

*Analysing the Algerian Educational System: A
Comparative Study*

تحليل النظام التعليمي الجزائري: دراسة مقارنة

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Abstract:

Comparative education is an interdisciplinary field which deals with comparing, contrasting, studying different educational systems compared to each other or separately. This paper aims to spot light on this discipline in comparison to the Algerian educational system in the post-colonial era. The Algerian educational system has witnessed different stages with positive and negative results vis-à-vis the students' performances. Theoretically speaking, any educational system is the result of different trials to end up with a successful system, but is it the case of the Algerian one? This paper tries to answer this question by analysing the Algerian educational system and providing new insights and ideas in the educational system.

Keywords: comparative education, Algerian educational system, post-colonial era

ملخص:

تعتبر نظرية مقارنة المناهج فرعاً من الفروع التربوية التي تهدف إلى إيجاد أوجه الاختلاف والتشابه بين نظامين أو أكثر. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على النظام ما بعد الاستعمار إذ واجه النظام التربوي عدة تغيرات أفرزت نتائج إيجابية وأخرى

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سلبية أوضحتها النتائج المدرسية. نظريا، يعد النظام التربوي نتاج محاولات عديدة إلى حين الوصول إلى نظام تربوي ناجح. فهل يعتمد النظام الجزائري على هذه الطريقة لبلوغ نظام قوي ومستقل. هذه الدراسة توصلت إلى عدة إجابات من خلال تقديم بدائل. كلمات مفتاحية: مقارنة المناهج؛ النظام التربوي الجزائري؛ فترة ما بعد الاستعمار.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is very valued in all countries all over the world. Governments give importance to education and try their best to be on top of successful educational systems. Algeria is a country which tried different educational methods since its independence. On paper, the successful educational system is the combination of different criteria: economics, politics, society and others. The Algerian government tries to put into practice all these elements to make a strong successful education. Although it is very difficult to apply this since the world is living under globalization or internationalism. The Algerian educational system faced and still faces different difficulties and challenges mostly problems of identity in the light of globalization.

Comparative education is the study in which two or more educational systems are compared and contrasted and in some other cases is trying to adopt and adapt some successful methods or strategies and apply them in one educational system. In the case of Algeria, many approaches have been in trial and

experiment like the case of competency –based- approach and task-based approach.

2. Definition of comparative education

Comparative education is an old discipline which deals with analyzing the educational systems. In his definition of comparative education, Adejumbi (1984: P. 2) says that comparative education is

“... the careful analysis of educational systems, issues and problems ... within the context of historical socio-economic, political, cultural, religious and other influential factors... which involves the collection, authentication and interpretation of data on the basis of direct observation, documentary analysis, person-to person contacts and reflection in as objective a manner as is possible.”

It is clearly noticed in the definition above that comparative education is an inter-discipline which is related to almost all the other domains: society, economics, politics, and religion in a way or another.

Isaac Kandel (1881-1965) (cited in Lawal, 2004) took up Sandler's view that comparative education should not focus only on the educational set up, but also the causes behind educational problems of different countries and tries to find solutions in the light of others' experiences. To explain more, through comparative education, investigators (specialists of comparative

education) can learn from others' difficulties and try to find solutions to their problems, and even they may apply their solutions.

According to Noah (1985), Comparative education is based on four main purposes, which are:

- to describe educational systems, processes or outcomes,
- to assist in development of educational institutions and practices,
- to highlight the relationship between education and society, and
- to establish generalized statements about education that valid in more than one country.

Comparative education as stated above is a very wide domain which is related to all other domains. Accordingly, its uses are varied, too. This interdisciplinary field can be studied from social, economical, religious and various other aspects, which make it open on many domains, and researchers can collaborate to improve educational practices.

3. Algerian educational system

Before introducing the Algerian education system, first what is education? The Online Etymology Dictionary (2022) defines education as to bring up, and originally, the verb to educate started to be used in the mid 15c. to mean bring up "children, to train", this word (educate) is taken from Latin "*educare*" and "*educere*" which means bring out and bring forth.

Education according to the Oxford Learner's Online

Dictionary (2022), education is “*a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools, colleges or universities to improve knowledge and develop skills.*” So, from what has been said above education is not only teaching, but also training and boosting learners’ knowledge.

As far as the Algerian education is concerned, the Algerian educational system witnessed different changes in the educational system. As a start, before colonialism, Algeria as an Arab and Muslim country used mosques, Quran schools to teach boys and girls, and most learning was based on Quran and hadith lessons and instructions.

