can be built.

This approach, however, moves far beyond a simple descriptive review or an annotated bibliography. Its purpose is to analyze, critique, and intentionally integrate insights from disparate bodies of literature to construct a new, coherent conceptual lens for understanding a specific problem (Torraco, 2005). The methodology is therefore fundamentally argumentative, seeking to build a novel theoretical case that explains not just what is happening in Algerian universities, but why it is happening at a systemic level. It aims to connect the dots between historical policy patterns, established pedagogical theories, and the fresh, ground-level data emerging from the first wave of academic inquiry into the reform.

The selection of literature for this synthesis was guided by a systematic, three-pronged strategy designed to ensure comprehensive, multi-layered, and relevant coverage of the issue. The three streams of literature were chosen to create a dialogue between global theory and local reality.

1. **International Theoretical Literature:** The first stream involved a deep engagement with foundational international scholarship in bilingual education, applied linguistics, and educational policy implementation. This provided the chapter's core analytical tools. Keywords for this search included "EMI," "Content and CLIL," "teacher cognition," "translanguaging," "language policy implementation," and "educational change." The work of seminal authors such as David Marsh (2008) and Do Coyle (Coyle et al., 2010) on CLIL, Ernesto Macaro (2018) on the complexities of EMI, Simon Borg (2015) on teacher cognition, and Ofelia García and Li Wei (2014) on translanguaging formed the theoretical bedrock of the chapter. This literature is crucial for situating Algeria's experience within a global context and for providing established frameworks to diagnose predictable challenges.

2. **Algerian Sociolinguistic and Historical Literature:** The second stream focused on scholarship specific to the Algerian context, providing the deep historical and social texture necessary to understand the current moment. This literature is vital for avoiding decontextualized analysis. Keywords included "language policy in Algeria," "Arabization," "language conflict," "Francophonie," and "post-colonial education." The foundational works of patterns like Mohamed Benrabah (1999; 2007) on language and politics, and the analyses of Bouherar and Ghafsi (2021) on the language policy reform's patterns, were prioritized. This strand ensures that the analysis is sensitive to the path-dependent nature of educational policy in Algeria, recognizing that the EMI mandate is not a standalone event but the latest chapter in a long and complex history.

3. **Recent Algerian Empirical Studies:** The third, and most critical, stream targeted peer-reviewed empirical studies published since the 2022 EMI policy shift. This was essential for sourcing the most current evidence of stakeholder perspectives and classroom realities, thereby grounding the chapter's theoretical arguments in the lived experiences of Algerian educators and students. The qualitative inquiries of Saidani and Belmihoub (2025), the mixed-methods research of Labeled and Graia (2025), and the policy analysis by Benadda and Bouguenous (2025) were central to this strand. These studies provide the empirical "symptoms" of the policy-practice gap, which this chapter then seeks to diagnose using the tools from the other two literary streams.

4.

1.1. Analytical Approach

The analysis was conducted not as a sequential summary of these three streams, but as an integrative and dialectical synthesis. The process involved identifying recurring themes, conceptual tensions, and explanatory connections across the different bodies of literature. The core of the analysis was to use the theoretical lenses of CLIL, teacher cognition, and translanguaging to interpret the historical patterns and empirical findings from the Algerian-specific literature.

For example, the historical patterns of top-down "policy shock" identified in the analysis of Arabization were used to frame and explain the chaotic nature of the current EMI mandate's rollout. The specific classroom practices documented by Saidani and Belmihoub (2025), such as the reliance on decontextualized vocabulary lists were analyzed not as isolated teaching flaws, but as direct and predictable manifestations of the cognitive barriers described in the international literature on teacher cognition (Borg, 2015; Macaro, 2018). Similarly, the "deficit subtractive approach" to language they identified was critically examined through the lens of translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014). This approach allows the chapter to construct its novel argument by placing these different bodies of knowledge in direct conversation, using established theory to illuminate local data, and using local data to illustrate the real-world consequences of theoretical debates.

