Review EL'BAHITH - ENS - Bouzareah - Algiers					
ISSN : 9577-1112	EISSN : 2602-5388	Volume: (17)	Number : (03)	year: 2025	Pages: 452-472

From Ideology to Reform: A Critical Comparative Reading of Japanese and Algerian Educational Models

من الأيديولوجيا إلى الإصلاح: قراءة نقدية مقارنة للنموذجين التعليميين الياباني والجزائري

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Date of Receipt: 05/09/2025 *Date of Acceptance: 02/12/2025* *Date of Publication: 20/12/2025*

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الملخص:

يقدّم هذا المقال تحليلا نقديا تاريخيا–مقارنا للنموذجين التعليميين الياباني والجزائري، بهدف استكشاف الأيديولوجيا الكامنة وراء بنائهما وإصلاحهما. واستنادا إلى الاتجاه النقدي، يُنظر إلى المدرسة بوصفها جهازًا لإنتاج وإعادة إنتاج النظام الاجتماعي ورأس المال الثقافي والقيم المهيمنة، لا كمؤسسة محايدة. ومن خلال تحليل نوعي للمصادر الثانوية والنصوص الرسمية والسرديات التاريخية والدراسات السوسيولوجية، يبحث المقال في تطور النموذج الياباني من بناء الأمة في عهد الميجي إلى الدمقرطة بعد الحرب والإصلاح النيوليبرالي، وفي المقابل يتتبع مسار النموذج الجزائري من التعليم الاستعماري إلى التوسع ما بعد الاستقلال ثم التعريب واستمرار الاعتماد على النماذج المستوردة. ويكشف التحليل أن النظامين، رغم اختلاف مساريهما، يجمعان بين الدعوات الشكلية إلى المساواة والممارسات التي تُكرّس التراتبيات الطبقية والثقافية. وبناءً على ذلك، يقترح المقال رؤية إصلاحية موجهة للجزائر تعيد تعريف دور المدرسة في تكوين المواطنة النقدية، والاعتراف بأشكال متعددة من رأس المال، وتجديد تكوين المعلمين، وتوظيف التكنولوجيا بما يراعي الخصوصية السياقية، مع التأكيد على ضرورة الانتقال من التقليد إلى الابتكار.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

التعليم؛ الأيديولوجيا؛ الهيمنة؛ إعادة الإنتاج الاجتماعي؛ الإصلاح التربوي.

Abstract:

This article presents a critical, historical–comparative analysis of the Japanese and Algerian educational models to explore the ideology underlying their construction and reform. Drawing on The critical approach, schooling is conceptualised as an apparatus for producing and reproducing social order, cultural capital, and hegemonic values rather than as a neutral institution. Using qualitative analysis of secondary sources, official texts, historical accounts, and sociological studies, this article examines how the Japanese model evolved from Meiji nation-building to postwar democratisation and neoliberal reform and how the Algerian model moved from colonial schooling to post independence expansion, Arabisation, and continued reliance on imported templates. The comparison reveals that both systems, despite their differing trajectories, combine formal appeals to equality with practices that perpetuate class and cultural hierarchies. On this basis, the article outlines a reform-oriented vision for Algeria that redefines the role of schools in critical citizenship, the recognition of diverse forms of capital, renewed teacher education, and context-sensitive use of technology, with an emphasis on a shift from imitation to innovation.

Keywords:*education; ideology; hegemony; social reproduction; educational reform.*

1. INTRODUCTION

From Qur'anic schools and missionary institutions to contemporary mass schooling, the history of education has been closely tied to wider processes of social, political, and economic transformation. Modernisation and industrialisation deepened the complexity of social life, accelerated urbanisation, and contributed to the institutionalisation of schooling as a central mechanism for social integration and control. As education became increasingly formalised, it was also progressively instrumentalised to sustain specific social orders and to disseminate and protect particular systems of values and ideas.

When ideology is read through education, the insights of critical theory become especially pertinent. Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches have long emphasised that ideology functions as a tool of domination, expressing the interests of dominant classes and obscuring relations of exploitation. Gramsci's concept of hegemony highlights the role of cultural and educational institutions in securing consent to existing power relations. At the same time, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge connects forms of thought to the historical and social contexts in which they emerge. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and symbolic violence highlights how schools contribute to the reproduction of class structures by valorising the culture of dominant groups, and Apple's work on the curriculum shows how educational reforms often serve to adapt schooling to the needs of the market. Taken together, these perspectives offer a rich framework for analysing educational models as ideological projects rather than as neutral technical arrangements.

The present article uses this framework to examine the ideology behind the production of two educational models: the Japanese model and the Algerian model. Both systems have been profoundly shaped by external influences, modernisation, and American occupation in the Japanese case and by French colonialism and postcolonial reform in the Algerian case; however, they have responded in different ways to the pressures of global capitalism and national identity building. The comparison is guided by two central questions: **(1)** What is the ideology behind the production of these educational models? **(2)** How do these models contribute to the reproduction of specific orientations, values, and social inequalities in their respective societies?