During colonization, everything changed, and colonial authorities changed those mosques to cathedrals and military services. No Arabic taught in schools except for some secret houses or some corners devoted to teaching Quran for some children.

After independence, the Algerian government established the ministry of education in 1963, a year after independence, and they tried to make it “Arabized” school. The purpose here is to change or to move from the French dependence or French medium of learning which dominated during colonization, to pure Arabic which means Arabic as a medium of instruction.

The Algerian government emphasized the free-tuition education, i.e. all children at the age of six have the right to enroll in first year primary school. Moreover, government focuses on education for all and even in the 2000’s created special classes for old people who dropped school or have never

attended school, and call this type of classes “eradication of illiteracy”.

3.1 Characteristics of the Algerian educational system

The Algerian education system as any other educational system is divided into stages that separate one category of students from others. First, pre-school is devoted to those children from three to five or six years old. In this stage, children are taught alphabet, numbers, and shapes and make simple activities like drawing and writing. Most schools in this stage are private in the form of kindergartens and associations.

Primary education starts at the age of five or six and lasts for five years. Many subjects are introduced to pupils like mathematics, Islamic studies, Arabic, history, geography, technology, foreign languages (French and English), sciences, music and arts. Pupils are required to take three exams per year and get an average of ten which determines their success or failure. At the end of this stage, pupils take a final exam (cinquième).

In the middle school, pupils are required to study four years and at the end, they take a final exam which is called “middle education certificate” or BEM as many people in Algeria like to call it. In this exam, pupils should have an average of ten to pass to the secondary school.

High school is where pupils choose to study either scientific or literary streams. Generally, those who have high average in middle school certificate get enrolled in scientific streams, and those who get average marks get enrolled in literary

streams. Scientific branch is based on natural sciences, mathematics, physics and chemistry without forgetting Arabic, French and English as languages, and history and geography. For literary streams, most important subjects are Arabic, French, English, philosophy, history and geography. In second year secondary school, pupils who are in the scientific stream are oriented to choose either experimental sciences, exact sciences, or technical branch; whereas those who are in the literary stream choose between philosophy and foreign languages. After three years of studying each in his/her stream, pupils take the most important exam in the educational system, which is the baccalaureate exam. Students should take all the subject exams and get an average equal or above ten.

At university, students have large possibilities to choose what to study. For example, those who studied scientific streams may get enrolled into medicine, pharmacy, dentist, veterinary, biology, etc. Those who studied in technical streams may enroll in technology and science, architecture, engineering, etc. Finally, students with literary baccalaureate may study languages, laws, economics, and many other specialties which are available almost in all universities around Algeria. Of course, the average gotten in the baccalaureate exam decides the branch studied at university. For example, a student with a seventeen average can be accepted to study medicine which is not the case with another student who got ten or eleven.

New reforms have been brought to higher education in the academic year 2003-2004, where authorities introduced the LMD (License, Master, Doctorate) system. This system is used

in different universities in Europe, and in Algeria, the government tried to experience this system. The main focus in this system is that there is a successive process of learning.

Much research has been done on the efficiency of the LMD system in Algeria, especially that it is a system which needs more efforts, materials and resources. In their study, Sarnou, et al. (2012) conclude that the LMD system despite its difficulties, students think that it gives them more recognized diplomas, and teachers give them more professionalism and skills improvement.

In brief, responsible authorities of the Algerian educational system have always tried to make modifications and changes by adapting new programs and curricula to enhance the quality of the educational system. Since independence, many changes have been done, and many policies have been applied, only to raise the students' performances.

3.2. Algerian educational system and international education

As it is mentioned above, the Algerian educational system has been all the time experimented and a station to try and experiment. During colonialism, the French educational system was dominating except for the few schools which were in houses or zawayas in tribes and rural places to teach Arabic and Quran (Colonna, 2008). After independence, government tried to use Arabic as a medium of teaching and learning in schools. Many teachers were brought from countries like Iraq, Syria and Egypt to teach children. Mostari (2003), in her study states that the classical Arabic was used after 1963 by measures taken by the former president Boumediene. Algerians, who were literate and

were basically students in the French schools, could not teach because their Arabic was weak compared with their French. So at that time, a shift from colonial dependence to independence made the government borrow some teachers from the Middle East to teach its schoolchildren.

In order to establish independent syllabi, the government gives huge importance to education, since funding the ministry of education is considered the highest after the ministry of defense. The government, as well, tries all the time to apply new strategies and materials for enhancing the quality of education, and more importantly is to keep the Algerian identity.