2. Theoretical Framework

To diagnose the profound gap between Algeria's ambitious EMI policy and its challenging classroom realities, a robust theoretical framework is essential. This framework serves as the set of analytical tools used to deconstruct the problem. This chapter's analysis is guided by three interlocking concepts that have emerged from decades of research in applied linguistics and bilingual education: the critical distinction between EMI and Content and CLIL, the role of teacher cognition as the internal engine or barrier to reform, and the function of translanguaging as a suppressed but powerful pedagogical resource. These concepts are not merely descriptive labels; together, they form a powerful explanatory framework for dissecting the pedagogical, cognitive, and sociolinguistic tensions that define the current crisis in Algerian higher education.

2.1 The Critical Mismatch Between the EMI Policy Label and the Pedagogical Need for CLIL

While often used interchangeably in policy discourse, EMI and CLIL represent fundamentally different educational philosophies with vast implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and student support. Understanding this distinction is the first step in diagnosing the Algerian crisis.

EMI, in its broadest sense, refers to the use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where English is not the majority language. It is typically a top-down policy decision, often driven by pragmatic, market-oriented goals: improving international university rankings, attracting international students, and enhancing the global competitiveness of graduates (Macaro, 2018). However, the term "EMI" itself specifies nothing about the method of instruction. This ambiguity is both a feature and a bug. It allows for rapid policy adoption, but it often masks a pedagogical vacuum. The implementation of EMI exists on a continuum. At one end lies a "weak" or "minimalist" form, which is little more than a language switch. This is a high-risk "submersion" model where students are expected to learn complex content through a language they have not yet mastered, with little to no pedagogical support. At the other end lies a "strong" or "maximalist" form, where language support is systematically integrated with content teaching, making it functionally indistinguishable from CLIL.

CLIL, by contrast, is not a policy label but a pedagogical philosophy. It is a "dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 1). This dual focus is the non-negotiable core of the approach, and it transforms the very nature of teaching. A subject lecturer is no longer just a physicist or an engineer; they are also a facilitator of the academic language of physics or engineering. A robust CLIL approach is built upon the integrated "4Cs" framework, which demands attention to:

- **Content:** The progression of subject-specific knowledge, skills, and understanding.
- **Communication:** The active use of language to learn, interact, and construct meaning, moving beyond receptive skills (listening to lectures) to genuine discourse (debating, presenting, collaborating).
- **Cognition:** The deliberate development of higher-order thinking skills (e.g., analyzing, evaluating, creating), which are seen as being inextricably linked to language. One cannot think of complex thoughts without the language to structure them.
- **Culture:** Exposure to alternative perspectives and intercultural understanding, fostering a more global academic mindset.

Given the diverse English proficiency levels of its students, who largely come from a traditional EFL background, Algeria's policy can only succeed if it is implemented as a strong, CLIL-oriented model. The government's directive for EMI implicitly demands the pedagogical sophistication of CLIL, even if it does not use the term. It is precisely here that the policy breaks down. Recent Algerian research reveals a chasm between this unstated need for CLIL and the on-the-ground reality. The crucial finding by Labeled and Graia (2025) that the majority of teachers they interviewed were "unfamiliar with this approach" and provided a simplistic definition akin to weak EMI ("the teaching of a certain content using a foreign language") is damning. It exposes a critical lack of conceptual understanding; teachers are "oblivious of their exact roles as CLIL practitioners." The policy demands a sophisticated, collaborative pedagogical model, yet the implementers on the ground lack the conceptual tools, training, and institutional support required to enact it. This disconnect is the foundational fracture of the entire reform.

2.2 Teacher Cognition as the Central Internal Barrier to Change

The success or failure of any educational reform ultimately rests not on the policy document itself, but on the beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, and thoughts of the teachers tasked with its executional domain known as teacher cognition (Borg, 2015). These beliefs form a complex, deeply ingrained, and often tacit web, shaped by an educator's own "apprenticeship of observation" as a student, their formal professional training, and their daily, iterative classroom practices. Teacher cognition acts as a powerful filter through which any new policy is interpreted and ultimately translated or mistranslated into classroom action.