Methodologically, this study is designed as a qualitative, historical–comparative analysis based on secondary sources. It relies on critical readings of official texts, historical accounts, and sociological studies of education in Japan and Algeria. Theoretical concepts from Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Mannheim, and Apple are not only cited but also used as analytical lenses to interpret how each system was constructed, which social interests it serves, and how it reproduces or challenges class structures and cultural hierarchies. The comparative analysis is structured around three criteria: **(a)** the historical formation of each educational model; **(b)** the mechanisms through which ideology and cultural capital are reproduced in schools; and **(c)** the trajectories and limits of reform efforts in both contexts.

In light of these considerations, the article proceeds in four stages. First, it outlines the ideological and historical foundations of the Japanese educational model, from the Meiji reforms to postwar restructuring. Second, it examines the Algerian model, from colonial schooling and the destruction of traditional education to postindependence reforms and contemporary tensions. Third, it develops a critical reading of how both models function as ideological apparatuses under global capitalism. Ultimately, it outlines a reform-oriented vision for Algeria that aims to transition from imitation to innovation, drawing selectively on international experiences while grounding educational reform in the needs and identity of Algerian society.

2. Reading of the Japanese Educational Model

This section presents a critical–theoretical reading of the Japanese educational model as a historical product of intersecting imperial, military, Western, and postwar influences. Rather than treating education as a form of neutral institutional development, it interprets the evolution of schooling in Japan as a sequence of ideological projects through which the state has sought to shape subjectivities, secure social order, and reproduce specific power relations.

Historically, Japan moved from imperial rule in the Nara and Heian periods to military governance under successive shogunates, during which the emperor's role became largely symbolic. The Meiji era (1868–1912) marked a decisive turning point: in the short term, Japan transformed itself from an isolated polity into a significant industrial and military power. This transformation entailed deep reforms of the economy, army, and state institutions, including education (Hoover, 2019). However, high literacy rates predate Meiji reforms. Research on the Edo period (1603–1867) indicates that Japan already had one of the highest literacy rates globally in the seventeenth century, reflecting intense cultural valorisation of

learning (Kubota, n.d.). Following Mannheim, these early literacy practices are understood as forms of knowledge production rooted in a specific social and historical context, not simply as indicators of linear "progress."

A central ideological moment in the construction of modern schooling was the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education. This document synthesised Confucian ethics, loyalty, filial piety, and family-centered morality with Western constitutional ideas. Through the collaboration of Motoda Nagazane and Inoue Kowashi, it established obedience to the emperor and family ethics as the foundations of education while embedding a legal structure informed by the German model (Duke, 2009). From a Gramscian standpoint, the Rescript represents a hegemonic project that provides moral and intellectual leadership, reconciling traditional values with the requirements of a modern nation-state and thereby securing consent to imperial authority. This dual orientation, which balances national identity and Western modernity, generates long-term tension between cultural continuity and structural adaptation, an issue that later resonates with the Algerian case.

World War II introduced a major rupture. Japanese expansionism destabilised European colonial regimes and stimulated anti-colonial movements, yet Japan's defeat placed its institutions under Allied, mainly American, control. Postwar educational reforms institutionalised the 6 3–3 structure of compulsory schooling and were officially justified as democratising and decentralising measures. Makino (1952) argued, however, that these reforms primarily imported the external form of the American model while failing to adapt curricula and pedagogy to Japanese realities. From a critical perspective, this represents a form of ideological importation: the rhetoric and structure of "democratic" schooling are embraced, but deeper relations of power and social reproduction persist. This raises an important comparative question for later sections of the article: when do imported educational models genuinely transform existing hegemonic arrangements, and when do they repack them?

By the late twentieth century, the Japanese education system was widely regarded as efficient, with strong academic performance and alignment with economic development. Its rapid expansion after the opening to the West responded to the needs of industrialisation and the desire to catch up with advanced economies (J. E., 1993). Viewed through Marx and Apple, the tight coupling of schooling and economic growth suggests that education functions as an apparatus for producing a disciplined labour force and adapting citizens ideologically to the demands of capital. The system is highly hierarchical and intensely competitive, particularly with

respect to access to elite universities, which has contributed to the growth of a large private tutoring sector (juku) and substantial student pressure. At the same time, critics point to centralisation, rote learning, bullying, and absenteeism. The National Council for Education Reform in the 1980s advocated for greater flexibility, decentralisation, and lifelong learning; however, reforms were hindered by a persistent attachment to traditional norms and a conservative–progressive divide in education and politics (J. E., 1993). These tensions can be read as a crisis of hegemony, in Gramsci's sense, where multiple social forces dispute the purposes of schooling without achieving a new consensus.

