

The Developmental Dimensions of Algeria's Experience in Adult Education and Literacy Eradication

Maachou Abbassia

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbes, Algeria

abb.maachou.sba@gmail.com

Received: 15/12 2025

Accept: 04/07/2026

Published: 13/07/2026

Abstract

Illiteracy is widely regarded as a manifestation of social, economic, and cultural underdevelopment in developing countries, including Algeria. Its eradication should therefore constitute an integral component of every project or plan intended to advance national development. To this end, the Algerian state adopted a strategic plan to combat and eradicate illiteracy and established educational centers and institutions to provide instruction to this segment of the population. Against this background, the present article identifies and analyzes the constituent elements of the developmental dimensions of literacy eradication. It further examines the substantive content and effectiveness of these efforts in freeing Algerian society from ignorance, intolerance, and underdevelopment. Finally, it considers the educational plans designed to eradicate illiteracy and highlights the role of adult education in enabling learners to participate consciously and effectively in the broader process of national development.

Keywords: developmental dimensions, adult education, civilizational illiteracy, Algeria

Introduction

Since 1962, Algeria has mobilized resources to eradicate illiteracy, which affected 85% of the Algerian population on the eve of independence. This situation resulted from the colonial policy of imposed ignorance pursued throughout the occupation under the slogan, "An ignorant enemy is better than an educated enemy." To overcome this deplorable legacy, the Algerian state declared education compulsory and free of charge. Illiteracy was regarded as a negative historical inheritance that had impeded the pace of national development. Hence, after regaining its independence, Algeria made education for all a priority, including education for the large segment of the population targeted by literacy programs (National Office for Literacy and Adult Education, 2005, p. 2).

The foundation of the Algerian experience rests on eradicating illiteracy and universalizing education. The 1976 National Charter, as reproduced by Turki (1981), stated:

Illiteracy, which is one of the legacies of colonialism, must be combated by all possible means. These efforts must be strengthened in the coming years to include all citizens, both men and women. Reception facilities will be made available to support this major national

undertaking, enabling people in neighborhoods, hamlets, and rural villages to exercise their right to acquire knowledge. (p. 27)

Algeria's organized efforts to combat illiteracy have focused on teaching adults basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills and equipping them with the knowledge and competencies required to perform their occupational roles and assume their assigned responsibilities. These efforts have also emphasized developing literacy programs that address learners' educational, vocational, and social needs, thereby contributing to comprehensive development.

Literacy education therefore has developmental outcomes and dimensions that encompass political, social, economic, psychological, and educational domains. Progress in these domains necessarily contributes to the advancement of society.

Against this background, this article analyzes the developmental dimensions of literacy education and their constituent elements, political, economic, social, psychological, and educational, and highlights their substantive content and effectiveness in freeing learners from illiteracy and ultimately eradicating it.

Strategies Undertaken to Eradicate Illiteracy in Algeria

Following independence, Algeria entered a new phase in which the fight against illiteracy was incorporated into the broader framework of comprehensive development. Algeria consequently began implementing its first literacy program in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

On December 31, 1966, Algeria signed an agreement with UNESCO to implement the Functional Literacy Project over a five-year period (1966–1970). The project sought to provide literacy education to 80,000 male and female workers in the industrial and agricultural sectors and comprised three subprojects (Turki, 1981, pp. 33–34):

1. The Staoueli project, located near the capital in one of Algeria's richest and most fertile agricultural regions, aimed to provide literacy education to 5,000 male and female workers employed on self-managed farms.
2. The Arzew project, located in one of Algeria's major industrial centers for petrochemical production and natural-gas liquefaction, aimed to provide literacy education to 25,000 male and female workers between 30 and 85 years of age.
3. The Annaba project, located in an agricultural and industrial region specializing in iron and steel production, aimed to provide literacy education to 50,000 male and female agricultural and industrial workers between 15 and 35 years of age.