In the Algerian EMI context, the cognition of content-area lecturers is the most critical variable. These instructors are experts in their disciplines. Their professional identity, forged over years of study and practice, is built on subject-matter mastery. They are physicists, engineers, biologists, and economists. They are not, in their own minds, language teachers. Furthermore, their own educational background, whether in the Arabized or the Francophone-influenced track, was likely dominated by a transmission-based model of education, where the teacher's role is to deliver knowledge to passive recipients. Their experience with English was likely through a traditional EFL model, which treats language as a separate, decontextualized subject, focused on grammar rules and vocabulary memorization.

This background creates a profound cognitive dissonance when they are mandated to teach through English. Their core pedagogical belief is often centered on the accurate transmission of disciplinary content; language is seen as a transparent, neutral container for that content. Consequently, the core tenets of CLIL scaffolding language, integrating language objectives with content objectives, designing interactive tasks, and facilitating student-led discourse can be perceived as remedial, tangential, or even a "dumbing down" of their serious academic subject. This is not mere resistance or unwillingness; it is a fundamental epistemological clash between their identity as a subject expert and the new, hybrid identity the policy demands. As research in European universities has shown, professional development that narrowly focuses on simply improving lecturers' English proficiency is bound to fail because it does not address this deeper, more resilient need to reshape their pedagogical beliefs and professional identity (O'Dowd, 2018). Without a deep, sustained intervention targeting these

underlying cognitions, the EMI mandate will remain a superficial language switch, leaving traditional, ineffective pedagogies intact and actively failing to support student learning.

2.3 Translanguaging: The Suppressed Pedagogical Resource

The third vital concept, translanguaging, offers a powerful lens for re-evaluating and reimagining classroom language practices in inherently multilingual EMI contexts like Algeria. For decades, educational policy has been dominated by monolingual ideologies that treat languages as separate, bounded, and often competing systems within a speaker's mind. From this perspective, the use of Arabic or French in an English-medium classroom is seen as a problem, a sign of interference, a crutch, or a failure to adhere to the policy.

Translanguaging theory radically challenges this deficit view. It posits that multilingual individuals do not possess separate language systems in their brains, but rather a single, integrated linguistic repertoire from which they strategically draw upon all its features to make meaning, communicate, and learn (García & Wei, 2014). From this perspective, the fluid and dynamic language practices of multilingual speakers are not a handicap but a cognitive advantage. In an Algerian EMI classroom, a lecturer might explain a complex concept in English, use a precise French technical term inherited from their own Francophone-influenced education, clarify a complex point in Algerian Arabic to ensure comprehension, and ask students to read a text in English. This is not chaotic code-switching; it is a sophisticated and natural use of linguistic resources to achieve a cognitive and pedagogical goal.

Recognizing these practices as a strategic resource, rather than a problem to be eradicated, is transformative for pedagogy. A translanguaging pedagogy encourages the planned and purposeful use of students' entire linguistic toolkit to support learning. For instance, a professor could allow students to debate a complex engineering problem in their shared L1 (Arabic or French) to ensure deep conceptual engagement, before requiring them to write their final report in academic English. This approach lowers anxiety, deepens content comprehension, and provides a crucial scaffold for academic language development (Sahan & Rose, 2021). It transforms the classroom from a place where students' home languages and identities are suppressed to one where their full linguistic identity is validated and leveraged in the service of learning. In a context like Algeria, with its rich and complex linguistic history, the ideological rejection of translanguaging in favor of a rigid English-only model represents a monumental, missed opportunity and a primary source of pedagogical failure, directly contributing to the "cognitive and affective burden" experienced by students (Benadda & Bouguenous, 2025).