Postwar education policy can be divided into three phases, revealing shifts in ideology and governance. The first phase (the late 1940s–early 1980s) juxtaposed attempts to diversify schooling with the persistence of a single-track, meritocratic structure aligned with economic growth. The second (mid–late 1980s) was marked by the Interim Council for Education Reform and the introduction of neoliberal ideas, market mechanisms, individual choice, and competitiveness that reoriented discourse toward efficiency. The third phase (from the late 1990s onwards) was characterised by political instability, gradual reform, and an increasing role for politicians in steering education at the expense of bureaucratic actors (Kenji, 2014). Following Mannheim and Apple, these phases exemplify successive efforts to relegitimise the system by reframing its ideological basis from developmentalism to neoliberalism to politically managed reform without fundamentally altering its social– reproductive logic.

The section also emphasises that everyday school practices are crucial to understanding Japanese education. School routines include cleaning time (souji), communal lunch (kyūshoku), guidance on tooth brushing, sports and cultural festivals, choral competitions, excursions, and ceremonial entrance and graduation events. These are designed to cultivate discipline, group responsibility, and an "ideal child" image. Silence during cleaning and lunch reinforces concentration and collective duty, whereas the shared care of plants and animals nurtures respect for nature and interdependence (Ueno et al., 2020). Uniform and strict regulations minimise visible class markers, discouraging displays of wealth and sustaining an appearance of equality (Roblen, 1983). From a Gramscian lens, such practices function as instruments of consent, embodying and normalising the values of order, discipline, and harmony that support existing power relations.

ISSN : 9577-1112 | EISSN : 2602-5388 | Volume: (17) | Number : (03) | year: 2025 | Pages: 452-472

However, the apparent egalitarianism of school life coexists with subtle forms of differentiation. Adopting a Bourdieusian perspective, this section highlights how cultural capital, both embodied (in dispositions, tastes, and language) and objectified (in books and cultural activities), shapes educational trajectories. Embodied cultural capital is cultivated in the home, fostering abstract thinking and motivation from early childhood, whereas objectified capital becomes particularly salient in high school choice. Teachers advise students not only on grades but also on family background and the home environment, informed by home visits and detailed portfolios (Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010). Thus, school guidance transforms preexisting differences in cultural capital into differential opportunities, making educational "merit" deeply class-mediated. Egalitarian rituals, therefore, coexist with powerful mechanisms of social reproduction, an insight the article later mobilises in analysing Algeria.

Critical scholarship further underscores contradictions within the Japanese model. McVeigh (2002) argues that education increasingly operates as a system of simulation: it is externally serious and efficient yet internally oriented toward exam success rather than substantive learning. In Bourdieu's terms, schooling becomes a site of credential inflation, where diplomas function primarily as symbolic capital. Degrees are pursued as commodities that secure middle-class status rather than as markers of intellectual growth, echoing Marx's critique of how capitalist relations commodify human capacities.

The expansion of private educational spending intensifies these contradictions. Families pay roughly one-third of total educational costs, including juku and private support, leading to financial pressure, fertility decline, and growing inequality (OECD, 2011). Despite formal equality through standard curricula and group learning, substantial disparities persist. The 2003 PISA results showed that neglecting class differences in policy undermines absolute equality of opportunity; structural uniformity cannot compensate for unequal distributions of economic, cultural, and social capital (Aizawa, 2021).

Institutionally, upper-secondary education is strongly stratified. The system includes a small number of elite academic high schools, followed by nonelite academic schools, vocational schools, evening schools, correspondence programs, and special education institutions. These tracks are hierarchically ordered and lead to distinct postschool destinations, with most students concentrated in nonelite academic schools (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999). The expansion of private schools and commercial study tools means that "money now plays a major role in reaching the

educational summit" (Roblen, 1983, p. 313), reinforcing both Marxist and Bourdieusian diagnoses of class-based access to valued credentials.

The reform efforts undertaken since the late 1960s have had a limited transformative impact. Schoppa (2002) attributes this to the long-term dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party, whose internal divisions among bureaucrats, party elites, and education specialists generated policy paralysis. Different actors criticise the system from divergent ideological positions: leftist unions emphasise the reproduction of inequality, parents decry exam anxiety, and conservatives lament the erosion of traditional values and connect exam pressure to youth suicide (Roblen, 1983). However, these disputes have not coalesced into a coherent counterhegemonic project.

Japan's substantial investment in teacher education is acknowledged as a significant asset. All teachers are trained in universities or junior colleges, and by 1979, the majority of primary and lower-secondary teachers were university graduates (W. O., 1991). However, Yoneyama (1999) argues that high qualifications have not prevented a deeper legitimacy crisis grounded in rigid, exam-driven schooling. Compared with more participatory models such as Denmark's, where students help shape educational decisions, Yoneyama suggests that meaningful reform will require student-led movements that redefine the purposes of schooling, knowledge, and the self. This aligns with Mannheim's and Apple's insistence that alternative educational projects must challenge not only institutional architecture but also the underlying distribution of power and cultural capital.