During this phase, the Algerian state also established regional literacy centers throughout the country's provinces, districts, and municipalities. The National Committee for the Fight Against Illiteracy was formed and prepared two textbooks in reading and arithmetic, each available in Arabic and French. The committee recommended Arabic as the principal language of instruction in literacy and adult education programs, while allowing instruction in French when preferred by the learner.

On May 20, 1995, Executive Decree No. 95-143 transformed the National Literacy Center into the National Office for Literacy and Adult Education. The decree assigned the Office the following responsibilities (Executive Decree No. 95-143, 1995, pp. 8–9):

- Serving as the state institution responsible for implementing national literacy policy and guaranteeing the right to education for adults who are unable to read and write.
- Ensuring the optimal use of the state-allocated material, financial, and human resources to achieve literacy objectives.
- Providing textbooks, teaching materials, programs, and curricula for literacy and adult education.
- Training and preparing literacy and adult education teachers and personnel.
- Safeguarding adults' right to education.
- Conducting scientific, technical, and applied studies on illiteracy and effective methods of combating it.
- Organizing conferences, seminars, exhibitions, and study days on literacy.

The National Office for Literacy and Adult Education (2005) reported that 10,896 learners had completed literacy programs. The Algerian Literacy Association, Iqra, likewise reported that the illiteracy rate had declined to 21.36% in 2005 compared with previous years. According to the relevant authorities, this decline was associated with the use of modern technologies to improve the effectiveness of adult education and literacy programs, the provision of the technical and administrative resources required for implementation, and the development of educational content and teaching methods in accordance with learners' needs and development priorities.

From 2001 to 2004, the network of branches affiliated with the National Office for Literacy and Adult Education expanded substantially and, by the end of 2004, covered all 48 provinces of Algeria. This phase also included the following measures (Bekkouche, 2005, p. 25):

- Developing a reference framework for literacy and adult education curricula based on the curriculum framework adopted by the Ministry of National Education.
- Developing literacy and adult education curricula in Arabic and mathematics, accompanied by a practical guide for program preparation.
- Preparing a national strategic literacy project under the sponsorship and supervision of the Minister of Education.

Through this strategy, Algeria sought to reduce illiteracy gradually and systematically and to improve literacy levels by 50% by 2015 (Bekkouche, 2005, p. 25).

The Developmental Dimensions of Literacy and Adult Education

The success of development programs depends on the effectiveness of human development initiatives, which, in turn, rely on the success of literacy efforts. From this perspective, adult education may be regarded as a foundation for sustainable development. The following analysis examines the political, economic, social, educational, and psychological dimensions of literacy and highlights their substantive content and role in freeing individuals from illiteracy and enabling them to contribute consciously to the development process.

Political Dimensions of Literacy

Adult education aims to familiarize learners with the political conditions that shape society, because these conditions influence standards of living and the nature of social life in Algeria.

The political content of adult education should include the dissemination and clarification of political facts and information relating to the ideology of the social system and its effectiveness in achieving learners' goals and aspirations. It should also provide learners with essential information about the state's duties toward citizens, citizens' duties toward the state, the importance of complying with lawful public authority, and the necessity of respecting Algerian law. It further involves "clarifying the foundations and components of the state and the legitimate and legal grounds on which it is based, while explaining the relationship among the state, political parties, and local communities within society" (Al-Hassan, 2005, p. 212).

Among the principal objectives of literacy and adult education are raising learners' awareness of the political risks and challenges facing the nation and strengthening their ability to resist political and ideological manipulation. Literacy education is intended to enable learners to engage more consciously with political and societal debates.

The Algerian state cannot fully eradicate illiteracy unless society understands the political dimensions of the phenomenon and recognizes the risks and challenges that illiteracy may pose to social stability and development. As Al-Hassan (2005) observed, "The phenomenon of illiteracy cannot be understood in depth unless it is viewed as part of a whole, nor can it be addressed radically without confronting the range of political factors" (p. 213).

Elias Farah argued that illiteracy is closely connected not only to underdevelopment but also to colonialism in its various forms, class exploitation, and the penetration of cultures hostile to liberation, unity, and democratic struggle (as cited in Al-Hassan, 2005, p. 214).

