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ALGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND STUDENTS' ACUMEN ON THE COURSE OF THE CURRENT REFORM

POLITIQUE ÉDUCATIVE ALGÉRIENNE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET LA PERSPICACITÉ DES ÉTUDIANTS SUR LE PARCOURS DE LA RÉFORME ACTUELLE

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Abstract : *In Algeria, the process of educational change is an intricate and tough task involving politically-oriented objectives whereby policy makers have felt the urgent need to reform the educational sector which has been described, several times, as 'doomed'. Through the use of a questionnaire and a mixed method approach, the rationale behind undertaking this study was to shed light on the current reforms achieved by the Algerian government vis à vis the higher educational system -with a special focus on the 'LMD' system- and to scrutinize whether those efforts have attained the desired objectives among a sample of 35 students enrolled in scientific and technological streams. The findings revealed that less than half of the sample population is satisfied with the current reforms achieved by the Algerian government, and that the majority students favour the 'classical' system instead of the 'LMD' system as they find their level gradually regressing. Additionally, this perception triggers a kind of uncertainty among the students' as regards their future professional career.*

Keywords: *Acumen, Algerian students, higher educational policy, LMD system, reform*

Résumé : *En Algérie, le processus de changement éducatif est considéré comme étant une tâche difficile et complexe impliquant des objectifs politiquement orientés et selon les quels les responsables politiques ont ressenti le besoin urgent de la réforme du secteur éducatif étant décrit comme 'voué à l'échec' à plusieurs reprises. A travers l'utilisation d'un questionnaire ainsi qu'une approche de méthode mixte, le but d'entreprendre cette étude était d'éclairer les réformes actuelles réalisées par le gouvernement Algérien vis-à-vis du secteur de l'éducation supérieur -tout en mettant l'accent sur le système LMD- et d'examiner en profondeur si ces efforts ont atteint les objectifs désirés parmi un échantillon de population comprenant 35 étudiants inscrits dans des filières scientifiques et technologiques. Les résultats ont révélé que moins de la moitié de la population est satisfaite des réformes actuelles réalisées par le gouvernement algérien, et que la majorité des étudiants favorisent le système classique plutôt que le système LMD puisqu'ils trouvent que leur niveau se régresse graduellement. En plus, cette perception a déclenché une sorte d'incertitude parmi les étudiants en ce qui concerne leur future carrière professionnelle.*

Mots-clés : *Etudiants Algériens, perspicacité, réforme, secteur de l'enseignement supérieur, système LMD*

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The concern of language planners is twofold: First, they want to reach a better understanding of the validity of education in its own empirically observed dimensions. Second, they help in defining appropriate strategies for change. The issue of higher education policies in Algeria seems to be among the most important queries entailed in educational policy and planning research. It is believed that Algeria absorbed a heavy colonial impact not only in its social life, but also in its educational policy.

Education policy makers emphasise the betterment of students' levels to get much knowledge in order to secure their jobs through acknowledged degrees and high levels of employment because the spread of joblessness, in Algeria, has upset both the government and the stakeholders.

The higher educational system in Algeria is viewed to be gradually moving through various stages punctuated by a series of reforms which try to update the educational system according to the socioeconomic, environmental and technological needs of the country. Faced with considerable pressure, it was necessary to alter the Algerian educational system to deal with the expectations of the new directions and global trends of higher education. Like many countries worldwide, Algeria has experienced the policy and principles of the LMD system which consists in the implementation of the licence/bachelor, master, doctorate (LMD) system in the university. This system has been examined by many Algerian researchers in terms of its evaluation and assessment. Therefore, this paper, firstly, aims to shed light on the current reforms achieved by the Algerian government vis à vis the higher educational system with a special focus on the LMD system since we are interested in its novelty and reliability, as a new reform, and its impact on the quality of education and the students' future professional career. Secondly, it aims to scrutinize whether those efforts have attained the desired objectives among a sample of 35 students enrolled in scientific and technological streams. Indeed, this paper tries to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the main reforms that the Algerian higher education sector has gone through and what is their impact on the quality of education?
2. What are the students' acumen on the higher educational reforms already implemented by the Algerian government-with reference to the LMD system, and what is its effect on their professional career?

