

Educational Governance in Algeria as an Arena of Struggle: A Sociological Analysis of the Role of Teachers' Unions in Confronting Executive Decree 25-54

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Abstract

This paper departs from the problematic that educational governance in Algeria cannot be reduced to a neutral technical tool for sector management. Instead, in light of the trajectory that produced Executive Decree 25-54, it manifests as a dynamic arena of struggle where the exercise of power and strategies of resistance between the Ministry of National Education and teachers' unions interact. The study aims to analyze the contentious role played by these unions, not merely as pressure groups defending material interests, but as symbolic actors seeking to redefine the terms of governance and their position within the educational "field." Drawing on conflict theory as formulated by Ralf Dahrendorf (power and resistance), Pierre Bourdieu (field and symbolic capital), and Lewis Coser (functions of social conflict), the paper adopts a qualitative-interpretive methodology based on documentary analysis of the decree, union statements, and media declarations. The study covers the period from May 2, 2021 (the date of presidential instructions to amend the law) to March 3, 2025 (the suspension of the protest movement). The findings reveal that the conflict did not arise solely from the content of the law but from the procedural path of its preparation, which was described as "exclusion" and a "flawed methodology" that betrayed a "symbolic pact" made by the highest authority in the state. In response to this exclusion, the unions produced a multifaceted "overt resistance," ranging from a technical-negotiating discourse to a mobilizing-threatening one, seeking not only to amend the law but also to impose recognition of themselves as essential partners in governance. The paper concludes that educational governance in Algeria is not a state of equilibrium but a permanent process of conflict, and that ignoring the dynamics of power and recognition empties any reform of its substance. The paper contributes theoretically by proposing the concepts of the "symbolic pact" and its "betrayal" as explanatory mechanisms for the outbreak of conflicts in charismatic bureaucracies.

Keywords: Educational Governance, Conflict Theory, Executive Decree 25-54, Power, Resistance, Symbolic Pact, Recognition.

Introduction

Educational governance, in contemporary public policy analysis literature, is no longer reducible to a neutral technical tool for rationalizing institutional performance. The technocratic approaches that long prevailed have given way to critical perspectives that view

governance as a space of social conflict, a domain where power relations are continuously produced and renegotiated among various actors (Ball, 2012 ; Bevir, 2013). In this context, the Algerian educational system offers a fertile ground to test this alternative conception. The issuance of Executive Decree No. 25-54, dated January 21, 2025, containing the special basic law for personnel belonging to the specific corps of National Education, constitutes a pivotal moment that crystallizes the structural tension between the state and teachers' unions (Executive Decree No. 25-54, 2025).

This paper departs from the fundamental observation that the sociological literature addressing educational reforms in Algeria has predominantly focused on analyzing the technical or pedagogical "impact" of these reforms, or on studying them from a historical perspective that describes the succession of laws without delving into an analysis of the actors who resist or redefine them (Brik, 2021). The role of educational unions, as collective contentious actors, has remained a largely neglected field in Algerian sociological research (Beddoubia, 2019). This paper aims to contribute to filling this gap through an in-depth sociological study of the role of teachers' unions in the context of the Decree 25-54 crisis.

The main question guiding this study is : **How did educational governance manifest as an arena of struggle between the Ministry of National Education and teachers' unions in the context of the preparation and issuance of Executive Decree 25-54 ? And what contentious role did these unions play in attempting to redefine the terms of governance and their position within the Algerian educational field ?** To answer these two questions, the paper draws on a conflict-based theoretical framework combining the works of Dahrendorf (1959), Bourdieu (1984), and Coser (1956). This framework allows us to analyze governance not as à state of equilibrium, but as a permanent process of conflict, and unions not merely as defenders of material interests, but as symbolic actors seeking recognition and the redistribution of power.