3. Analysis: Anatomy of the Policy-Practice Gap

This section applies the chapter's tripartite theoretical framework to dissect the profound and growing gap between the Algerian government's EMI policy and the lived reality within its university classrooms. It moves beyond a mere description of the symptoms of the crisis, such as student disengagement or teacher anxiety to diagnose its underlying causes. This analysis demonstrates that the current challenges are not accidental by systematically weaving together historical precedent (the legacy of Arabization), cognitive barriers (teacher cognition), pedagogical voids (the suppression of translanguaging), and structural failures (institutional misalignment). Rather, they are the predictable and logical outcomes of a systemic collision between a rigid, top-down policy, and the deep, complex, and resilient structures of the Algerian higher education environment.

3.1 The Arabization Campaign as a Precedent for the 'Policy Shock' Implementation Model

To understand the current EMI crisis, one must first exhume the ghosts of Algeria's past language policies. The implementation of the 2022 EMI mandate is not happening in a vacuum; it follows a familiar and problematic pattern of top-down language policy reform that powerfully echoes the post-independence Arabization campaign. Arabization, like the EMI mandate, was a politically motivated, ideologically charged, and rapidly executed reform aimed at fundamentally shifting the linguistic center

of gravity in education and public life (Benrabah, 2007). While the ideological goals were different, one focused on national identity, the other on globalization, the implementation methodology shares a number of critical and instructive flaws.

The Arabization process was characterized by what can be termed a "policy shock" approach: a sweeping, universal mandate issued from the top with insufficient pedagogical planning, a severe lack of locally developed and contextually appropriate materials, and inadequate training for the teachers expected to implement it. Crucially, it failed to account for the complex linguistic realities on the ground, where French remained the de facto language of science, technology, and economics, creating a societal diglossia that persists to this day (Bouherar & Ghafsi, 2021). The result was decades of educational disruption, the creation of two parallel and often unequal educational tracks (the Arabized and the Francophone-educated), and significant challenges in aligning educational outcomes with the demands of the modern economy.

This historical precedent has created a form of institutional muscle memory for how language policy is conducted in Algeria: through abrupt, disruptive decrees rather than through gradual, evidence-based, and consultative transitions. This context makes the current situation both understandable and deeply concerning. The Ministry of Higher Education's official plan for a "smooth," three-phase transition from general English proficiency to a fully integrated CLIL-like model, as outlined by Benadda and Bouguenous (2025), exists on paper as a well-intentioned and logical blueprint. However, the lived reality has been a brutal "policy shock." The universal mandate was deployed with such speed that it bypassed its own logical stages, pre-empting the possibility of conducting needs analyses, launching pilot programs, or providing the deep professional development required. The current crisis, therefore, is not just a reaction to a new policy; it is a reaction amplified by the legacy of past reforms that normalized disruptive, rather than transformative, change.

3.2 The Cognitive Collision Between a Subject Expert's Identity and CLIL's Pedagogical Demands

The most significant point of collision occurs within the minds of the individual educators tasked with implementation. As our theoretical framework predicts, the EMI policy implicitly demands a CLIL-style pedagogy, requiring teachers to become dual-practitioners of their content specialty and the language of instruction. This demand clashes profoundly with the established teacher cognition of most Algerian content-area lecturers.

Their professional identity, forged through years of specialized training, is that of a subject-matter expert, a physicist, an engineer, a biologist not a language facilitator. This is not a matter of simple resistance, but of a fundamental mismatch in professional identity and pedagogical beliefs a challenge recognized in international EMI contexts where teacher attitudes are a critical factor for success (Dearden & Macaro, 2016). The recent empirical research from Algeria provides stark, ground-level evidence of this cognitive barrier. The crucial finding by Labeled and Graia (2025) that most teachers were "unfamiliar with this approach" and held a simplistic, weak-EMI understanding of CLIL is the diagnostic key. This is powerfully corroborated by earlier research by Belmihoub (2021), which found that Algerian teachers' pre-existing beliefs about language teaching directly impacted their classroom practices, leading them to avoid the integrated techniques central to a CLIL methodology. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that the core pedagogical demand of the policy has not been communicated, understood, or internalized. Teachers are, in the words of one study, "oblivious of their exact roles as CLIL practitioners" (Labeled & Graia, 2025).

