

Teaching English under the LMD Reform: The Algerian Experience

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Abstract—Since its independence in 1962, Algeria has struggled to establish an educational system tailored to the needs of the population it may address. Considering the historical connection with France, Algeria has always looked at the French language as a cultural imperative until late in the seventies. After the Arabization policy of 1971 and the socioeconomic changes taking place worldwide, the use of English as a communicating vehicle started to gain more space within globalized Algeria. Consequently, disparities in the use of French started to fade away at the cross-roads leaving more space to the teaching of English as a second foreign language.

Moreover, the introduction of the Bologna Process and the European Credit Transfer System in Higher Education has necessitated some innovations in the design and development of new curricula adapted to the socioeconomic market. In this paper, I will try to highlight the important historical dimensions Algeria has taken towards the implementation of an English language methodology and to the status it acquired from second foreign language, to first foreign language to “the language of knowledge and sciences”. I will also propose new pedagogical perspectives for a better treatment of the English language in order to encourage independent and autonomous learning.

Keywords—Teaching English as a foreign language, Globalization, post-colonial Algeria, the educational system.

I. INTRODUCTION

ALGERIA is facing the challenges of the new century with the hope to catch up with the demands of globalization and the knowledge economy. In this process, however, it has put tremendous hope on the educational system as an integrating entity since its independence in 1962. Too centralized and fragmented in its essence, the actions taken towards building up a national entity led the country to focus on a national regime clustered on its Arabic and Muslim identity without open-frontiers on any further establishments.

The ambivalence of the educational decisions taken toward the teaching and learning of languages led the Algerian system to adopt the Arabization policy since 1971 creating an arena of debate about the establishment of an authentic cultural identity. The adopted policy proved inefficient in creating a strong education built on the same principles of the North but holding the traditions and beliefs of a new-independent country. De facto, the teaching and learning of the French language gained a prestigious place among the educated community. However, with the advent of globalization, education has increasingly crossed the borders national, regional and institutional. At the same time, the Arabization policy had, itself, to respond to other profound changes, such

as the knowledge explosion, the changing interaction between the public and the private spheres and the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies. Consequently, the discrepancies between the use of French as a medium and as a tool started to compete with English which was hitherto placed at a third position. From second foreign language, to first foreign language, to the language of knowledge and science, English has gained steps forward in the Algerian educational scene. In this paper, we are going to present a comparative picture of the place of English in the Algerian curricula and the challenging present for its users.

In the year 2004-2005, Algeria has joined the rules and principles of the Bologna Process by adopting the LMD principles (Licence, Master, and Doctorate). The philosophy of teaching under the new architecture stipulated that more space is given to the learners' output and mobility. Continuous education and training became a tremendous imperative for all successful learning using Information and Communication Technology. On the other hand, globalization has led to a considerable shift in the aims and objectives of teaching that had to meet the changing demands of the socioeconomic market. As a matter fact, new methods in language teaching and linguistics have shaped the new curricula as far as English teaching and learning are concerned. In this article, I shall try to give an evaluation of the Algerian linguistic history of language teaching and propose some future perspectives for further investigation.

II. THE ALGERIAN REFORM IN EDUCATION: ROOTS AND OUTCOMES

In most countries, educational reform is rooted to instill change and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of schooling. Typically based on structural functionalist assumptions, reform efforts focus on particular problems or issues, such as enhancing the teaching quality, adapting the curricula or reorganizing the school setting. The Algerian educational system, long patterned after the French, was changed by a program of Arabization shortly after independence. The government introduced new teaching methods and began training Algerian teachers and bringing in foreign, Arabic-speaking teachers. In 1976 all private schools were abolished and a compulsory period of nine years of education was introduced. In the late 1980s some 3.8 million pupils attended primary schools and about 2.1 million were enrolled in secondary schools. The government also maintained vocational and teacher-training schools [1].

Since 1973, however, the curriculum has been arabicized and the teaching of French has been restricted. Though the use of Arabic has been enforced in public life, Tamazight was allowed in schools from the year 2003. The shift to the use of

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English as a tool and as a medium in the Algerian contexts seems but a matter of heralding the French power. As a matter of fact, the shift in practice reveals the intensity of the political debate as far as the influence of English is concerned. Thus, in order to understand the weakness of the teachings applied in the English language, we need to divide the Algerian educational movement into three distinct periods: The first phase is characterized by the colonial legacies amongst which was a network of schools and an educational system dominated by the French language with Arabic growing steadily in importance. The second phase lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1990s and corresponded to the socialist-era central planning economy, called the nationalist transition. The Arabic language was gradually imposed in the educational sector. An extreme version of exclusive nationalism inspired by the 19th century European ideal of linguistic convergence marked this era. The third phase began in the early 2000s corresponding to the transition toward the free economic market with less assertive Arabization policies. During the third phase, the authorities have encountered hostility to the reform of the schooling system. In fact, the Algerian government has come to admit that education has “failed” [2].

According to a number of educationalists, the Arabic monolingual system implemented during the post-colonial period has been the source of this failure [3].