The section concludes that the Japanese educational model combines high performance, strong state coordination, and rich school rituals with persistent inequality, ideological contradiction, and political deadlock. When examined through the works of Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Mannheim, and Apple, Japan emerges as a paradigmatic case of a system that simultaneously fosters social cohesion and reproduces class hierarchies. These tensions make it a crucial reference for comparative analysis with Algeria, particularly regarding how educational systems manage the relationships among modernisation, social justice, and national identity, as well as the risks of adopting external models without interrogating their ideological foundations.

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3. Reading of the Algerian Educational Model

In line with the analytical criteria used for the Japanese case, this section examines the historical formation of the Algerian educational model, its mechanisms of ideological reproduction, and the limits of reform, reading the Algerian educational model through the lens of colonial hegemony, postindependence nation-building, and persistent structural inequalities. Drawing on Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Mannheim, and Apple, it treats schooling in Algeria not as a neutral institution but as a field in which competing projects of domination, resistance, and identity formation have been articulated.

3.1. Algerian education under French colonial rule

French colonial discourse has long claimed that "modern" education in Algeria began only with the French conquest after 1830. Within this narrative, precolonial education in zawiyas is represented as traditional, backwards, and limited to Qur'anic memorisation, with no "modern" subjects such as history, geography, or philosophy. This interpretation persists despite French statistics indicating the existence of approximately 2,000 schools before the occupation (Bouguerne, 2009, p. 264). In practice, the colonial authorities appropriated this preexisting infrastructure to educate the children of the French community, introducing curricula centred on reading, writing, arithmetic, and other subjects, while framing the teaching of French to Algerians primarily as an instrument for facilitating contact with the coloniser and with Western science (Bouguerne, 2009, p. 264).

From a Mannheimian perspective, this colonial narrative can be read as a particular "situated" form of knowledge that naturalises French cultural superiority and erases Algerian educational traditions. In Gramscian terms, it is part of a hegemonic project that seeks to secure consent to colonial rule by redefining what counts legitimate knowledge and who is entitled to produce it. By presenting indigenous education as obsolete, the French justified both the imposition of their own model of schooling and the marginalisation of the Arabic language and Islamic learning.

Colonial policy toward education combined ideological delegitimation with direct institutional destruction. As Guelamine (2018) noted, French authorities pursue two complementary strategies of "oppression and intellectual domination": combating the Arabic language and establishing French schools. Algerian teachers were perceived as political and cultural threats because they embodied and transmitted national identity. Consequently, many schools were closed, and teachers were expelled to transform Algerian society into an illiterate and culturally

disoriented population (Guelamine, 2018, p. 399). From a critical standpoint, this strategy can be interpreted as an attempt to sever the organic link between language, religion, and collective memory and to reorient education toward serving the colonial project.

Seen through Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, the imposition of French as the language of schooling and administration functioned as a powerful mechanism for devaluing Arabic and local cultural capital. The mastery of French became a form of linguistic capital closely tied to social mobility within the colonial order, whereas indigenous forms of knowledge were relegated to the status of "tradition." In Marxist terms, the colonial school acted as an apparatus that disciplined subjectivities and adapted them to the requirements of a dependent, extractive economy while reproducing a racialised division of labour. Thus, the colonial period established both material and symbolic foundations that would continue to shape educational inequalities in independent Algeria.

3.2. Post-independence reforms, expansion, and teacher training

Following independence in 1962, the new Algerian state sought to rebuild its educational system on the foundations of the colonial infrastructure. In contrast with the Japanese case; where modernisation was largely internally driven, Algeria inherited a deeply segmented system explicitly designed to serve a foreign power. The postindependence leadership attempted to develop a national model that would universalise access, affirm Arab-Islamic identity, and support economic development. Following Mannheim, this can be read as an effort to create a new "total ideology" that replaces the colonial ideology, in which education plays a central role.

Algerian education has since passed through distinct phases linked to broader political, economic, and social transformations. The first phase (1962–1976) prioritised the generalisation of education and the expansion of schools into remote areas while beginning to adapt and Arabise curricula inherited from the French system. The second phase (1976–1981), framed by Orders 76--35, introduced more radical reforms aimed at constructing an "authentic, democratic, and open" national system, especially in science and technology, and linking education to economic and social needs (Rouane, 2009, p. 92). Development plans, such as the triennial, first and second quadrennial, and quinquennial plans, translated these ambitions into quantitative objectives. The results were striking at the level of expansion: the number of educational institutions increased from 2,647 in 1962–1963 to 19,505 in

2000–2001, and student numbers grew from approximately 308,000 to more than 6.7 million over the same period (Rouane, 2009, p. 92).