The practical result of this cognitive dissonance is a retreat to familiar but ineffective coping mechanisms. Instead of re-engineering their courses to integrate language and content objectives, lecturers are defaulting to what they know. This includes:

- **Direct Translation:** Translating old French or Arabic lecture notes into English, preserving a transmission-based model.

- **Decontextualized Vocabulary Teaching:** As Saidani and Belmihoub (2025) document, teachers resort to providing lists of technical terms to memorize, treating language as a lexical problem rather than a discourse skill.
- **Avoidance of Interaction:** Fear of exposing their own linguistic limitations leads lecturers to minimize student interaction, relying on monologues that render students passive.

The policy, therefore, demands a pedagogical fusion, but the cognition of the implementers remains rooted in a deep-seated and institutionally reinforced separation of content and language. This is the central human drama of the reform, placing thousands of dedicated professionals in a position where they are being asked to do a job for which they have not been trained and which conflicts with their very identity as educators.

3.3 The Suppression of Translanguaging Represents a Missed Pedagogical Opportunity

Faced with the immense challenge of teaching and learning in a language that is not their own, both teachers and students are left with one powerful, organic, and immediately available resource: their shared linguistic repertoire of Algerian Arabic, Standard Arabic, and French. However, the prevailing institutional ideology, driven by a purist, monolingual English-only ideal, actively suppresses this resource. This creates a pedagogical void where the most effective and natural tool for scaffolding learning is stigmatized, forbidden, and driven underground.

This "deficit subtractive approach," a term used by Saidani and Belmihoub (2025) to describe the attitudes they observed, views students' native languages not as a cognitive foundation but as interference, a bad habit, or "linguistic pollution" that contaminates the purity of the English-medium classroom. This perspective is not only pedagogically unsound but also deeply damaging to student confidence. It ignores the fundamental principles of translanguaging, which posits that multilingual speakers naturally and effectively draw on their entire linguistic toolkit to make meaning.

Instead of being trained to use translanguaging strategically for example, by allowing students to brainstorm in Arabic, debate concepts in French, and then structure their final written output in English teachers are often pressured by implicit or explicit institutional norms to enforce an unrealistic and counter-productive English-only rule. This directly contributes to the "cognitive overload" experienced by students, who are blocked from using their existing knowledge to access new knowledge (Benadda & Bouguenous, 2025). The pressure to "think" in English from day one is an impossible demand for most, leading to surface-level engagement and rote memorization. Students, as one can infer from the challenges described, are likely forced to perform a constant, exhausting mental translation, which consumes cognitive resources that should be dedicated to understanding the complex subject matter itself.

The suppression of organic translanguaging is perhaps the single greatest pedagogical failure of the current implementation. It transforms a valuable asset—the rich multilingualism of the Algerian student body into a perceived liability. It denies teachers their most potent tool for clarifying complex ideas and denies students their most natural pathway to understanding, all in service of a monolingual ideal that has no basis in cognitive science or effective bilingual pedagogy.

3.4 A Misaligned University System Creates an Institutional Fracture Undermining EMI

Finally, the policy-practice gap is cemented and made permanent by a profound institutional fracture. Even if individual teachers were to overcome the cognitive barriers and embrace a CLIL pedagogy, the university system itself is not structured to support them. University as an organization remains misaligned with the policy's goals.