It is, therefore hypothesised that:

1. The classic system already implemented by the higher education sector has been subject to criticism and has been replaced by the LMD system which has not yielded fruitful results and attained the desired objectives as expected.
2. Most students show less satisfaction towards the LMD system compared with the old one as they feel a kind of uncertainty about their future and professional career.

Through the use of a questionnaire which includes both open-ended and close-ended questions, and administered to a sample of 35 students enrolled in technological and scientific streams, this study will try to answer the above- mentioned research questions and, adequately, treats the issue raised.

1. Educational policy and higher educational reform in Algeria

Educational policy refers to the principles and government policy-making in educational sphere, as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of educational system. "The notion of educational planning - making the education sector grow and function more effectively - may implicitly suggest a well-structured field of unambiguous issues, clearly defined objectives, mutually exclusive choices, undisputed causal relationships, predictable rationalities, and rational decision-makers"(Wadi D. Haddad, 1995, p. 17). The Algerian higher educational system has been marked by two major forms of policy since its independence: the former and the most recent system - the

adoption of a three-cycle higher education framework, called the LMD system (Licence-Master-Doctorate), in existence since 2004/2005. Algerian universities have implemented a reform aiming at integrating the Bologna process.

Its broad target is put by the European University Association (2004): “The Bologna Process does not aim to harmonise national educational systems but rather to provide tools to connect them”. Participation in the Bologna Process is a voluntary decision taken by each country and its higher education community to support the principles underlined in the European Higher Education Area (European University Association, 2004). The Bologna process standards consist in 3 years of study for the licence degree and 2 years for the master’s degree. Since the introduction of the three-cycle degree system in 2004, universities have awarded a licence degree for having achieved 180 credits (first cycle), a master’s degree for having achieved 120 additional credits (the second cycle) and, following a course of study, a doctorate (third cycle). The role of the Algerian university consists in:

- Providing quality training.
- Creating a real osmosis with the socio-economic environment.
- Educating and nurturing future leaders and innovators of the society.
- Doing research to generate and promulgate new knowledge and technology.
- Developing mechanisms for continuous adaptation to changing jobs.
- Encouraging diversity and international cooperation by the most appropriate terms.

3. The process of higher education reform

The process of the Algerian higher education reform consists, first, in updating, adaptation and upgrading the various education programmes by means of:

- generalising the introduction of interdisciplinary course elements, with modules in fields such as: Information technology, history of science, modern languages, methodology and international law;
- broadening course content with the introduction of optional modules and cross-disciplinary diversification;
- adopting a semester system;
- Upgrading practical work, periods of practical training in businesses, projects and students’ personal work.

Second, it consists in establishing a new course planning through the introduction of the license, Master and Doctorate structure taking into consideration the following points:

- standard degree courses in all subjects;
- a greater focus on professional specialisation in some courses (vocational license and Master degrees);
- semester-long modules for which transferable credits are awarded (ECTS)

Some reforms designed to modernize the university sector were established in 1971, and major reforms were established in 1988. With complete Arabization of the baccalaureate programmed for the 1989/1990 school year, this step had been a catastrophe for the baccalaureate holders who enrolled in scientific and technical streams at university where subjects were taught in French like in the medical stream, electrical engineering,

computing and architecture. These students found themselves encountering the language handicap that inhibited them from even comprehending the course content as opined by Entellis, (1981),

Indeed, increased arabization of primary and secondary school curriculum without concurrent language uniformity at the higher levels has created enormous tensions and frustrations for those “arabisants” unprepared to cope effectively with French-language instruction, and therefore destined to “dead-end” jobs, since nearly all openings in the public and private sectors require some level of bilingualism and, in certain fields, trilingualism (p.197).

3. Classical system vs. LMD system

This section is concerned with defining what the classical and the LMD system are concerned with along with the main difference between them.