These reforms, however, also illustrate tensions between decolonisation and continuity. The grading scale adopted after independence, for example, reveals a curriculum heavily oriented toward moral, national, and basic scientific education. The core subjects included reading, conversation, composition, grammar, memorisation, handwriting and spelling, religion, national education, arithmetic, "objects," drawing and crafts, physical education, French, care and cleanliness, and order. This configuration expresses a dual ambition: to promote national and moral education anchored in Arab-Islamic values while retaining elements of the inherited colonial curriculum, most notably French, deemed indispensable for modernity. From a Gramscian angle, it is an attempt to construct a new hegemonic bloc that reconciles national identity with the technical and linguistic requirements of a globalised world.

Teacher training was central to this nation-building project, but structural constraints also marked it. In the immediate postindependence years, Algeria faced a severe shortage of qualified teachers. Between 1962 and 1967, temporary training institutions were created as emergency measures, and they remained in place until 1998. The Ministry of Education then launched initiatives to improve teacher qualifications, culminating in the transfer of training to universities with the creation of higher teacher education schools (Écoles normales supérieures, ENS) in 1999. By 2000, three central training institutions were formally recognised: the Higher Schools of Education, the National Institute for the Training and Development of Education Personnel, and in-service training institutes, which were later opened to university graduates (Ben Ghadfa, 2012, p. 372).

From a Gramscian perspective, these policies can be interpreted as efforts to form new corps of "organic intellectuals" capable of articulating and disseminating the postindependence project. However, as Bourdieu and Apple stressed, the focus on quantitative expansion and credentialing has not always been matched by a profound reflection on the pedagogical models and ideological orientations that teacher education should embody. The fragmentation of training pathways and the oscillation between different policy frameworks have often prevented the emergence of a stable, critically oriented professional culture among teachers.

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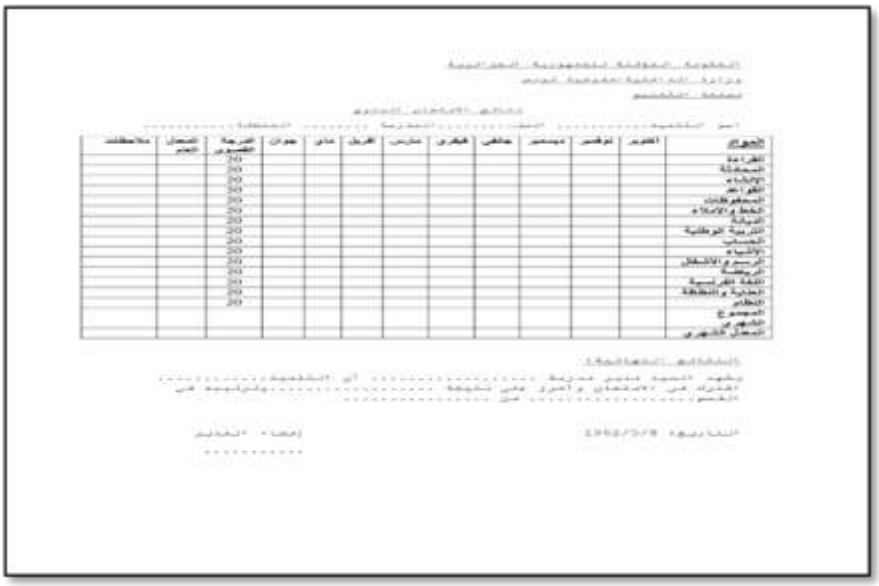

Fig.1. educational document exhibited from the year 1962(The Provisional Government of Algeria in 1962(Saouli, S. (2024). Field note based on a personal visit to the Musée du Moudjahid, Algiers, 2024. Hand-copied version of an educational document exhibited from the year 1962)

3.3. Structural limits and ideological contradictions of the Algerian model

From an ideological and sociological perspective, the Algerian educational model has inherited many ambivalences from its colonial past and from the contradictory pressures of postcolonial state-building. On the one hand, the universalisation of schooling and the policy of Arabisation have aimed to democratise access and reaffirm national identity. On the other hand, the persistence of French as a key language of higher education, administration, and social mobility has maintained a hierarchy of linguistic capital. In Bourdieusian terms, schools tend to valorise the cultural capital of urban areas, francophoning middle classes. Moreover, students from rural or working-class backgrounds confront curricula and codes that only partially reflect their lived experience.

This duality is also evident in recent reform discourse. Policy documents emphasise "quality," "competence-based approaches," digitalisation, and integration into the global knowledge economy. However, structural problems such as overcrowded classrooms, persistent regional disparities, fragmented teacher training, and the gap between school knowledge and local realities remain insufficiently addressed. Following Apple, these reforms risk functioning as ideological adjustments that align Algerian education with the requirements of global capitalism,

producing adaptable, credentialed labour rather than as transformative projects that empower learners to interrogate and reshape their social world critically.

Furthermore, the historical layering of colonial and postcolonial logics has generated an internal hierarchy within the system itself. French-language streams and institutions often retain higher prestige and better resources, whereas Arabic-medium tracks may be less connected to valued economic opportunities. This configuration contributes to the reproduction of social and regional inequalities and to the emergence of what Mannheim calls competing "utopian" and "ideological" visions of education. Some actors view schooling as a vehicle for social justice and cultural authenticity, whereas others view it mainly as a pathway to individual advancement in a stratified labour market.