The CLIL model, and any strong EMI model, is fundamentally collaborative. It requires what Labeled and Graia (2025) aptly call a "professional symbiosis" between content experts and language experts. Yet, their research reveals that this symbiosis is non-existent in the Algerian context. Collaboration is

"almost confined to informal joint lesson planning," a form of ad-hoc crisis management rather than a systemic, institutionalized practice. They found teachers were largely "unwilling to participate in team teaching and reflective praxis," not necessarily out of ill will, but because the institutional frameworks, time allocations, and reward structures for such deep collaboration simply do not exist.

Universities remain organized in traditional departmental silos. There are no formal mechanisms for joint curriculum design, co-teaching, shared professional development, or joint assessment between the engineering faculty and the English department. This structural isolation is reinforced by seemingly minor but symbolically powerful administrative decisions. The practice of assigning a low credit weighting or "coefficient" to language-support courses, as noted by Saidani and Belmihoub (2025), is a perfect example. It signals to students and faculty alike that language development is a secondary, remedial, and low-priority concern, rather than an integral and essential component of their disciplinary education.

The policy, therefore, demands an integrated, interdisciplinary, collaborative approach, but the institutional structure enforces separation, hierarchy, and isolation. This fundamental misalignment ensures that even the most motivated and innovative educators are left to struggle alone, making systemic, sustainable change nearly impossible. The system itself is working against the stated goals of the reform.

4. Discussion

This section moves from analysis to a broader synthesis and critique. The preceding analysis deconstructed the component parts of the policy-practice gap in Algerian EMI implementation. This discussion now reassembles those parts to interpret their collective meaning, explicitly answer the chapter's guiding research questions, and critically explore the profound challenges and pitfalls that the current policy trajectory presents. It addresses the wider implications of the analysis for theory, policy, and professional practice, culminating in a set of integrated recommendations designed to offer a more sustainable and pedagogically sound path forward.

4.1 Synthesis of Findings and a Return to the Research Questions

The central argument of this chapter is that Algeria's EMI mandate has created a critical and widening policy-practice gap. This gap is not a result of isolated failures but is a systemic crisis born from a collision between a top-down, decontextualized policy and the deeply ingrained cognitive, pedagogical, and historical realities of its higher education system. The findings of this literature synthesis provide clear, integrated, and troubling answers to the initial research questions posed in the introduction.

- **In response to RQ1:** The analysis demonstrates that the legacy of Arabization serves as more than just historical context; it is an active and powerful precedent that shapes the very methodology of the current reform. The "policy shock" approach characterized by ideological fervor over pedagogical planning and a disregard for the nation's linguistic complexity is not a new phenomenon. It is a well-worn path in Algerian policy-making (Benrabah, 2007; Bouherar & Ghafsi, 2021). The current EMI mandate, by mirroring this disruptive pattern, has inherited the institutional memory of past failures. This has engendered a deep-seated skepticism among stakeholders and set the reform on a trajectory where it is at high risk of repeating the same mistakes: creating educational inequalities, failing to achieve its stated goals, and causing widespread disruption without yielding sustainable transformation.
- **In response to RQ2:** The concept of teacher cognition emerges from the analysis as the central human and pedagogical barrier to effective implementation. The conflict is profound: the policy

implicitly demands the hybrid identity of a CLIL practitioner, yet the professional identity of content lecturers is forged as a subject-matter expert, not a language teacher (Macaro, 2018). This is not an abstract conflict; its consequences are visible in the classrooms. The persistence of decontextualized, transmission-based teaching, the simplistic understanding of CLIL as merely "using a foreign language," and the reluctance to engage in collaborative praxis, as documented empirically by Labeled and Graia (2025) and Saidani and Belmihoub (2025), are direct manifestations of this cognitive dissonance. The policy has changed the language on the door of the classroom, but it has not provided the tools or the rationale for lecturers to change the deep grammar of their teaching.