3.1. The classical system

In Algeria, the last decades witnessed an important growth in terms of higher education infrastructure - be it material or human; this increase was pursued by a series of flaws and issues that led to a progressive decadence of the teaching and learning quality at university level. Additionally, there was a serious disagreement between market requests, social requests and what the university produced. This fact proved the malfunctioning of the classical system applied in the Algerian universities since Algeria’s independence. The classical system which consisted in four years license, two years magister and four years doctorate system, did not reply to the major challenges laid down by the changing situation of economy, of politics and of the society in Algeria. The changing situation led the government and education policy makers to re-think the higher educational system in Algeria and to integrate a new system that can correlate and reply to socioeconomic mutations contributing to a serious evolution of this country. As matter of fact, a decision was made to apply the European educational system known as LMD - Licence - Master - Doctorate in 2004.

3.2. The LMD system and its Objectives

Since the introduction of the three-cycle degree system (LMD) in 2004, universities have been awarding a ‘*Licence*’ (Bachelor degree) for the accumulation of 180 credits (first cycle), a Master degree for the accumulation of 120 additional credits (second cycle), following a postgraduate course of study, a doctorate (third cycle). According to Djebbari (2016),

This reform is believed to offer further possibilities and opportunities for students and teachers so that both become involved in training process. The teacher has the opportunity to present training courses based on an active pedagogical panel and the student, on the other hand, has the opportunity to contribute vigorously in his training. Therefore, extra teaching hours are supplemented to the training outside university throughout projects and activities (p.17).

The LMD system tends to achieve the following objectives established by the Ministry of Higher Education (2003). These essential principles underline the vision of the task, and they can be summarised as follows (Djebbari, 2016, p.18):

- Ensure a high teaching quality according to the social demand; in terms of access to higher education;

- Achieve a harmony with the socio-economic development in all possible interactions between the university and the world.
- Be more open to the global developments, particularly in science and technology;
- Encourage international cooperation and diversity.
- Lay the foundations of good governance based on participation and consultation.

However, some educationalists (Megnounif, 2010; Miliani, 2010; Mami, 2013) consider this reform as inaccurate in Algeria. One proof of this is that Megnounif (2010) assumes that despite the settled ideal objectives, a number of limits are diagnosed:

- Educational programmes no longer meet the new socio-economical data.
- Training mono disciplinary in classical approach where concept of general culture is completely absent.
- A significant failure rate due primarily to uncertainty about the future among students.
- Lack of motivation among teachers and students.
- Centralized management of the university.

Albeit the text of regulations in the LMD system brings some innovations in assessment and the roles of teachers and students in the teaching and learning process, it does not offer any solutions to the employment of graduates. By contrast, and in an attempt to provide an answer to these claims, one of the ex- Ministers of Higher Education, Haraoubia (2013) opined “those stating that the LMD system has failed, did not understand the real content of this system until today!” After shedding some light on the higher educational reforms implemented by the Algerian government, the current paper will diagnose the students’ perceptions towards the implementation of the LMD system in Algerian universities taking Ain-Temouchent University as a case in point.

4. Method

The present study is a tentative attempt to investigate the acumen of students towards the implementation of LMD system and whether this implementation is a success or failure compared with the classical system. This study, therefore, focuses on the following questions:

1. What are the main reforms that the Algerian higher education sector has gone through and what is their impact on the quality of education?
2. What are the students’ acumen on the higher educational reforms already implemented by the Algerian government-with reference to the LMD system, and what is its effect on their professional career?
- 3.

The present study is a cross-sectional survey under quantitative and qualitative paradigms. In survey research, according to Fraenkel and Wallen, “Researchers are often interested in the opinions of a large group of people about a particular topic or issue. They ask a number of questions, all related to the issue, to find answers” (2010, p. 390). Considering the purpose of the study, in order to collect necessary data, an in-depth close-ended questionnaire is adopted. Our respondents were handled a series of questions, and then given time to answer them. Their answers were analyzed considering their linguistic level

arising from their points of views towards the new reforms adopted by the Algerian government, in particular, the LMD system.

6.1. Context of investigation

The research study took place in Ain-Temouchent; it has been followed and supervised during three months. This location, Ain-Temouchent city, was selected because Belhadj Bouchaib University of Ain-Temouchent is the place of the author’s work and could provide us with a sample of students whose characteristics are appropriate for the research study, and as a teacher at Ain-Temouchent University who witnessed the implementation of LMD new reform, the opportunity to do this investigation was available.