In Marxist terms, the Algerian school increasingly operates within a peripheral capitalist economy, where education is expected to respond to labour-market demands and to support integration into global circuits of capital. However, because underlying structural conditions, such as dependence on hydrocarbons, regional imbalances, and high youth unemployment, remain untransformed, education cannot fully deliver on its promises of mobility. This gap between the official ideology of meritocracy and the reality of limited opportunities produces frustration and contributes to the erosion of the school's legitimacy.

In summary, the Algerian educational model must be understood as a contested field where colonial legacies, nation-building projects, and global pressures intersect. While it has achieved important gains in access and institutional expansion, it continues to reproduce significant inequalities and to oscillate between imported models and local aspirations. Read through Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Mannheim, and Apple, the Algerian case illustrates how a postcolonial education system can become both a site of resistance to colonial domination and a mechanism for reproducing new forms of ideological control. These contradictions are central to the later comparative discussion with Japan and to the reform-oriented vision proposed for the future of Algerian schooling.

3.4. Recent policy documents and strategic frameworks (2008–2030)

The reform sequence that began in the early 2000s was consolidated by Law n° 08-04 of 23 January 2008 on the orientation of national education, which now constitutes the main legal framework of the Algerian school system (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 2008). This law defines the mission of the *école algérienne* as forming a citizen anchored in national values, capable of understanding and transforming the world and mastering at least two languages,

while guaranteeing free and compulsory schooling from six to sixteen. In this sense, the law gives legal form to a state project already present in the 1976 Ordinance, but now situated in a context marked by the shift to a market economy, the adoption of the competency-based approach (CBA) and stronger international benchmarks (Lahmar, 2024).

In continuity with Law 08-04, the Ministry of National Education adopted a strategic framework entitled *L'école algérienne : les défis de la qualité. Cadrage stratégique 2016–2030*, which explicitly places quality, equity and efficiency at the center of educational policy (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale [MEN], 2017a). This document identifies three major dysfunctions—dropout, wastage and weak learning outcomes—and proposes levers such as strengthening preschool education, reviewing workloads, further connecting schools to the internet and improving teacher training (MEN, 2017a). It also aligns Algerian policy with the Education 2030 agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4, notably through initiatives to integrate environmental and sustainable development issues into curricula (Lahmar, 2024).

At the curricular level, methodological guides and new programmes published around 2016–2017 for the primary and middle cycles detail how the competency-based approach should guide teaching and textbook design, particularly in French and science education (MEN, 2016, 2017b). However, recent analyses of textbooks show that, behind the language of competencies and learner-centred pedagogy, the manuals often remain anchored in directive, teacher-centred practices and reproduce a narrow vision of national identity and citizenship (Saad, 2023).

Beyond official documents, recent research underlines that Algerian reforms are increasingly caught between global agendas (quality assurance, digitalisation, "Education 4.0") and local demands for equity, recognition and decolonisation. Lahmar's (2024) chapter on educational reform in Algeria shows how the system attempts to reconcile Islamic and national reference frameworks with global standards of quality and accountability, creating new tensions around language, governance and the purposes of schooling. Sarnou's (2024) study, *Transforming Algerian Education: A Generational Perspective*, highlights how the emergence of Generation Z and Generation Alpha as digital natives has accentuated the gap between official curricula and students' expectations, pushing schools to integrate digital learning and new forms of pedagogy.

In parallel, a growing body of empirical work assesses the implementation of the competency-based approach in different sectors of the Algerian system. Studies conducted at middle-school level and in teacher education show that, despite its central place in policy discourse, CBA is only partially applied and often coexists with traditional, teacher-centred practices (Benadla, 2012; Chelli, 2010; Dahache & Bessai, 2022; Aouali, 2025). These works support the argument developed in this article: the distance between legal and strategic documents, on the one hand, and classroom realities, on the other, is not merely technical but also ideological. It reveals the persistence of a centralised, prescriptive vision of schooling, even when the official vocabulary is that of quality, competence and learner-centredness.