- **In response to RQ3:** The analysis confirms that the prevailing "deficit subtractive approach" to language is a direct and damaging consequence of imposing a monolingual ideology onto a vibrantly multilingual reality. The evidence suggests that translanguaging is not an abstract theory but a concrete reality in Algerian classrooms, it is occurring organically as a survival mechanism for both students and teachers struggling to make meaning (Saidani & Belmihoub, 2025). However, because this natural practice is stigmatized as "linguistic pollution" or a sign of failure, its immense potential as a strategic, asset-based pedagogy is lost. This ideological rejection of students' full linguistic repertoires actively creates the "cognitive and affective burden" that Benadda and Bouguenous (2025) describe, preventing the development of a pedagogy that could scaffold learning, validate students' identities, and build a bridge to academic English proficiency.

4.2 Critical Analysis of Challenges, Pitfalls, and Deeper Implications

Synthesizing these findings reveals several critical challenges that threaten not just the success of the EMI policy, but the health of the Algerian higher education system itself. The current path demonstrates a clear tension between the "ambitions and risk" inherent in any large-scale educational reform, where the potential long-term benefits are jeopardized by the immediate, on-the-ground damage caused by a flawed implementation strategy (Benabdelkader, 2025).

- **The Pitfall of Historical Repetition and Manufactured Inequality:** The most significant danger is that the EMI mandate, in its current form, is poised to create a new and durable form of educational inequality, much as the flawed implementation of Arabization did. By enforcing a submersion model without adequate, system-wide support, the policy risks creating a two-tiered system where only a small elite of students with prior access to high-quality English instruction can succeed. The vast majority risk being left behind in a "sink or swim" environment, leading to high failure rates, increased dropout, and a decline in the overall quality and equity of public higher education.

- **The Challenge of Reshaping Professional Identity:** The analysis underscores that the deepest challenge is not linguistic but cognitive and professional. Reshaping the ingrained beliefs of thousands of university lecturers about their role as educators is a monumental task. It requires far more than short-term workshops; it necessitates a fundamental rethinking of the "professional journeys of academics" in an internationalized university (Galloway et al., 2017). Without a long-term, systemic strategy to transform professional identities from "content transmitters" to "content and language facilitators," the policy will remain a superficial layer on top of unchanged and largely ineffective pedagogical practices.

- **The Risk of Unintended Pedagogical Consequences and Curricular Simplification:** In the absence of proper training, instructors are reverting to predictable but counter-productive coping mechanisms, such as the decontextualized vocabulary teaching observed by Saidani and Belmihoub (2025). This "pedagogical reversion" may lead to a subtle but pervasive simplification of the subject

content itself, as lecturers avoid conceptually complex topics, they feel ill-equipped to teach in English. The very policy intended to enrich the curriculum could paradoxically lead to its hollowing out.

- **The Teacher and Student Perspective: A Crisis of Confidence and Well-being:** At the human level, the current implementation model is creating a crisis of confidence and well-being. For teachers, it induces a state of high anxiety, undermining their authority as experts. For students, as Benadda and Bouguenous (2025) highlight, the result is a debilitating combination of cognitive overload and affective strain, leading to disengagement and learned helplessness.

4.3 Recommendations

The analysis presented in this chapter points not toward an abandonment of the EMI policy, but toward its radical and urgent reconceptualization. The current "policy shock" must be replaced with a pedagogically informed, strategically phased implementation model.

1. A Strategic Pause and a Shift to a Phased, Piloted Model. The immediate priority is to pause the universal, top-down mandate. In its place, the Ministry should launch official, well-funded, and rigorously evaluated pilot programs in select faculties. This would allow for the development of context-specific pedagogical models and provide the evidence needed to inform a wider, more intelligent national rollout.

2. A Massive Investment in Deep Professional Development. International research has unequivocally identified the training of teachers as the "key challenge for the internationalization of higher education" (O'Dowd, 2018). Therefore, the focus of investment must shift from simply testing English levels to providing deep, continuous professional development. This development must be certified and focus on reshaping teacher cognition through intensive training in CLIL pedagogy and instructional practices that integrate content and language (Ruiz de Zarobe & Lyster, 2018). This cannot be a one-off event but must be an ongoing process of collaborative, reflective practice.

