

Rising to the Challenge of the LMD Study Scheme

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Abstract:

This paper highlights a number of features that characterise the LMD as a new university study scheme emphasizing the discrepancy with the former and still in use study system, commonly referred to as “the classical system”. It then explores a number of aspects that are believed to be in favour of a successful study route and argues for the urgent need to lift the present study context in Algerian universities and create a match between the academic environment and the pedagogical requirements.

Introduction

The long feared and rejected LMD system has now been installed bearing in it what appears as a demanding work plan for teachers and a tight study schedule for students. Characterised by aim/objective-set courses which address areas of specialism, the new study scheme is clearly suggestive of the need for a number of resources: these may be identified as strong commitment, interest, good will and involvement. What is further required, in addition to human resources, is a set of material and environmental conditions. In other words, for students to successfully complete tuition in the new system, human resources and material and environmental parameters should be favourable.

In what follows, a number of course aspects, at degree level, are highlighted, and then concern with environmental and material inadequacies is raised and the necessity for improvement discussed against the requirements of the new scheme. To the first part of the discussion, we now turn.

Pausing to consider, what in essence, differentiates the new study scheme from the old, we might point out that the organization of the courses according to areas of specialism involves various degrees of emphasis since it includes focal disciplinary components as well as interdisciplinary options. In this connection, it seems worth adding that such a blend can be but beneficial since interdisciplinary options lead students to extend their scope of interest and knowledge.

A further noticeable aspect (and not the least) are the detailed objectives related to each course. Indeed, whether a focal option (unité fondamentale) or an interdisciplinary one (découverte ou méthodologie), it must be fully depicted in terms of both content and achievable goals pertaining to both knowledge and skill before the course starts. This is believed to be of high importance in that it not only informs teachers about the various aspects of their duties but also eases assessment, making it clear for them to check, via various means whether students' involvement, attendance, and achievement are in harmony with the requirements of the new language degree.

Assessment is precisely an aspect that is worth focus. The literature that is available (Document de la Conférence Nationale, Actes du Colloque International 30-31 Mai 2007), insists on the need for teachers to keep a record of course work, home assignments, class participation and attendance for each student as well as integrate the results thus obtained and merge them with the results obtained by the students sitting for formal tests. If it is by far obvious that such an approach to assessment is in compliance with recent approaches to assessment which present continuous assessment as a most desirable approach, it nonetheless ensures a fair treatment of students' efforts.

Another no less important aspect worth pointing out regarding this new assessment scheme relates to the idea that students do not risk being identified as high or low performers on the basis of one score obtained at a formal test/ examination set at

the end of the year, as is currently the case in the “classical system”. Information on the students’ profiles is obtained from “multiple sources”(Bailey,1998), and is therefore more reliable than a one-shot result.

Recent literature on the various forms of assessment and continuous assessment in particular,(Bailey, opcit,Puhl, 1997,Norris, 2000, Norris 2002, Chapelle and Brindley,2002) reveals scholars’ emphasis on the necessity for teachers to obtain information about their students’ profiles using various types of instruments among which observation grids, peer and self assessment, conferencing. These and conferencing, in particular give the teacher opportunities to both obtain such information and cross-check it. An additional value such assessment practices may have is the impact on students’ work. Indeed thus informed about their work and in constant opportunity for accountability, students are made responsible and made to realize that achievement is their “own business” and more a matter of hard work and commitment to studies than a mere “chance” depending on the nature of the (single) end-of-term test questions. This matter is re-visited below in a subsection devoted to how the students community is perceived in the new scheme.

An often heard response to such form of assessment concerns its feasibility in large classes. And class size is precisely one of these features specific to the LMD. Highly recommended in the documents regulating the scheme is the need to limit tuition groups to 25 students. Obviously, provided that implementers “go by the book”, the argument relating to the difficulty to implement these pedagogical measures no more holds since and as experienced so far with the first promotion of students, continuous assessment is a feasible option and most welcomed by both teachers and students.

Towards a fair coverage of the theme and the “challenging” orientation of the new system, it seems useful to glance at the position of the students under the new scheme as this seems to reflect a new perception of what following an LMD course requires from students. One such requirement shared by all courses in general is that students are expected to demonstrate commitment to the degree study course. However, this involves a number of behaviours that are implicit in other study schemes but made highly explicit in the LMD. When such behaviours are expected,i.e. regular attendance, active participation, private study work,and progress towards aims/study goals, they are, as mentioned above, also accounted for through continuous assessment. In a “normal”/ traditional degree course, these are taken for granted but never or rarely assessed in an academic study context where tuition group sizes are beyond control. When this may be due to an assumption that candidates for an academic degree should be fit with academic ability and must either pass or fail, the new scheme seems to accept the idea that candidates for a LMD degree have a potential which they might exploit during on-going course tuition; thereis ,thus , room for improvement .