Back to history, borrowings are the first attempts of comparative education. The meaning of a borrowing is to take any method, concept, idea or educational policy and apply it in another educational system. The best example of famous borrowings is Victor Cousin (1792-1867) who was sent as the representative of the French minister of education in 1831 to Prussia in order to observe the educational systems used. In his return, his findings were led to the Guisot Act (1833) which later was used as the basic structures and principles in the French educational system (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2007). Later, his research and results were adopted by England and America.

4. Methodology

4.1. Integrating new strategies in the Algerian educational system

In order to establish our independent and clear educational system, decision makers and researchers should first look at the most successful educational systems in the world. It would be

asked some important questions: do we have to apply literally others' educational systems? What makes their educational systems successful? How can we establish our own educational system? And most importantly, how can we keep our Algerian identity in the light of globalization?

Finland is considered as one of the most successful educational systems in the world. The main focus in their educational system is “learn by play”. The idea is to focus on the cognitive development of the child, children generally like to play, and through playing, they include some activities or idea to keep in mind. Besides, in Finland, learners have less school hours like their counterparts in other countries. Testing and exams are of no existence until last year of primary education, no exams but assessment in Finland. The idea behind this is to make learners enjoy learning and value their time in schools. A study was made by Wilk (2017) which describes the efficiency of five educational systems in the world, including Finland. This study summarises the educational system which was reformed for thirty years. The reforms focus on learning free spaces and no-exams until secondary schools. Kumar and Chowdhury (2013) in their study “current education system of the world”, state that the best policy of countries such as Finland is to emphasise the importance of education among citizens and its “underlying moral purpose”.

4.2. New strategies: The Montessori Method

Many educational systems in the world are adapting quality rather than quantity in education. Kids (from a Montessori perspective) learn through play. Basically, the Montessori Method is child-centered method. In this method, the child plays,

corrects himself, and learns from mistakes everyone according to his abilities. To elucidate, the Montessori Method emphasises independent learning of children, lifelong learning and better citizens, this idea is defined by Orem (1965) as *“a spontaneous, expansive educational system designed to afford the child liberty to move and act in a prepared environment encouraging self-development”* (P.13). Basically, the majority of the Algerian classrooms are closed areas in which all pupils sit in one-after-one structured rows - including young children of the pre-school (aged from 5 to 11 years old). In this age, children are very active and curious to see around, so logically, it is very hard to keep them in the row from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

In the case of Algerian primary education, it is observed by parents, doctors and even associations' activists the heavy weight of school-bags and heavy materials (books and copybooks) for memorisation, to self-education and open spaces in schools to learn in a sustainable environment. It is high time to look for real and practical solutions to overcome this issue. According to Tzuo (2007), the Montessori Method enables children to make free choices about their learning; besides the method itself is an aiding tool to the teacher. Primarily, the Montessori Method focuses on the students-centeredness and not teacher centeredness.

With the initiation of using notebooks in classrooms, it is better to engage all the community in this change. Parents in here have a crucial role to raise their children awareness about the importance of these tools as aids for learning and not for playing. Some challenges are raised in moving from traditional ways of

teaching to new era –technology use. One major challenge is class size and teacher charges.

4.3.The importance of teacher training in the light of internationalism and AI tools

With new educational methods in teaching, it is necessary to consider the ways teachers present their lessons. It is no longer the board as a medium for teaching and learning. Teachers should be encouraged and sent to have contact with other teachers inside and outside the country to renew and to develop their skills.

In the same flow of ideas, the world is witnessing different and rapid changes which automatically influence the educational practices, namely the AI integration in the education milieu. Teachers should be trained and be aware of these changes and work accordingly.

5. CONCLUSION

As an attempt to shed light on Algerian educational system, the paper focuses on some areas that comparative education deals with. Comparative education is a discipline which helps researchers, educators and governments develop their educational systems and policies through others' experiences.

The Algerian educational system is not an exception. It has moved or passed through different stages and changes. During colonialism, education was pure in French and for fewer Algerians, except for those secret attempts to teach Algerian children. After independence, there were many trails to raise the educational system. The reforms in Algeria were successful in some way through introducing new subjects, concepts and even

programs. In many other cases, the Algerian educational system focuses more the memorization of lessons because of time constraints and large sizes of classes.

In many programs around the world, the main focus is the individual; the child is the centre of the learning process. Play is part of many successful educational systems. It should be considered the cognitive development of the child in each stage.

The programs should be studied according to the Algerian identity and the Algerian specificity: Arabic and Muslim considerations.

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