To carry out this analysis, the paper adopts a qualitative-interpretive methodology based on a case study of the entire trajectory of Decree 25-54, from the moment of the presidential instructions (May 2, 2021) to the suspension of the protest movement (March 3, 2025). The study combines documentary analysis of the decree, ministerial and union statements, and thematic analysis of union leaders' speeches and media declarations. Following this introduction, the paper is organized into five sections : the first section presents the theoretical framework ; the second details the methodology ; the third provides a sociological analysis of the law's preparation trajectory ; the fourth addresses the dynamics of conflict after its adoption ; and finally, the conclusion presents the study's findings and outcomes.

1. Theoretical Framework : Conflict Theory as an Approach to Analyzing Educational Governance

To understand educational governance in Algeria not as a neutral administrative tool, but as à social space charged with continuous tension and negotiation, conflict theory in sociology offers a multi-dimensional analytical framework. This framework rests on three integrated theoretical pillars : the conflictual conception of governance formulated by Ralf Dahrendorf, the concept of field and symbolic capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu, and the approach to the multiple functions of conflict as articulated by Lewis Coser. Together, these pillars allow us to construct an analytical model capable of deconstructing the dynamics of the conflict

between the Ministry of National Education and teachers' unions over Executive Decree 25-54.

1.1. Governance from a Conflict Perspective : Beyond Technical Neutrality.

The early literature on governance was dominated by a techno-managerial conception that viewed it as a set of rational mechanisms and procedures aimed at improving institutional performance and regulating relations between actors (Rhodes, 1996). However, this technocratic vision, as many critics have noted, ignores a fundamental truth : every rule enacted and every procedure imposed is, at its core, an expression of a power relation and the product of a conflict between actors who possess unequal resources and do not share the same interests (Ball, 2012).

Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) provides a powerful theoretical alternative to this conception. In his book *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, he argues that every social organization is characterized by an unequal distribution of authority, which creates divergent interest groups : those who hold power and issue the rules, and those who are subject to this authority. This unequal distribution is not a pathological condition but the normal process of any organization. Crucially, authority is not exercised in a vacuum but necessarily produces counter-resistance. Where there is authority, there is resistance, because those subject to it do not remain passive but seek to improve their position or challenge the legitimacy of the rules imposed upon them (Dahrendorf, 1959). Governance, therefore, is not a state of harmony but an ongoing, dynamic process of the exercise of power and the production of resistance.

1.2. The Educational Institution as a Field of Struggle :

If Dahrendorf provides a general framework for understanding conflict, Pierre Bourdieu supplies more precise tools for deconstructing its mechanisms within a specific social space. Through the concept of "field," the educational institution can be viewed not merely as an administrative structure but as an organized space of struggle between actors possessing unequal resources, competing to impose their legitimate definition of educational practice (Bourdieu, 1984).

A field, in Bourdieu's terms, is a relatively autonomous social space, governed by its own rules and structured by power relations between actors occupying differentiated positions. These positions are determined by the volume and forms of "capital" each actor possesses : cultural capital (qualifications, expertise), social capital (networks, union affiliations), and symbolic capital (recognition, status, prestige) (Bourdieu, 1986). The struggle within the field is not only over acquiring these resources but also over imposing the definition of what constitutes valuable "capital" in that specific field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

In the Algerian educational field, the Ministry occupies the dominant position by virtue of its immense organizational and legal capital. Teachers, on the other hand, possess cultural and technical capital (pedagogical knowledge, field experience) but suffer from a structural disparity in their ability to set the rules of the game. Between these two poles stand the unions, collective actors seeking to convert teachers' social and symbolic capital (their numbers, mobilization capacity, history of struggle) into bargaining power capable of challenging the Ministry's dominant position and modifying the distribution of power within the field (Bourdieu, 1984).

1.3. Unions as Contentious Actors : The Multiple Functions of Conflict.

Lewis Coser completes this theoretical construct by highlighting the functions performed by conflict. In *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), Coser rejects the view that reduces conflict to a destructive phenomenon, arguing instead that it performs positive and constructive functions for groups and institutions. Two types of functions can be distinguished : external functions, where conflict serves as a means of pressuring authority to modify its rules ; and internal functions, where conflict strengthens the internal cohesion of the group and reinforces its collective identity in the face of the "other" (Coser, 1956). Union discourse, in this context, not only conveys demands but also produces and reproduces an "alternative definition" of the teacher and the teaching profession, in opposition to the official definition imposed by the state.