III. THE ALGERIAN REFORMS IN EDUCATION

After independence in 1962, Algeria has adopted an eradication policy of the French rule and culture. Consequently, to avoid being in contradiction with their ideology, the Government of Colonel Boumediène imported hundreds of Arabic teachers and imams from the Middle East for securing “Arabization”. However, the number of such Arabic teachers could never compare with the thousands of French and Algerian-French teachers who had been sent to secondary schools during the 1960s and 1970s. [4] At the same time, an educational policy regarding the elites has emerged and was very much similar to the one prevailing in France. Shortly after, within a decade or two, new national universities and some selective “Grandes écoles” were created in independent Algeria. Consequently, new administrators in Science, Industry, university, research and alike worked according to the French standards and usually spoke and wrote in the French language.

The turning point in the Algerian educational system came within the years 1976-1979 and marked the end of the educational “cooperation”. Arabic was declared the language of instruction for all subjects except sciences and medicine courses [5]. Islamic culture generally replaced philosophy, sociology and French literature in High Schools as well as in universities. The 2008 World Bank Report cited that “the outdated methods of teaching” became the dominant pedagogic paradigm. The French “*esprit critique*” as it continues, had become a synonym for subversion in North Africa and had to be eradicated by all means [6]

Mass Higher Education and Arabization have reformed the

worldview of the new generation by mid-1980s. As stated by Krichen (1986) [7], Arabization, in the region, is not only a question of words and symbols, but a fundamental question concerning the very conception of the world (Vermeren, p. 56). In a few years, the social situation led to a political change which acted upon education. Algeria was confronted to a civil war during the 1990s that separated between two groups of mindset: on the one hand, the fundamental ideologists kept looking to the Middle East as a source of vestiges heritage of Arabic and, on the other hand, a small elite of separatists characterized a form of “western-way-of-life and culture”. Educational reforms in Algeria started by the year 2000. A new period began marked by a rapid change in the global economic and social market. Algeria, which was getting out of a bloody war known as “*la décennie noire*” had to engage in a process of adaptation to the job market. Faced with Arabization, mass Higher Education and graduate unemployment, the crises that marked the period were cultural, social and educational.

The authorities as well as a large part of the population have felt the need for educational reforms, which should include among other things, the reintroduction of French at an early stage. Similarly, prior to his elections as Head of State in April 1999, candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika often repeated in public the expression “doomed schooling system” [8]. Indeed, the educational system needed to reinvent in the learning process as far as open-mindedness and quality were concerned. However, the political map has changed as well as the economic powers. At the aftermath of the twenty-first century, English has gained considerable space shortly because of the rapid development of Information and Communication Technologies. Globalization has become the world mantra changing the world into a small village. Consequently, Algeria had to keep pace with time in order to stay in the unprecedented race of the developed and developing countries.

IV. THE INTRODUCTION OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

By the mid of the year 2000, Algeria has started a series of changes with the aim to improve the structure of the educational system. However, the traumatic past events have left the administration confused in certain areas where many schools required better organization and more teachers. Since the introduction of the English language into schools, it has become an important part of the curriculum and has recorded a great demand in all levels of education. Various TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) schools have been established throughout the country.

While encompassing the motive of the venerable French grammar, the current view of the place of English in language learning is also filled with political scenes aiming to put one language at the edge of drowning. I explain: “adjusting” a person to a culture has connotations of cultural chauvinism, applying that the new comer should abandon the culture of origin in favor of embracing the values and customs of the host society. This was the case with the French language. On

the other hand, learning a second culture has not such ethnocentric overtones. There are many examples in life where it becomes necessary to learn a practice even if one does not approve of it, and then abandon the customs when circumstances have changed. English, in the Algerian case, came to meet those needs.

As it has been stated by Professor Miliani (2000) [8],

“In a situation where the French language has lost much of its ground in the sociocultural and educational environments of the country; the introduction of English is being heralded as the magic solution to all possible ills-including economic, technological and education ones”. (p. 13)

As a matter of fact, English has been defined as a second foreign language in the beginning of the 90s, and as a first foreign language after the 2000 reform, to gain the status of the langue of science and technology used in lifelong learning in recent years.

V. TEACHING ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS

In speaking about the teaching of English in schools, many approaches have been adopted by educationalists and psychologists. In Algeria, however, two approaches have been adopted since its inception. The first one being the Communicative Approach to language where curriculum designers agreed that language is first communication. As a matter of fact, arguments leaned toward putting the student or the pupil in the skin of the native speaker and communicate. This was not very practical considering difficulties of time and space. Although the linguistic influence of advertising on the people is undeniable, the culture and the thought of the people influence advertising [9], Second, or foreign language learners must not only be aware of this interdependence, but must be taught its nature in order to convince them of the essentiality of including culture in the study of a language which is not their own.

The second approach adapted from the first one was the competency-based approach, helping the learners acquire a communicative competence by centralizing on the learner as the target of the learning process. The focus, in this approach, was on the meaning conveyed by the context rather than the grammatical forms used in it. This approach has been an answer to the requirements of the 21st century which dictated certain measures to the teacher better considered in the United States as *facilitators*.