6.2. Sample Population

Thirty five participants took part in this study. They are university students from L2, L3 M1 and M2 enrolled in different streams at the faculty of science and technology at Belhadj Bouchaib University. The age range of the informants was between 18 and 26; 70% of these students are not so familiar with the LMD system. The sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling. The informants, male and female, were chosen purposefully from different levels. The reason for their participation in this survey was to verify whether the LMD system affects them either positively or negatively and why in both cases.

6.3. Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool used in this research study is a questionnaire including both close-ended and open-ended questions and containing eight items. It was administered to the students mentioned before for the purpose of getting some analysis of their experience with the LMD system and their perceptions towards its implementation years later and what pros and cons it has yielded.

6.4. Data Analysis

After having collected the responses of the students via the questionnaire, we began working on the classification of their responses and then display them via tables, attempting to analyze the students’ perceptions towards the LMD system. We extracted, in fact, the students’ opinions regarding the LMD system. In analyzing the data, we have adopted quantitative and qualitative approaches to the description of the sample population’s responses, then the questionnaire has been answered accordingly.

After making sure that the participants under investigation are aware of the difference between the classical system and the LMD system, the following question was addressed.

- Question n°1: Which of these systems do you think is or will be more suitable for you? Why?

Table1: Students’ choice of the best reform

Classical	LMD
65%	35%

When this question was posed, the majority students revealed their preference towards the old system as shown in the table 1. In fact 65% said that they prefer the classical system instead of the LMD one as this latter had negative repercussions on the quality of their education. Five students opined that “With the LMD system, we do not have enough time to finish the syllabus and deal with all the lectures. This affects our level negatively”.

- Question n ° 2: As an LMD student, how would you evaluate your learning capacities?

Table 2: Students’ evaluation of their learning capacities

Very Good	Good	Medium	Low	Very Low
8.33%	24.64%	39%	18.45%	9.58%

As far as the students’ educational level is concerned, table 2 shows that the majority participants rating 39% evaluated it as ‘medium’; 24.64% viewed it as ‘good’ while only 8.33% stated that their level is very good. The rest of the participants considered it either as ‘low’ or ‘very low’ rating 18.45% and 9.58% respectively.

- Question n ° 3: How would you evaluate the current reforms made by the Algerian government?

Table 3: Students’ evaluation of the current reforms

Good	Medium	Bad	I do not know
11.56%	41%	31.67%	15.77%

When the participants were asked to report on their evaluation on the current reforms made by the Algerian policy makers, most of them rating 41% pointed out to the LMD system which they evaluated as ‘medium’; 31.67% of the participants found it bad while 15.77% remained neutral and only 11.56% viewed it as a ‘good’ reform.

- Question n ° 4: Do you think the LMD system allows you with more job opportunities than the classical system?

Some of the significant participants’ comments were as follows:

“At the beginning of its implementation, we were optimistic, but actually, most students hold their diplomas and get unemployed”

“The students who studied during the ‘classical system period were more brilliant and had more job opportunities than us’.

“We do not think so; the LMD system is associated with quantity; the number of students getting their diplomas exceeds the number of job opportunities”.

- Question n°5: What are the pros and cons of the LMD system; now that you are acquainted with this reform?

“We are said that studying under the LMD system gives the students more job opportunities and more specialized training, but this is not always the case.”

“The main difference between classical and LMD system is in terms of the disciplines taught to both- for the LMD they are more focused, and the many chances of passing years for LMD students.”

“It has become a political matter; all the students are passing years without spending many efforts. We are getting diplomas only, but in fact we lack enough knowledge, resources and training outside the university context.”

“The classical students are more competent than LMD students; we have noticed that in the doctoral contests”.

“We never have the opportunity to deal with all the lessons planned in each semester and this has negative repercussions on our level”.

- Question n°6: Do you find the LMD system adequate or not as far as the Algerian higher educational system is concerned?

Here, the majority students rating 75% opined that it is not really adequate, and that it is high time to go back to the classical system since this latter has brought fruitful results as far as the students' level is concerned.

Some of them rating 15% stated the following: “They told us that the LMD system opens doors for scholarships and job opportunities abroad like Erasmus, Fulbright, etc., but in reality, this is just a dream.” To this 70% of the participants added,

“Graduating with a licence of four years is better than that of the LMD system. Licence students can teach with their diplomas in secondary schools and/or middle schools while L3 students cannot teach with their degree of L3. Learning in three years, for LMD students, is difficult, intensive and it contains loaded and full programmes”.