This vision is complemented by contributions from the social movements literature, which provides a deeper understanding of how individual anger transforms into organized collective action. Unions play a crucial role in the "framing" of grievances : reformulating them into a coherent discourse capable of mobilization and converting them into contentious actions that challenge the established authority (Tarrow, 2015 ; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). They transform "silent resistance" into "overt resistance," which seeks not only to circumvent the rules but also to modify them or redefine their legitimacy.

1.4. Towards an Integrative Analytical Model

This tripartite framework (Dahrendorf, Bourdieu, Coser) constitutes an integrated lens for analyzing the Algerian case. From Dahrendorf's perspective, we will read the relationship between the Ministry and teachers' unions as à relation of authority and resistance, where the procedural trajectory of Decree 25-54 generated counter-resistance. From Bourdieu's perspective, we will see this relationship as à struggle within the educational field over the distribution of symbolic capital and the definition of professional legitimacy. Finally, from Coser's perspective, we will analyze the functions performed by the unions' "overt resistance," not only in pressuring the Ministry but also in strengthening the internal cohesion of teachers and producing their collective identity.

2. Research Methodology : A Qualitative Analysis of the Conflict Trajectory Surrounding Decree 25-54.

To answer the main question guiding this paper, the study adopts a qualitative-interpretive methodological approach. This choice stems from the nature of the research questions, which seek to understand the meanings and symbolic connotations produced by actors in their public discourse and to deconstruct the discursive strategies they employ in their struggle (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.1. Research Strategy : A Temporally Extended Case Study.

This paper is based on a "case study" strategy as the most appropriate for examining a contemporary social phenomenon in its real-world context and multiple dimensions (Yin, 2018). The "case" studied here is the entire trajectory of contentious interaction surrounding Executive Decree No. 25-54. The study's timeframe has been extended to cover the period from May 2, 2021, the date of the presidential instructions calling for an amendment to the special law for teachers, until March 3, 2025, the date when the teachers' union coalition announced a temporary suspension of the protest movement. This temporal extension is of crucial methodological importance, as it allows for tracing the phenomenon in its full trajectory and

understanding the roots of the conflict that peaked after the decree was published in the Official Gazette on January 21, 2025 (Executive Decree No. 25-54, 2025).

2.2. Data Sources and Collection Techniques :

The study relied exclusively on documentary and public sources that constitute the raw material for analyzing official and union discourse. These sources are divided into three integrated types :

- **Official State Documents** : Including the full text of Executive Decree No. 25-54 as published in the Official Gazette (2025), the statement issued by the Ministry of National Education following the Council of Ministers' approval on December 22, 2024, and reports of Council of Ministers meetings related to the education sector.

- **Written Union Statements** : Including official statements issued by various teachers' unions (UNPEF, SNTE, CSA, CELA) and union coalitions (CNAPESTE-CELA-SNAPEST coalition, coalition of independent unions), as well as lists of demands addressed to public authorities.

- **Media Declarations and Union Writings** : Including interviews and oral statements made by union leaders to the media, as well as published union analyses of official statements.

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The study employed two complementary techniques for analyzing textual and discursive data :

- **Content Analysis** : Applied to official documents (the text of the decree and ministerial statements) and written union statements. This analysis aimed to extract the major discursive themes through which the legitimacy of authority is constructed, on the one hand, and counter-discourses of resistance are built, on the other.

- **Thematic Analysis** : Applied to media declarations and union writings, following the methodological steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initial codes were generated in a hybrid manner : deductively, by searching for indicators of conflict theory concepts (such as authority, overt resistance, struggle for recognition), and inductively, by remaining open to new categories emerging from the actors' own discourse.