VI. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER AS A FACILITATOR

Successful teachers and the institutions where they teach may differ in many ways. For the Algerian case, the teachers' experience, training, and level of English or the size of classes, hours of classes per week and the methodology may interfere in the learning and teaching process. However, successful teachers may have certain things in common:

1. Have a practical command of English, not just a knowledge of grammar rules;
2. Use English most of the time in every class, including beginners' classes;

3. Think mostly in terms of learner practice, not teacher explanations;
4. Find time for really communicative activities, not just practice of language forms;
5. Focus their teaching on learners' needs, not just on finishing the syllabus or course book [10].

On the other hand, students must gain awareness of the importance of studying English, not only as a subject matter, but as a source of gaining knowledge. Students do not recognize real success in English language learning. The long-term goals are not always well explicit in the course syllabus. As quoted by Baiche in Bouabdesslam (2001) [11];

“The English syllabus in secondary education in Algeria is narrowly defined and restricted... to a collection of functions that are randomly selected... however; the major lack of harmony between the various official documents is over the degree of specificity of overall objectives: instructions in the English syllabus are not in harmony with those in new lines and pedagogical instruction”. (p. 103)

Ideally, the goal of most English language courses would be to develop a general command of “real-English” for use outside the classroom. In many Algerian contexts, however, factors such as the shortage of time or the large number of learners in a class make this goal seem difficult or impossible to reach. Obviously, using English as the main classroom language can be a learning opportunity and a challenge for non-native teachers of English as well as for learners.

VII. SETTING THE OBJECTIVES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH

For a country like Algeria, which has witnessed turmoil in the choice of the languages used in education, it has been hard to set the objectives of studying English as a “foreign language”. In Higher Education, for example, students are often asked about their motives of studying English as a specialty. Their answers often vary between “*Because I like it*”, “*because it's the language of the world*”, “*It was not my choice but this was the only thing I could do with my marks*”. In such a situation, it is necessary to put conditions to learning.

Another phenomenon is that our students rely heavily on grades as a motive for learning. As a matter of fact, the mark becomes the main objective for the learner rather than the learning process or the subject taught. Travis and Wade (1997) [12] say in the same context:

“The fact that our school system relies heavily on grades may help explain why the average college graduate reads few books. Like all extrinsic rewards, grades induce temporary compliance but not necessarily a lifelong disposition to learn”. (p. 232)

Giving more importance to marks may hinder the learner from making research for the sake of gaining knowledge. It also kills creativity and intelligence. In order to remedy to such a problem, a number of motivating properties need to be introduced into the Algerian educational arena for a better accomplishment of the teaching goals. These could be summarized as follows:

- a. Creating conditions for learning: sufficient space. A group that is not too big, adequate lighting and a room with adequate acoustics. But also, plenty of opportunity for students to participate in class and an atmosphere where they feel motivated to learn.
- b. Base learning on communication and creating real English situations;
- c. Establish goals and objectives in teaching English;
- d. Make a clear disconnection between French and English for a better thriving of English as a separate subject.
- e. Creating projects focusing on English classes.

The misconceptions inherent to the teaching of English in Algeria are misconceptions in the distinction between the theory and practice, between the “know” and “know how”. It is not enough to do our best; we should know what to do, then do our best to achieve it.

VIII. THE LMD REFORM

In the year 2004 – 2005, Algeria has integrated the principles of the Bologna Process set in Europe in the year 1999. The traditional programs and curricula have been replaced by new offers of formation adapted to the unique needs of the country. At the level of linguistics, new methods were based on the philosophy of mobility and personal formation.

At the level of Higher Education, the Algerian Ministry has assigned special commissions to evaluate the Licence and Master's offers. That latter had to rely on the innovative methods of the linguistic competence. In order to render the LMD architecture more beneficial, a number of measures have to be adopted at the level of curriculum design and integration. Success would rely on the following perspectives:

1. Planning and evaluation of the students' needs as well as those liaised to the socioeconomic market,
2. Developing multimedia at the level of oral expression and vocabulary,
3. Encouraging student enhancement with mobility,
4. Creating cooperation between universities who share the same objectives and interests.
5. Create listening cells and audits in order to register students' propositions.
6. Prepare students for vocational education through the choice of English.

IX. CONCLUSION

Algeria has gone through a series of actions in its policy of education: from a purely French colonial regime during the colonial period, to a monolingual country after the adoption of the Arabization policy, to an open country in the twenty-first century. However, when the winds of change blow, you can be caught between the inclination to build protective walls and the wish to harness the energy by conducting windmills. When the winds of change blew over the Algerian educational system, it had to adopt a modernization policy to keep pace with time. However, no chain being stronger than its weakest

link, the teaching of English, in Algeria, had itself to respond to other profound changes in society.

As a matter of fact, and in order to lead the country to a successful reform, it is my contention that a separation between politics and policy is essential. It is undeniable that Algeria has accomplished steps forward in its educational policy about languages, but the hardest work is yet to come. Teaching English in our schools be it *first*, *second* or simply *foreign* language needs deeper planning at all levels of education. Our students and teachers alike are addressing a clarion call, not only for policy makers, but for the whole nation, too.

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