An explicit statement of study behaviours to be displayed during the course of study is suggestive of a different underlying assumption: faith in the student’s potential for constructing the profile which is required to meet the study objectives. To support this idea, it seems useful to remind the reader of the inclusion in the new scheme of conferencing with a “tutor”, which offers the students opportunities to reflect on these behaviours and assess their progress towards the term/year objectives. If such opportunities allow students to assess both study work and behaviours , they are expected to make them become/ be made aware of lacks or deficiencies in knowledge and skill and take action .

Furthermore, students’ decisions and future moves towards improvement not only derive from a discussion/conference set towards this purpose but they are monitored by both the teacher and the student , the students’ main role being that of accounting for their own work and gauging progress(Workshops on the “Tutorat”,

October 2010 and January 2011). A further expectation of students in difficulty is to make use of available support and demonstrate good will and earnest effort.

When monitoring students' attempts to overcome their study difficulties may be a responsibility assigned to one teacher, and for a particular group of students, the pedagogical responsibility at large remains in the hands of teachers in charge of the various subjects which are taught during a term or year. These, as prescribed in the regulations, have to organize into pedagogical units upon which depend decisions to be taken about course content and assessment. Made more explicit, such decisions address each teacher's pedagogical responsibilities as well as discussion and re-adjustment of course content. They also address responsibility over tuition progress and assessment procedures and the essential concern with weighting the different forms of assessment that are implemented. It is clear that such a perception of a teacher's duties differs greatly from any other as it dictates the need for collaboration and cooperative work. The least this can do is to empower staff with decision-making and decision-taking abilities.

Weighed against what may be referred to as the core of the LMD system, the present study environment is, as it has always been for the last three decades, a matter of great concern. In order to identify the reasons for such concern, it is felt necessary to spell out a number of infrastructural conditions to be met if such a study scheme is to bring about desirable outcomes.

By far too obvious because both in conformity with minimal pedagogical requirements and a sine qua non condition to face the challenge, the academic environment must be safe and void of any sort of polluting element and study locations. Classrooms and reading rooms must be equipped with basic quality material. In addition, working/study equipment must be relevant to disciplinary demands: language laboratories or audiovisual equipment must be available and operational as precious study time requires it.

A must in all academic contexts, the world over, the documentary stock as well as other research tools are to be updated and in a sufficient number, adequately displayed in appropriate locations in order to ease research, retrieval and use of such tools by students seeking to complete assignments or update course information. Last but not least, a study environment must comprise comfortable, attractive and quiet study rooms to host hard working students and encourage research and work towards progress.

A glance at the present environment and the prevailing conditions is disheartening. What is worse, it raises doubts about the feasibility of the scheme and the implementation of the LMD system. The "academically poor" life which prevails may be depicted briefly in what follows.

A university campus plagued with deficiencies such as hostile and polluted study locations which are unfit for interactive study procedures, is not likely to encourage hard work and academic endeavour. Worse even, deficiencies such as lack of appropriate teaching material and study locations may just hamper the study process causing serious obstacles, delays and demotivation.

These and other serious anomalies found in the present study context can little contribute to credit the need for change that is associated with the recommended pedagogical procedures. They might weaken any chance for more effective tuition in the degree course and even jeopardize an expected higher rate of success. More importantly, they seem to stand against the spirit of the new scheme and may not work in favour of the appeal to the university community to join effort towards a successful application of the LMD system (Dossier Réforme des Enseignements du Supérieur, December 2003) which is spelt out in this (unpaged) document: "...**l'adhésion de toutes**

les composantes de la communauté universitaire comme garantie du succès de l'application du système.”

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined a number of aspects which reflect the philosophy of the LMD system namely the pedagogical procedures related to course content and assessment. We have also considered some of the requirements against the prevailing academic environment and finally, argued for the need to operate drastic changes in favour of an enjoyable study life , in harmony with the students needs, the study requirements and the designers' recommendations. In all, the raise to the challenge consists in displaying earnest study behaviours on behalf of the students and a greater commitment on behalf of teachers but it requires decision-makers' will to provide appropriate work conditions and adequate means and materials upon which depends the success of this new educational enterprise .

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