2.4. Limitations of the Study

This study has certain methodological limitations. First, its reliance on public sources means it cannot claim to know what happened in the "closed rooms" of negotiations ; it analyzes only the "discursive front" of the conflict. Second, the findings are not statistically generalizable but offer a deep, context-rich understanding of how union conflict operates in Algeria. Finally, this paper is part of a broader research project being conducted by the researcher as part of a doctoral thesis in the Sociology of Education.

3. The Context of the Struggle : A Sociology of the Preparation of Decree 25-54 (May 2, 2021 – December 22, 2024)

The intensity of the conflict provoked by Executive Decree 25-54 cannot be understood in isolation from the political and procedural process that produced it over more than three years. Before becoming a set of articles published in the Official Gazette, the law was a long trajectory of promises, expectations, and anticipations that quickly transformed, in the eyes of union actors, into a path of exclusion and circumvention. Analyzing this trajectory provides

fertile material for understanding how power is exercised not only through the content of the law but also through controlling the process of its production.

3.1. The Foundational Moment (May 2, 2021) : The President Produces the "Legitimate Definition" of the Teacher

On May 2, 2021, the Council of Ministers issued presidential instructions calling for an amendment to the special law for the teacher—a term that was discursively consecrated to replace "the basic law for National Education personnel." The importance of this moment, from a sociological perspective, lies in its constituting a "symbolic act" by the highest authority in the state. The President did not merely issue an administrative order but explicitly produced a legitimate definition of the teaching profession based on a fundamental distinction between "function" and "profession." The "teaching profession" was described as a "profession with lofty dimensions" and "capital," whose "benefit is the pupil," denying it the status of an abstract bureaucratic "function." The instructions also urged a "deeper review, enrichment, and clarification of the law's content," "genuine participation," and the rejection of "centralization and unilateralism."

From Bourdieu's (1984) perspective, this presidential discursive distinction is not a mere description but a reversed "symbolic violence" in favor of teachers. The supreme authority in the educational field was recognizing, for the first time and with such clarity, that the teachers' symbolic capital (their mission, the nobility of their profession) outweighed the bureaucratic capital through which the administration evaluated them. Thus, the unions suddenly found themselves in an unprecedented position : their historical discourse, which had long demanded "recognition of the teacher's status," was officially adopted by the highest authority in the state. The unions were no longer fighting solely against a Ministry that did not recognize them ; they were now fighting for the "implementation of the President's vision" against an administrative apparatus described, in their discourse, as having "not understood" or "circumvented" this vision.

3.2. The Phase of the "Promise of Partnership" and Its Betrayal (2021-2023): Producing the Law in "Dark Rooms"

Based on these presidential instructions, the Ministry of National Education began a series of consultative meetings with unions as "social partners." These meetings continued until October 25, 2021, when the Minister promised the partners that he would deliver a hard copy of the draft law before submitting it to the Council of Ministers. This promise was not kept. Despite repeated demands, and even the organization of a strike by the "Teachers' Union Coalition" to obtain the draft, the Ministry refused to hand it over. The unions felt that there was "systematic and organized work in dark cells" aimed at aborting the ambitions planted by the presidential directives.

This moment is most telling from Dahrendorf's (1959) perspective. The Ministry was exercising a "monopoly of authority" even in the preparatory process. It not only enacted the rules unilaterally but exercised a more fundamental form of power : excluding the opponent from the moment of rule production. The claim that the project was "prepared in dark rooms" is not rhetorical exaggeration but a precise sociological description of the mechanism of exercising power : keeping those subject to the rule outside its formulation process to ensure they become merely its passive recipients (Dahrendorf, 1959). This, precisely, necessarily generates counter-resistance.

3.3. The Rejection by the Council of Ministers (2023-2024) : Crowning Hopes with a "Symbolic Pact"

The Council of Ministers' rejection of the draft law on two occasions (December 24, 2023, and February 18, 2024) marked a pivotal moment. Contrary to what might be thought, this rejection was not a "victory" for the unions in a direct contentious sense, but much more than that : it was the crowning of their hopes. The President of the Republic, by refusing to approve the draft, literally and officially adopted the core of the unions' historical discourse. His affirmation that "basic laws must take teaching as their goal," that "the educator is not like other functions," that the law must "protect the teacher's gains and elevate their status," and his powerful phrase distinguishing between "the one who burns out in the classroom" and "the one who does not" — all this represented an exceptional moment of recognition for the teachers and their unions. Teachers felt that the highest authority in the state not only understood them but sanctified their profession and made elevating their status a supreme goal. Hopes soared, and a deep sense of relief prevailed that the forthcoming law, built on this vision, would finally be the long-awaited law of "fairness." This rejection was, in essence, a "symbolic pact" between the highest authority and the teachers.