The political dimension of literacy may therefore be understood as a strategic national project intended to develop educated, aware, and politically informed citizens who can fulfill their personal and social roles effectively. It also promotes citizenship and national identity, encourages participation in elections, reinforces respect for the law, and strengthens a sense of belonging and responsibility toward the nation.

Economic Dimensions of Literacy

Adult education and literacy constitute specialized forms of training with a technical character and are directly connected to economic development. They should therefore be planned and implemented as components of broader development programs. Turki (1981) defined literacy as follows:

Literacy is an educational system that seeks to provide illiterate adults with the opportunity to acquire reading, writing, and numeracy skills within the environment in which they live and work and in relation to the productive activities they perform. Through learning, they become scientifically and practically capable of active participation in and contribution to economic and social development. (p. 49)

Literacy and adult education programs may be more cost-effective than formal education programs because their instructional materials and curricula can connect reading, writing, and numeracy skills directly to vocational practice and, in some cases, to vocational qualifications. Such programs provide learners with opportunities to acquire the skills and experience required to enter the labor market, thereby generating substantial long-term returns.

According to Al-Tanoubi (2002), the Conference of Arab Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning and Education, held in Tripoli in April 1966, emphasized the need to prioritize literacy programs, as investment in literacy yields economic benefits. The conference recommended integrating literacy programs into educational plans, linking those plans to social and economic development strategies, and allocating the necessary funding from general education budgets (p. 164).

Economic well-being and material progress depend in part on sustained attention to cultural and educational development, particularly basic education and literacy. High rates of illiteracy among both men and women hinder the implementation of development plans, impede social development, and worsen individuals' economic circumstances. Culture and education, therefore, play a fundamental role in economic production.

Algeria has sought to raise individuals' educational and cultural levels and improve their living conditions by increasing economic production. Greater production depends on several factors, among the most important of which is an educated and productive workforce. An educated worker is generally better equipped than a worker without basic literacy to improve the quantity and quality of production and to operate modern factories, laboratories, and machinery. Addressing illiteracy is consequently an important condition for the success of economic development plans. State expenditure on literacy and adult education should therefore be understood as an investment that can increase production and improve its quality.

The functional relationship between literacy and productive efficiency, on the one hand, and between literacy and the implementation of development projects, on the other, can be summarized as follows:

A high illiteracy rate prevents members of society from using technological means of production, either because such means are unavailable or because illiterate groups are unable to use them owing to their limited cultural and educational backgrounds and their inability to receive the necessary training. Low individual productivity is therefore attributed to the failure to use modern technological means of production, and the failure to use such means is attributed to illiteracy. (Al-Hassan, 2005, p. 215)

Education is therefore a fundamental component of economic development. Its role extends beyond preparing individuals for the labor market to shaping citizens' personalities, fostering citizenship, and encouraging the assumption of social responsibilities. By increasing labor productivity, education directly influences comprehensive development. From this perspective, eradicating illiteracy is not merely an educational objective but a strategic economic investment that produces long-term social returns.

Social Dimensions of Literacy

The social dimension of literacy requires an analysis of its influence on the vitality and functioning of the institutions that constitute the social structure, including educational, family, health, and cultural institutions. It also requires consideration of literacy's influence on learners' behavior, relationships, and social roles. Educated individuals become better able to communicate and understand their rights and duties, particularly within the family. Al-Hassan (2005) explained:

An educated and cultured family is the social unit founded on scientific principles and objective foundations that influence relationships among its members, particularly those between husbands and wives, parents and children, or mothers and daughters, as well as its methods of socialization and upbringing. (p. 218)

An educated family that is free from ignorance provides its children with appropriate methods of socialization and instills the behavioral and moral patterns valued by society. It also encourages children to pursue education and benefit from cultural and educational institutions so that they may acquire the knowledge, experience, and competencies needed to contribute to social development.

A family's education and cultural awareness may also help it overcome inherited social problems, including neglect of children's upbringing, inequality between women and men in rights and duties, and marital conflict. A family equipped with knowledge and education is better positioned to address these problems and strengthen its role as a central social institution.