- Question n°7: Are you with or against the continuing of its implementation? How?

When this question was posed, nearly all the participants claimed that,

“This reform needs complete revision from the part of all stakeholders since our future is at stake; we are really worried and pessimistic as far as job opportunities are concerned.”

“This reform has malfunctioned in Algeria; it has nothing to do with the LMD system implemented in European countries”.

- Question n°8: How do you see the future of students studying under this reform?

Here again, the students showed a kind of dissatisfaction vis à vis the LMD system in comparison with the classical one as they said:

“The LMD system in Algeria has yielded bad results and even teachers are always complaining about this reform; may be because they are not well-informed about its implementation”.

“It needs to be either completely revised or replaced by the classical system since students, at that time, were better trained and the number of students enrolled at universities was not as great as today”.

7. Discussion

Less than half of the sample population is satisfied with the current reforms achieved by the Algerian government. Surprisingly, the majority students preferred the classical system instead of the LMD system as they find the latter easy to progress automatically from one semester (one year) to another by accumulating credits and a barrier to their academic progress. They also found that this system has malfunctioned compared with the old one,

for it does not open doors for job opportunities and scholarships as it has been oppositely thought at the onset of its implementation. The participants also pointed out to their worries and fear about their professional career, low educational level and the heavy amount of lessons they have to deal with besides the lack of time associated with this flaw.

Indeed, most of the drawbacks are represented in: an uncertainty about the future among most students and lack of motivation which is primarily due to the lack of resources (material and financial), and training sessions outside the university. According to some students, this new reform requires an effective approach to the review and evaluation or a complete substitution by the old system since they claimed that those who, actually, win the doctoral contexts are mostly students from the classical system. Among the most important challenges combined with the LMD system is first, how to reconcile the needs of democratic access to higher education with the need for higher quality of training in a changing world characterized by the advent of a knowledge and information society, and the second challenge consists in training to a high standard a large number of teachers to look after the huge number of students studying in the Algerian universities.

Conclusion

Throughout the present paper, the main issue addressed has been the reforms implemented in the Algerian higher education sector and their impact on their professional career besides the students' acumen of the LMD system and the way it affects their academic progress in the Faculty of science and technology at Belhadj Bouchaib University. The main goal of the Algerian government in higher education and scientific research sphere is the implementation of an efficient high quality- system of training and research. It seems that the Algerian government has invested a lot in recent years on the LMD system for the reform of higher education to ensure quality training that enables to raise the Algerian university to an international status. However, the participants from various streams and different levels, who were involved in this study, showed dissatisfaction towards the LMD system.

Through their responses, some negative aspects related to this reform are perceived to be less beneficial and valuable compared to the classical system applied previously as for most students, it hinders their academic progress and success, as well as future job opportunities. Among the steps that should be followed for more effectiveness are: Pursuing a policy of providing attractive, high-quality training, obtaining input from Algerian researchers based abroad to the training effort and to the development of scientific research, providing more basic training in all the fields and preparing individuals for employment as researchers, encouraging continuous training of teaching staff and researchers in their field of specialisation and in quality assurance good practices and finally, identifying students with a particular aptitude for research and encouraging them by awarding them substantial scholarships.

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Appendix1: Questionnaire to students

This questionnaire includes a set of close-ended and open-ended questions that will allow the researcher to know more about the current course reform in the Algerian higher education system and its implementation, in addition to the students' acumen and perceptions about the LMD system and its impact on the quality of education and the students' future professional career.

- 1) Which of these systems do you think is or will be more suitable for you? Why?
 - a- Classical
 - b- LMD
- 2) As an LMD student, how would you evaluate your learning capacities?
- 3) How would you evaluate the current reforms made by the Algerian government?
- 4) Do you think the LMD system allows you with more job opportunities than the classical system?
- 5) What are the pros and cons of the LMD system now that you are acquainted with this reform?
- 6) Do you find the LMD system adequate or not as far as the Algerian higher educational system is concerned?
- 7) Are you with or against the continuing of its implementation? How?
- 8) How do you see the future of students studying under this reform?