Table 1.Main historical phases of Japanese and Algerian education systems

Country	Phase / Period	Key policy texts / reforms	Dominant project / ideology	Main contradictions (for your argument)
Japan	Meiji period – pre-1945	Early school laws, Imperial Rescript on Education	Nation-building, loyalty, hierarchy	Authoritarian nationalism; exclusion
Japan	Post-war (1945–1970s)	1947 Fundamental Law of Education, school system acts	Democratisation, economic reconstruction	Meritocracy, hidden inequalities
Japan	High-growth & late 20th century	Curriculum revisions, yutori reforms, etc.	Human capital, competitiveness, "education fever"	Stress, exam pressure, shadow education
Japan	21st century	New curriculum guidelines, "global human" discourse	Globalisation, creativity, digital skills	Work–life imbalance, demographic crisis, burnout
Algeria	Colonial period (before 1962)	French colonial decrees on schooling	Assimilation/segregation, racial and social control	Extreme inequality, exclusion of Algerian majority
Algeria	Post-independence 1962–1976	Constitution 1963; early decrees	Nation-building, Arabisation, mass education	Resource limits, ideological centralism
Algeria	1976 reform cycle	Ordinance 76-35 on education and training	"École fondamentale", socialist state model	Quality, overcrowding, centralised bureaucracy
Algeria	2003–2008 reform sequence	2003 reform; Law 08-04 (2008) on orientation	Competency-based approach, quality, multilingualism	Implementation gap, teacher preparation, overload
Algeria	2016–2030 strategy & beyond	"L'École algérienne: les défis de la qualité" 2016–2030; later roadmaps	Quality assurance, SDGs, digitalisation, equity	Over-programming, resistance, social protest, language conflicts

4. From Imitation to Innovation: Toward a Proposed Vision for Educational Reform in Algeria

Garcia (2021) noted that "politicians do not gather information to understand, they gather information to act" (p. 13). This observation is particularly relevant for educational reform: policymaking is not a purely cognitive exercise but a form of political action embedded in ideological projects and hegemonic struggles. Rather than assuming a neutral relationship between knowledge and policy, this section proposes a reform vision that explicitly mobilises critical theory, Mannheim, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Marx, and Apple, to rethink the Algerian educational model in light of the preceding comparative analysis with Japan.

In Mannheim's terms, ideology refers to historically situated forms of thought that express specific social positions; there is no context-free, absolute truth. Conceptualising ideology thus requires a framework that situates political and educational discourse within concrete historical and social conditions (Dakhil & Ziani, 2022, p. 282). Within this framework, the school appears to be a strategic site where ideology is translated into practice. Schools constitute a meeting point between elite and popular culture, providing a privileged arena for examining how values and representations circulate and are naturalised. Gramsci emphasises that control over institutions responsible for producing and preserving knowledge is central to maintaining ideological hegemony. The knowledge selected, maintained, and disseminated by schools can accordingly be understood, following Mannheim, as a "social construction" that does not necessarily serve the interests of all groups (Apple, 1978, p. 368).

Bourdieu's analysis of education and social reproduction deepens this critique. Schooling functions as a form of symbolic violence by legitimising the culture of dominant classes and presenting it as universal. Curricula and pedagogical practices socialise individuals into patterns of thought and behaviour that align with existing class structures. Institutions serving disadvantaged groups often emphasise obedience, discipline, and conformity, whereas schools attended by the privileged encourage autonomy, reflexivity, and pathways to prestigious positions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Cultural capital, much of which is accumulated in the family during early life, explains how educational systems reproduce the distribution of advantages and, through this, the broader social structure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. vii; Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010, p. 68). From a Marxian perspective, schools can also be read as organised communities structured around routines that coordinate work,

discipline bodies, and manage conflict, producing a social environment that mirrors broader relations of production (Krauss et al., 1984, p. 144).

Building on these theoretical insights and the comparative reading of Japan and Algeria, the proposed reform vision adopts a sociological approach that treats education as a central apparatus for the production and reproduction of social structures. In its current form, the Algerian system tends to reproduce inequalities and the absence of justice and equity. It reinforces traditional patterns of socialisation that hinder creativity and innovation and remains partially dependent on imported models insufficiently adapted to local realities. Given the weight of accumulated bureaucratic and ideological constraints, schooling often becomes a space for rote learning, superficial knowledge, and the attenuation of critical thinking. This diagnosis parallels some of the contradictions identified in the Japanese case, such as the gap between formal equality and substantive inequality but also reflects specific colonial and postcolonial trajectories.

4.1. Reorienting the function of the school

The first principle of the proposed vision is to redefine the school's function. Instead of viewing education primarily as a mechanism for credentialing and channelling students into a stratified labour market, the school should be conceived as a space for forming rational, reflective citizens capable of interpreting social and natural phenomena through scientific reasoning and of questioning inherited, nonscientific patterns of thinking. This perspective draws on Mannheim's insistence on reflexive knowledge and Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual" as someone capable of linking personal experience to broader social structures.

At the foundational stage of schooling, educational content should be restructured to focus on essential knowledge and life skills, with a strong emphasis on experiential learning in the natural and social environment rather than on abstract, decontextualised instruction. Research on "learning in nature" (LINE) suggests that outdoor learning enhances teachers' enthusiasm, encourages pedagogical innovation, and strengthens their sense of responsibility and leadership in shaping school culture (Dillon, 2014, p. 29). Brody (2005) further argues that learning in nature provides a coherent framework for understanding the interplay of action, thought, and emotion in experience (p. 620). In the Algerian context, such approaches could reconnect schooling with local realities and environments, counteracting the tendency toward purely theoretical, exam-oriented learning.

