

Reforms: expectations and frustrations

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Rapid globalization places pressure on Algeria, as many countries, to reform its educational system, and to incorporate the use of English as an important medium of international communication. Understanding that use, Algerian leaders and educators are working to ensure that it should be included at all levels of education with regard to the modern school and the new training curricula.

As far as the English subject is concerned, the level remains unsatisfactory. Our 3As pupils have spent five to seven years learning the foreign language, but they can neither speak it appropriately, nor can they express themselves clearly in writing. For many years English has had one of the poorest scores among all subjects in the “Baccalaureate” examination. It is the subject where pupils often fail whatever the stream is, especially the literary ones: “Arabic Language and Literature”, “Human and Islamic Sciences”, and “Arabic Literature and Foreign Languages”-02.65%, 06.82%, 10.03% respectively (1999 “Baccalaureate”). For the technical streams things are more serious that there is no need to show some catastrophic scores.

- The Reform

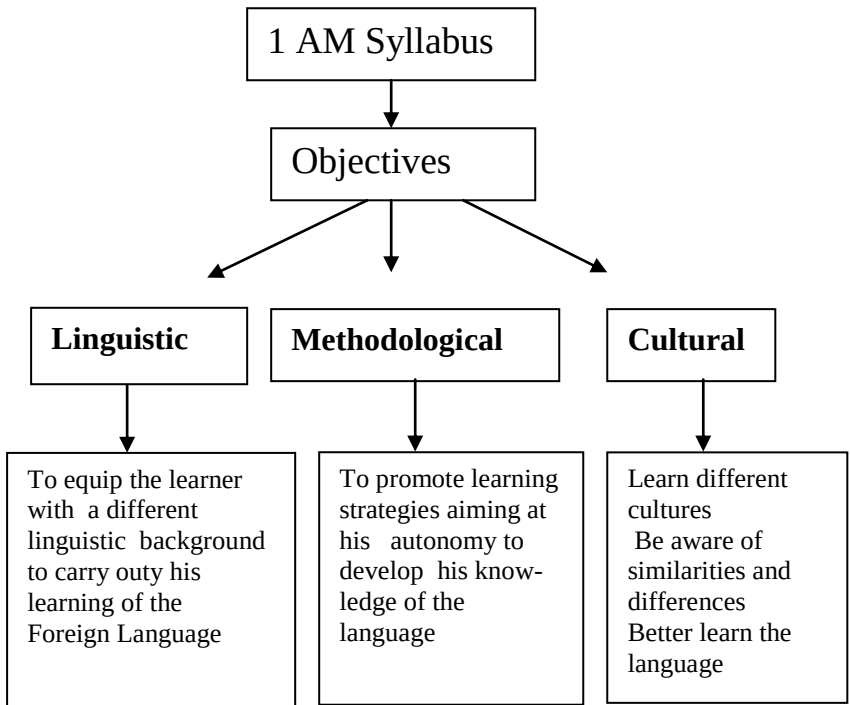
Because the term “reform” is the agenda of today’s educational discussions and official instructions, we ,teachers, educators, parents and learners have to understand the changes and their impacts on the programmes and the actual pedagogical practices. The reform also means new commitments at different learning levels.

Teachers of English have waited for many years for a law which outlines a curriculum meant to fit the modern world. The introduction of English as a second foreign language at “1 Am”, issued by the authorities implies new syllabuses as well as textbooks based on the “competency-based” approach, which implements an adequate training for teachers to cope with the various aspects of methodology and procedures of everyday courses.

-The Objectives of “1 AM” Syllabus

Taking profit of his six years experience at the primary school, the first year pupil will learn a second foreign language taking into account his reception and production capacities. At the end of that year he would be able to listen and understand a simple oral message, differentiate the language sounds (simple- diphthong), and distinguish various types of messages as: declarations, questions and injunctions; they should also be able to utter a simple oral message following stress and intonation. In written expression, they should be able to identify visual clues like paging, lettering, capitals and punctuation as well as logical markers, coordination,

comparison, time and opposition. By the end of the year he should be able to produce a simple and coherent paragraph, ask correct and appropriate questions using logical markers imitating the supplied model. Culturally, they will be aware of the similarities and differences between foreign cultures and their own. In sum the syllabus aims at reaching three objectives: 1-linguistic- 2-methodological- 3- cultural.



- The Textbook

“Spotlight on English” is a textbook meant for “1 AM” pupils, who have never studied English before; based on the official syllabus, it requires the implementation of a “competency-based” approach through the development of three essential competencies:

1-Interact orally in English

2-Interpret authentic oral and written documents

3-Produce simple oral or written messages.

The textbook is presented in a form of seven files (each of them is centered around a general theme) organized under major headings to fulfill the entire production:

-Learn the language

-Learn about the language

-Reminder

-Check

-Project

- Some Frustrating Questions

These shifts in practice and methodology are enough to frustrate parents, teachers and learners because a lot of questions remain unanswered:

-Have teachers been trained for the 1 AM syllabus, approach, the textbook and the like?

Lacking training, most teachers are compelled to continue with familiar methods and nearly all the teaching materials are prepared in a way that does not help make the transition. We confess that the transition to

the new approach is unthinkable without adequate teacher training and education. And the lack of information, insufficient time to become acquainted with the new requirement, and train teachers ongoing changes will no doubt hamper implementation.

Even if an official commission was in charge to decide of the innovations in the educational reform, there must be a close collaboration with classroom teachers who live with the daily realities of the teaching situations. They are the cornerstone and the secret of any successful educational system, for they contribute to a large extent in the achievement of all objectives. Therefore, priority should be given to teachers- how to prepare them to changes, innovations and reforms that are likely to happen. Unfortunately these teachers are asked by ministry officials to implement them prematurely.

-Has the suggested reform been tested on some pupils, schools and teachers? And is there any feedback?

-Has it been studied, analyzed and evaluated? What and where are the results, then?

How ambitious and great the objectives are! As mentioned before. Yet, they remain reachable theoretically. The educational reform normally relies on recent researches with objective information on the evaluation of tomorrow's school in terms of performances, changes of pedagogical practices and teachers training for new programmes. This reform should be founded on three fundamental questions:

What, Why, and How. What to include in it, how it is delivered and why changes (Tylor 1950).

Recent reform should see quality, competitiveness and accountability as the main goals in curriculum reform (Rappolt, 1993), relying on sampling-groups of learners, schools and teachers as well as focusing on researches and presenting the findings with external consultants for approval and consideration for implementation to avoid what Dubin and Olshtain (1986) warn against in the following:

“A curriculum which is not in line with the broader community’s concepts of language education, certainly one which does not accommodate the immediate audience’s expectations-those of teachers and learners- may just gather dust on a shelf. (p.3)

All societies, nowadays, are entering the Internationalization Era that urges the educational officials and educators to think of our children to guide and develop their learning desires, to have a high knowledge level and competence. Tomorrow’s world relies on the real mastery and the well use of “learning, the grey matter constitutes the plain and true richness of any country. If educating, instructing, socializing and preparing the child to acquire knowledge and a qualification constitute the essential duties of today’s school, we wonder how we can achieve these goals without adequate educational reform.

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