3.4. The Meeting of November 30, 2024 : Unions in the Position of "Strategic Partner"

The appointment of a new Minister of Education, who had previously served as an Advisor to the President on education affairs, reinforced this hope. At the meeting on November 30, 2024, the unions listened to the new Minister's discourse on "serious dialogue" and "participation" as the way to solve the sector's problems. But what happened at this meeting went beyond mere listening. The unions presented themselves not as a pressure group demanding benefits but as a strategic partner with a roadmap for reform (Tarrow, 2015). In their diagnosis of the problem, they directly linked the lack of stability to the "flawed methodology" in the law's preparation. They then offered a pragmatic solution based on a separation of paths : accelerating the improvement of wages through the "compensatory scheme," while leaving the "basic law" for calm, in-depth discussion, warning that rushing it without consensus "will create discord and problems that will reflect on the stability of educational institutions." This stance demonstrates a qualitative shift in union contentious action : from the position of "opponent" who rejects, to the position of "partner" who diagnoses the problem and offers an alternative path.

3.5. The Approval and the Shock (December 22, 2024) : The "Betrayal of the Symbolic Pact"

Then the unexpected happened. Just three weeks after this meeting, the unions were surprised by the Council of Ministers' approval of the executive decrees (25-54 and 25-55) on December 22, 2024. Their strategic proposal was ignored, dialogue was not resumed, and they learned the news through a press release issued by the Ministry. This moment, in all its dimensions, is the crux of the conflict. What happened was not just another "exclusion" from the preparatory process, as before, but, from a sociological perspective, far deeper. It was a "double betrayal": a betrayal of the "symbolic pact" made by the highest authority in the state with the teachers through its clear words, and a betrayal of the spirit of "serious dialogue" heralded by the new Minister. The unions felt that the "systematic work in dark cells" was the stronger party, one that had managed to pass the project as it was, disregarding not only the teachers and their unions but perhaps even the directives of the President of the Republic. This

trajectory is what made the "overt resistance" analyzed later not merely a reaction to legal articles but a reaction to the "shattering of a hope" that had been methodically built over three years, only to be destroyed in a single moment. Confrontation became inevitable after December 22.

4. Analysis of Findings : The Dynamics of Conflict After Adoption (December 22, 2024 – March 3, 2025)

If the previous section revealed the procedural trajectory that produced the "shock," this section analyzes the dynamics of the conflict that followed it. We will first address the official discourse that attempted to tame the narrative and impose a legitimate reading of the event. Then, we will move to an analysis of the "overt resistance" produced by the unions, with its multiple strategies and discursive modes. Finally, we will present a comparative analysis of union strategies and examine the dual functions performed by this conflict.

4.1. Analysis of the Official Discourse : The Ministry's Statement of December 22, 2024

The statement issued by the Ministry of National Education on the evening of the Council of Ministers' approval on December 22, 2024, constituted the first discursive act of authority after the shock. This statement is not merely an announcement of a decision but is, in itself, an "act of power" aimed at imposing an official reading of the event. This discourse can be deconstructed into three strategic axes :

First, taming the narrative : The statement insists on describing the project as "the fruit of continuous work in which the accredited union organizations participated." This phrase, from Bourdieu's (1984) perspective, is a "discursive strategy" aimed at conferring participatory legitimacy on a decision prepared in secrecy. The statement portrays what happened (exclusion) as its exact opposite (participation), making any subsequent protest appear as an objection to "what was agreed upon."