3. Realigning Institutional Structures and Valuing Language. University administrators must actively dismantle the institutional fractures that undermine the policy. This requires breaking down departmental silos to create formal structures for interdisciplinary collaboration. Critically, the credit weighting of academic language support courses must be increased to signal their core importance, repurposing language centers into sophisticated academic literacy hubs embedded within faculties.

4.4 Limitation

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. As a critical literature synthesis, its primary limitation is that it does not present new empirical data. Its conclusions are interpretative and are constructed upon the quality and scope of the available published research. While it synthesizes the most current research available, the EMI landscape in Algeria is dynamic, and on-the-ground practices and attitudes may be evolving rapidly. The perspectives of teachers and students, while central to the analysis, are filtered through the lens of the researchers cited. This chapter provides the theoretical diagnosis; it is not a substitute for further, direct empirical investigation into the lived experiences of those at the heart of this reform.

Conclusion

The chapter has undertaken a critical synthesis to deconstruct the profound policy-practice gap that has emerged from Algeria's rapid implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction. The analysis has demonstrated that the current crisis is not the result of isolated shortcomings but is a predictable, systemic failure born from a fundamental collision. A top-down "policy shock," mirroring the disruptive patterns of past language reforms like Arabization, has been imposed upon a complex educational ecosystem. This policy's implicit demand for a sophisticated CLIL pedagogy clashes directly with the established teacher cognition of subject-matter experts, whose professional identities are not aligned with the dual-practitioner role this new context requires. The result is a reversion to ineffective teaching methods, creating a state of cognitive overload for students and deep professional anxiety for lecturers.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the implementation is hampered by a significant pedagogical void. By adhering to a rigid and unrealistic monolingual ideology, the policy encourages a "deficit subtractive approach" that stigmatizes and suppresses the rich multilingual repertoires of both students and staff. This act of rejecting translanguaging treats a powerful pedagogical asset as a liability, denying educators and learners their most effective tool for scaffolding understanding in a challenging new linguistic environment. This pedagogical failure is cemented by institutional fractures that ensure the system itself works against the collaborative model necessary for success.

Ultimately, the goal of internationalizing Algerian higher education through English is both valid and necessary. However, the path chosen is not only ineffective but is actively causing harm, risking the very educational quality and human capital it seeks to enhance. The solution lies not in abandoning the journey, but in fundamentally rethinking the map. Algeria does not need a simple language substitution; it requires a deep, patient, and well-supported pedagogical reorientation that respects the cognitive realities of its teachers, leverages the linguistic assets of its students, and aligns its institutional structures with its ambitious goals.

As for Future Directions for Research

The limitations of this study, rooted in its nature as a literature synthesis, point directly toward several urgent directions for future empirical research. The framework presented here serves as a call to action for researchers to investigate the unfolding reality of EMI in Algeria with greater depth. The following avenues are critical for building an evidence base that can guide a more sustainable and equitable policy path.

Longitudinal Ethnographic Studies of Teacher Professional Development: This chapter's core argument rests on the centrality of teacher cognition. We now need empirical evidence on the solution. Longitudinal ethnographic studies are needed to follow content lecturers through intensive, CLIL-oriented professional development programs to track the evolution of their pedagogical beliefs, classroom practices, and professional identities over time.

Student-Focused Narrative and Phenomenological Research: There is an urgent need for research that places the student experience at the center of the inquiry. Narrative and phenomenological studies can systematically document the lived reality of students navigating this transition, exploring not only their learning challenges but also the profound cognitive and affective dimensions of their experience: anxiety, motivation, identity, and resilience.

Comparative Implementation Studies: The recommendation to shift from a universal mandate to a piloted model creates a vital research opportunity. Comparative, mixed-methods studies of different implementation models across Algerian universities could measure variables such as student learning outcomes, pass/fail rates, and academic literacy development, providing policymakers with the concrete data needed to make informed decisions about a national rollout.

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