Literacy also plays a leading role in transforming the class structure and accelerating social mobility, thereby supporting a society founded on equality, freedom, and social justice (Al-Hassan, 2005, p. 219).

The spread of education among poor agricultural and working-class populations, described as constituting approximately 70% of the population, can reduce class disparities. Education narrows the gap among social groups, encourages harmony and cooperation across social strata, and helps reduce class conflict and social exploitation (Al-Hassan, 2005, p. 219).

Functionalist sociological approaches to literacy regard education as a fundamental mechanism of socialization that integrates individuals into the social structure and strengthens social cohesion. Within this framework, reading and writing promote integration between the individual and society by enabling people to understand and internalize social values and norms and to participate effectively in social institutions.

Literacy is likewise viewed as a means of enabling individuals to participate constructively in the social system by helping them perform their social and occupational roles competently, thereby contributing to social progress and the stability of society as a whole.

Paulo Freire proposed that literacy should serve as a means of liberating individuals from the social and cultural constraints that impede their development. He emphasized reading and writing as tools of criticism and analysis through which social contexts can be understood. From this perspective, literacy programs become interactive processes that generate critical

consciousness, free individuals from dependency, and enable them to participate in building their communities (as cited in Talbi, 2025, p. 500).

Literacy thus constitutes a comprehensive process of human and social liberation. Its role is not limited to teaching reading and writing; it can also transform individuals' personalities and the ways in which they interact with their social and cultural environments. Possession of the basic tools of knowledge opens new possibilities for understanding, participation, and self-expression and frees individuals from intellectual and social dependency, making them more aware of their rights and responsibilities within society.

The ability to read and write is not merely a technical skill; it is also a symbol of liberation from the social constraints imposed by illiteracy and a pathway to participation in public, cultural, political, and economic life. Through literacy programs, learners can move from being passive recipients of information to becoming socially conscious actors capable of analysis, criticism, and initiative, thereby strengthening citizenship and effective community participation.

These programs do more than transmit knowledge. They also seek to develop the life and social skills that enable individuals to contribute to local development through employment, collective initiatives, and engagement in public affairs. Their purpose is to develop people who can make informed decisions and participate consciously in sustainable development, making literacy a fundamental pathway toward a knowledge society grounded in social justice.

Literacy is therefore not merely a narrowly defined educational objective; it is a civilizational and humanitarian project that seeks to free individuals from cognitive and social exclusion and empower them to become active and responsible participants in the development of their communities and nation.

Educational and Psychological Dimensions of Literacy

The educational dimension is among the most important objectives of literacy programs. It seeks to provide learners with basic knowledge and skills, including reading, writing, and arithmetic, and therefore encompasses the core elements of the educational process.

The psychological and educational objectives pursued in literacy centers can foster the development of confident, socially capable individuals through cultural and instructional activities. As learners acquire the ability to read, write, and perform arithmetic, understand social issues and problems, and interpret the educational and noneducational dimensions of their lives, their self-confidence and awareness of what they can contribute to society increase. Literacy programs also have a psychological dimension centered on developing a well-adjusted personality capable of adapting to contemporary social reality. The lessons provided can help learners replace emotionally driven behavior dominated by instinctive impulses with rational and refined conduct expressed through constructive social relationships, affection for others, avoidance of harm, humility, chivalry, and compassion (Al-Hassan, 2005, p. 222).

A culturally and intellectually enlightened individual is better able to interact positively with society, establish relationships based on cooperation and mutual respect, and contribute to balance within the social fabric through responsible conduct. Such an individual recognizes that

culture and knowledge are measured not only by the amount of information acquired but also by the quality of the behavior and actions that reflect social awareness and understanding.

From this perspective, a genuinely educated person seeks to avoid environments that perpetuate ignorance and harmful conduct, recognizing that intellectual advancement should be accompanied by moral and behavioral development. Education does not merely change the way individuals think; it also directs behavior toward the public good and encourages balance and responsibility.