Second, the narrative of gains : The statement presents a long list of "gains" (improved classification, reduced teaching hours, the possibility of early retirement), presenting them as generous gifts from the President of the Republic. This strategy, from a conflict perspective, performs a very precise function : it makes it difficult for the unions to protest without being branded as "ungrateful." It is an attempt to disarm the opposition morally.

Third, the call for "participation" after exclusion : The statement concludes by calling on "the educational community... to greater dedication, participation, and cooperation." This call, in the context of the exclusion practiced by the Ministry, is the essence of what Bourdieu (1991) terms "symbolic violence » : the authority that has excluded its partners asks them, after a *fait accompli* has been imposed, to "cooperate." This stark paradox explains why the unions felt that this statement was not an announcement but a genuine provocation.

4.2. The Unions' "Overt Resistance » : Analyzing Counter-Discourse.

The Council of Ministers' approval was the starting point for a wave of "overt resistance" embodied in a series of union statements and declarations. Analyzing these documents reveals a union landscape characterized by multiple voices and strategies.

4.2.1. The Chronological Path of the Conflict : From Protest to Suspension.

Tracing union statements over time reveals an evolving contentious path :

- **Phase of Initial Protest (Late December 2024 – January 2025)** : Statements of rapid condemnation (SNTE, UNPEF, CSA, CELA) were issued, marked by denunciations of the "flawed methodology" and characterizations of the law as "punitive."
- **Phase of Escalation (February 2025)** : With demands continuously ignored, unions moved to direct contentious action (rolling strikes, national protest rallies). This coincided with reports of "harassment and arrests" of union leaders.
- **Phase of Temporary Suspension (March 3, 2025)** : In a strategic shift, the CNAPESTE-CELA-SNAPEST coalition announced a temporary suspension of the movement, setting a deadline of no more than two months. This shift reflects a union awareness of the importance of tactics : "conditional de-escalation" as a strategy to recharge energies without losing face.

4.2.2. Modes of Union Discourse : From Technical Negotiation to Revolutionary Mobilization.

Content analysis of the statements reveals three main discursive modes (see Table 1) :

Table 1 : Modes of Union Discourse and Their Contentious Functions

Union / Coalition	Discursive Mode	Tone	Contentious Function
UNPEF	Technical-Negotiating	Angry but institutional	Demonstrating legitimacy and technical competence
SNTE	Emotional-Appealing	Emotional, imploring presidential intervention	Appealing to the supreme authority
CELA	Accusatory-Exposing	Sharp, alleging a "conspiracy"	Rallying the base and deconstructing the law's legitimacy
Coalitions	Mobilizing-Militant	Defiant, threatening escalation	Strengthening internal cohesion and creating a unified "enemy"
CSA	Political-Comprehensive	Political, comprehensive	Broadening the front and linking the social to the political

These modes are not contradictory but complementary within a multi-dimensional contentious landscape. The existence of a "negotiating" discourse (UNPEF) lends the union movement a veneer of legitimacy before public opinion, while the "accusatory" discourse (CELA) exerts moral pressure on the authority, and the "mobilizing" discourse (coalitions) provides deterrence through the threat of escalation. This multiplicity reflects the complexity of an "interest group" that does not speak with a single voice (Dahrendorf, 1959).

4.2.3. Core Demands : Between the Material and the Symbolic.

Beyond the multiplicity of statements, five central demands were recurrent across all documents : (1) unifying classification across corps—a demand reflecting a struggle over "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1984) ; (2) retroactive effect from January 2024 ; (3) a meaningful increase in allowances to compensate for inflation ; (4) justice for marginalized

corps (such as professional users); (5) respect for union freedoms—a demand reflecting a struggle over the legitimacy of the union actor itself.