4.2. Differentiated pathways and recognition of diverse capitals

A second principle concerns the organisation of educational pathways. After a shared foundational stage, the system should implement a principled form of differentiation that respects learners' interests, abilities, and forms of capital rather than reproducing rigid hierarchies between "noble" academic tracks and "lesser" vocational routes. Academic pathways aim to form scientific and political elites capable of designing and managing processes of change. In contrast, vocational pathways focus on practical, employable skills that respond to real economic needs.

Crucially, this differentiation should not be imposed primarily by labour market pressures or socially dominant preferences but rather should be shaped by informed, participatory guidance processes. The underlying principle is that "the choice of one's professional and life path is founded on individual and personal choice, according to inclination, desire, and the abilities and competencies available to the learner." From Bourdieu's perspective, this requires confronting symbolic violence against certain professions and recognising the legitimacy of diverse forms of cultural and practical capital, especially those tied to productive jobs and crafts that contribute directly to development.

4.3. Teacher education as a site of counterhegemony

A third pillar of the reform vision is the profound transformation of teacher education. No educational reform can succeed without addressing the position of teachers as key agents of socialisation and potential "organic intellectuals." Future teachers should be equipped not only with methodological skills but also with critical and creative cultural capital, as well as a genuine vocation for the profession. Entering teaching primarily for income or social status risks reproducing existing patterns of domination rather than challenging them.

Integrating the social sciences, especially sociology, into teacher training programs is central to this ambition. Such integration would provide educators with conceptual tools to interpret social action and structures and to understand how their work contributes to or contests social reproduction. From an Apple-inspired perspective, teachers should be able to critically analyse curricular reforms, global policy agendas, and the role of schooling in relation to the market rather than merely implementing external directives. At the same time, teacher education must be restructured to move beyond fragmented, short-term training towards coherent pathways that support professional autonomy and collective reflection.

In parallel, the reform vision calls for dismantling the ideological dominance of imported curricula by adapting them to local contexts and languages while maintaining openness to international knowledge and perspectives. Technology and artificial intelligence are envisaged as supportive tools that can enrich the educational process, provided they are used strategically and critically, without slipping into technological dependency or eroding cultural identity.

4.4. Education as a collective societal project

From this perspective, education is conceived as a conscious, collective societal project aimed at producing well-formed, creative social actors capable of reshaping reality and directing development. Transforming the Algerian school from a space of rote learning and rigid bureaucratic discipline into one of critical social action and continuous innovation requires the participation of all socialisation institutions: family, civil society, and the media. Early guidance of children should rest on sound scientific and practical criteria rather than on inherited aspirations, fashionable career choices, or myths about "prestige."

This implies correcting parents' perceptions of science and work, avoiding symbolic violence against less prestigious professions, and enabling learners to develop emotional and intellectual attachments to the paths they freely choose. It also requires raising awareness of the importance of productive jobs and crafts that directly serve the economy, as opposed to service professions, which may be attractive but offer limited developmental outcomes. In Marxist terms, the aim is to realign education with socially necessary forms of work while preserving the autonomy and dignity of learners.

4.5. Financing and political commitment

Finally, the proposed vision emphasises the material conditions of reform. Increasing investment in the education sector in Algeria, ensuring high-quality teacher training, and providing adequate infrastructure for a growing student population are indispensable. Developed countries devote significant shares of their public spending to education; Japan, for instance, has reached an exceptionally high level of investment. In contrast, Arab countries such as Algeria still have relatively low levels of educational expenditure. In 2012, public expenditure on education accounted for only 4.3%, according to the Arab Observatory for Education in the Arab World (Abdel Salam, 1970, pp. 137–138). Without a strong and stable financial commitment, reform risks remaining at the level of discourse.

5. CONCLUSION

This article aims to examine the ideology underlying educational models in Japan and Algeria through a critical, historical–comparative lens. Using concepts from Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Mannheim, and Apple, it is argued that schooling in both contexts operates as an apparatus of social reproduction and hegemony, even when it is publicly justified in terms of equality, modernisation, or national unity. The Japanese case illustrates how a highly organised, exam-centred system can simultaneously deliver high performance and maintain deep class differentiation through cultural capital and credential stratification. The Algerian case illustrates how a postcolonial system, constructed on the ruins of colonial education, continues to oscillate between national authenticity and imported models, thereby reproducing linguistic, regional, and social inequalities.

The comparative reading highlighted a common tension: education is expected to democratise society, yet it often legitimises existing hierarchies. The main contribution of this study is the translation of this diagnosis into a reform-oriented vision for Algeria. This vision calls for redefining the function of schools around critical citizenship, structuring pathways that respect diverse talents and forms of capital, rethinking teacher education as a site of critical professionalism, and adopting international models and technologies in ways that are adapted to local realities rather than copied. While the analysis is limited to secondary sources and lacks primary empirical data, it opens space for future research on the basis of case studies, classroom ethnography, and broader South–South comparisons that can further inform efforts to move from imitation to innovation in educational reform.

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