Literacy programs seek to strengthen these intellectual and behavioral dimensions among adult learners. They are not simply mechanisms for acquiring reading and writing skills but integrated educational projects. Adult learners enter such programs with substantial life experience and prior knowledge that enable them to engage positively with the educational process and to become partners in the construction of knowledge rather than passive recipients.

Mastery of reading and writing also creates broad opportunities for continuous learning through newspapers, books, and locally available sources. This access can expand learners' perspectives on social, economic, and cultural issues. Many adult learners view these skills as an incentive to pursue higher levels of education or vocational training that improve their employment prospects. Literacy programs may therefore strengthen productive capacities, increase income, and improve social status.

Finally, literacy programs encourage adult learners to continue their education and pursue academic progress by cultivating perseverance and ambition for self-development. They also encourage learners to raise their intellectual and cultural levels and to use the basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills they have acquired to serve themselves and their communities. These programs are not merely a means of acquiring basic skills; they are a fundamental step toward developing educated, aware individuals who can contribute to their social and professional environments.

Conclusion

Overall, Algeria's experience with literacy education has primarily sought to connect education with social, cultural, and economic development plans, improve learners' productive efficiency, and enable them to participate positively and effectively in the management of their society.

Despite the benefits of literacy education, many teachers continue to focus on alphabetic illiteracy while neglecting digital illiteracy. Teaching adults to read, write, and perform arithmetic represents only one part of the literacy process. The other, which often receives insufficient attention, involves developing learners' awareness of the civilizational and informational dimensions of contemporary society, including its political, social, cultural, educational, and technological aspects. Modern literacy education therefore requires a qualitative transformation in educational policy that moves beyond conventional alphabetic literacy to address civilizational and digital illiteracy.

This transformation seeks to raise learners' awareness and enable them to acquire the skills required to use modern technology effectively and access the information and knowledge available in their social environment. Digital competence is no longer optional; it has become an essential condition for social and economic inclusion in a knowledge society. Through this form of education, individuals become better able to respond constructively to technological change and benefit from digital resources in learning, work, and daily life, thereby improving their social circumstances and strengthening their professional and cognitive capacities.

The central objective of this transformation is to enable adult learners to move from passive reception to active participation and initiative by equipping them with the skills of the digital age. These skills allow them to contribute to local and national development and open new opportunities for personal and social advancement. In its modern form, literacy education thus becomes a means of liberation from ignorance and marginalization.

References

- Al-Hassan, I. M. (2005). *'Ilm al-ijtima' al-tarbawi* [Sociology of education]. Dar Wael.
- Al-Tanoubi, M. O. (2002). *Asasiyyat ta'lim al-kibar* [Fundamentals of adult education]. Maktabat Bustan al-Ma'rifa.
- Bekkouche, M. T. (2005, January). *Mahw al-ummiyya: Waqi' wa-afaq* [Literacy: Current realities and future prospects] [Conference presentation]. Study Day on the Occasion of Arab Literacy Day, Algeria.
- Executive Decree No. 95-143 of May 20, 1995, transforming the National Literacy Center into the National Office for Literacy and Adult Education. (1995). *Official Gazette of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria*, (28), 8–11. <https://www.joradp.dz/FTP/jo-francais/1995/F1995028.PDF>
- National Office for Literacy and Adult Education. (2005). *Al-istiratijiyya al-wataniyya li-mahw al-ummiyya wa-ta'lim al-kibar* [The national strategy for literacy and adult education].
- Talbi, A. L. (2025). Al-ummiyya bayna ishkaliyyat al-tahdid al-mafahimi wa-tahaddiyat al-alfiyya al-thalitha bi-al-Maghrib [Illiteracy between the problem of conceptual definition and the challenges of the third millennium in Morocco]. *Majallat al-Ma'rifa lil-Dirasat wa-al-Abhath*, (23), 493–509. https://josoor.com/pdfs/twentythree_one/first/38.pdf
- Turki, R. (1981). *Mushkilat al-ummiyya fi al-Jaza'ir* [The problem of illiteracy in Algeria]. Al-Sharika al-Wataniyya lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi'.