4.2.4. The Strategy of "Invoking the President » : The Pinnacle of Contentious Action.

One of the most prominent strategies revealed by the analysis is the strategy of "invoking the President." The unions do not address the Ministry as their sole opponent but directly address the President of the Republic ("We ask Your Excellency to intervene," "We trust in your justice"). This strategy, from a sociological perspective, represents a "fissure within the administrative field" (Bourdieu, 1984). The unions are aware that the "bureaucratic field" is not monolithic but a space divided between the "political center" (the President) and the "executive apparatus" (the Ministry). They exploit this division to their advantage by : protecting themselves from accusations of opposing state authority ; positioning the President as arbiter ; and enhancing the legitimacy of their demands by linking them to the directives of the highest authority in the land.

4.2.5. The Struggle of Discourses : A Comparative Analysis of Strategies of Legitimation and Delegitimation

Comparing union discourse with the authority's discourse (see Table 2) reveals that educational governance is exercised not only through administrative decisions but also through a "war over meanings" (Bourdieu, 1984).

Table 2 : Comparison between the Authority's Discourse and the Unions' Discourse

Axis	Authority's Discourse	Unions' Discourse
Characterization of reality	"Reform," "Fulfilling commitments"	"Crisis," "Boiling over," "Disappointment"
Evaluation of the law	"Qualitative leap," "Improving the system"	"Punitive," "Unfair," "Unbefitting"
Legitimacy of the procedure	"Dialogue took place," "Decision is sovereign"	"Exclusion," "Opaqueness," "Flawed methodology"
Status of the union	"Listened to," "Subject to the law"	"Partner," "Rights-holder"

It is noteworthy that the unions' discourse is characterized by detail (specific figures, precise legal articles), a strategy aimed at demonstrating "technical competence" and "cognitive legitimacy" in opposition to the authority's discourse, which tends towards generalities ("qualitative leap," "improvement"). This paradox gives the unions an advantage in the "war over meanings," as it shows the observer that they have technical arguments, not just emotional anger.

4.3. Unions between External Pressure and Internal Cohesion : The Dual Functions of Conflict

The conflict waged by the unions embodies the dual functions identified by Coser (1956). On the external level, "overt resistance" exerted real pressure on the authority, forcing it to open the door for dialogue (the sessions of January 26, 2026). On the internal level, this conflict strengthened the internal cohesion of the professional group and produced an "alternative

definition" of the teacher in opposition to the official definition. This is clearly embodied in slogans like "Promotion is a right, not a privilege," which redefine the basis of the relationship between teacher and state.

5. Extended Discussion : Towards a Model for Studying Educational Governance as à Struggle for Recognition

After analyzing the dynamics of conflict between the Ministry of National Education and teachers' unions in the context of Decree 25-54, this section moves to a broader discussion aimed at transcending description to interpretation and building theoretical conclusions with potential for generalization. The central question we seek to answer here is : What does the Algerian case add to the global literature on governance and education unions ?

First, Governance as a Process of Conflict, Not a State of Equilibrium. The trajectory of Decree 25-54, with all its complexities, reveals a central lesson : educational governance is not a destination we arrive at but an ongoing process of rule production and resistance. From the foundational moment on May 2, 2021, to the suspension of protests on March 3, 2025, we did not witness a single moment of genuine stability. Every "solution" (the Council of Ministers' rejection of the project, the appointment of a new Minister, the suspension of the protest) was, in fact, the beginning of a new round of conflict. This aligns perfectly with Dahrendorf's (1959) thesis that conflict is not a transitional phase towards stability but the normal state of any social organization. The authority's attempts to impose its definition of legitimacy (through the "narrative of gains") necessarily produced a counter-resistance seeking to redefine reality (through the "narrative of injustice and betrayal").

Second, the "Symbolic Pact" and its "Betrayal" as Drivers of Conflict. One of the most prominent findings of our analysis, constituting an original theoretical contribution, is the importance of what can be termed the "symbolic pact" made by the highest authority in the state (the President) with the teachers through his clear discourse distinguishing between "profession" and "function" and sanctifying "the one who burns out in the classroom." This pact, which raised hopes sky-high, was not a written agreement but a "symbolic promise" that gave teachers a profound sense of recognition. When Decree 25-54 contravened this spirit, the anger was not merely a reaction to legal articles but a reaction to what we have described as the "betrayal of the symbolic pact." This dynamic offers a new generalizable concept : in charismatic bureaucracies, where the leader's word plays a pivotal role, "symbolic promises" may become factors of pressure on executive apparatuses, and their "betrayal" may become a primary source of conflict. This concept enriches the governance and social movements literature, which has long focused on material or institutional demands, neglecting this charismatic-symbolic dimension.

Third, Unions as Complex Contentious Actors between "Technical Competence" and "Mobilizing Power." The analysis of union discourse shows that we are not dealing with a simple actor but with a complex one capable of employing multiple and integrated strategies. The unions did not limit themselves to emotional protest ; they proved their high technical competence in deconstructing the official discourse and exposing its contradictions (as manifested in the reading of the Ministry's statement by the union member, Mr. Toudiat). This duality—the capacity for emotional mobilization and technical refutation—is what makes unions a formidable adversary. This aligns with social movements literature showing that the

most effective actors are those who can blend "persuasion" and "confrontation" (Tarrow, 2015). Moreover, the multiplicity of union strategies (negotiation, supplication, threat) shows that the "interest group" is not monolithic but a space of internal contestation over the best means of confrontation.

Fourth, the Procedural Path as the Primary Arena of Struggle. One of the study's main conclusions is that the conflict did not arise solely from the law's content but from the procedural path of its preparation. The entire preparation process, including its promises of participation that were then broken, became a primary "arena of struggle" and further evidence, for the unions, that governance is exercised through exclusion rather than participation. This teaches us that "how" a law is produced is no less important than "what" it contains.

Fifth, The Algerian Case as a Contribution to International Literature. This study presents the Algerian case as a unique one in the international literature on education unions and governance. It reveals a conflict dynamic that differs from Scandinavian participatory models and French protest models (Wermke & Höstfält, 2016) and is characterized by the fact that unions are still at the stage of "struggle for recognition" as a necessary prelude to any future participatory governance. It is the absence of "institutional recognition" of unions as partners that keeps their relationship with the state governed by a dynamic of open struggle over legitimacy itself.

6. Conclusion : A Proposed Analytical Model and Future Prospects

Based on this study, we propose an analytical model for studying educational governance in transitional bureaucratic contexts, which can be termed the "governance as symbolic struggle" model. This model rests on four pillars derived from the analysis of the Algerian case :

1. Pillar One : Authority and Resistance (Dahrendorf). Governance is not a state of equilibrium but a dynamic process of rule production (by authority) that necessarily generates counter-resistance (by subjects).

2. Pillar Two : The Struggle over Symbolic Capital (Bourdieu). The core of conflict is not centered only on material resources but on "recognition" of status, prestige, and legitimacy within the educational "field."

3. Pillar Three : The "Symbolic Pact" as a Driving Mechanism. In contexts where the presidential word plays a pivotal role, symbolic promises may become unwritten "pacts," and their "betrayal" may become a primary source of conflict. This concept is added here as an original theoretical contribution.

4. Pillar Four : The Multiple Functions of Conflict (Coser). Conflict is not only exercised to pressure authority (external function) but also performs vital internal functions, such as strengthening professional cohesion and producing an alternative collective identity.

This model can be applied to other studies, not only in the education sector but in any public sector characterized by strong unions, centralized bureaucratic authority, and charismatic political discourse. It allows researchers to analyze how "words" become "pacts," how their "betrayal" drives conflict, and how "technical competence" and "mobilizing power" compete within actors' strategies.

In conclusion, this study opens multiple research avenues. First, this model can be applied comparatively to other international cases (such as France, Tunisia, and Morocco) to test its

generalizability. Second, future research can examine the impact of these conflicts on actual educational outcomes and on the dynamics of internal conflict among the unions themselves. Finally, on a practical level, this study confirms that any educational reform in Algeria cannot succeed without taking into account that governance is, at its core, a relationship of power, negotiation, and recognition, and that unions are not an obstacle to reform but a central actor in it, whether we like it or not. Ignoring the "symbolic pact" or its "betrayal" does not produce stability but, as we have seen, generates deeper and more intense conflict.

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