

**Developing capacity-building strategies for the
LMD reform in Algeria**

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Abstract

The emergence of new forms of cross-border education and the establishment of capacity-building approaches are recent phenomena in Higher Education. While several European countries compete to attract foreign students, Algeria's Higher Education procedures are yet in their prime infancy. As a matter of fact, innovative strategies should be introduced for the import of cross-border education to build capacity in Higher Education and accelerate economic development. This paper will argue in favour of the case. Using cross-border education for capacity-building would be an effective strategy to put in place a more appropriate regulatory process for the reforms taking place in Algeria's Higher Education.

Key words: Cross-border mobility, Cross-border Education, Capacity-Building, Accreditation, LMD Reform, Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Globalization. TEMPUS

Résumé

L'émergence de nouvelles formes d'enseignement transnational et la création d'approches de renforcement des capacités sont des phénomènes récents dans l'enseignement supérieur. Alors que plusieurs pays européens sont en compétition pour attirer les étudiants étrangers, les procédures de l'enseignement supérieur en Algérie sont encore à leur début. Cependant, des stratégies novatrices doivent être introduites pour l'importation de l'enseignement transnational afin de renforcer les capacités dans l'enseignement supérieur et accélérer le développement économique. Ce document fera valoir l'intérêt apporté à cette cause. L'utilisation de l'éducation transfrontalière pour le renforcement des capacités serait une stratégie efficace pour mettre en place un processus réglementaire plus adapté pour les réformes en cours dans l'enseignement supérieur en Algérie.

Mots clés: La mobilité transfrontalière, L'éducation transfrontalière, Renforcement des capacités, La réforme LMD, L'Accréditation, L'Enseignement Supérieur, L'Assurance Qualité, La Mondialisation. TEMPUS,

Introduction

Higher Education plays a significant role in capacity-building strategy. With the introduction of the LMD system in the Algerian universities, our policies are to take a serious hold of the new demands of the job market. The ultimate goal of the national education policy would be directed toward a national capacity development strategy to achieve progress. An important undertaking for the Algerian higher Education would be to consider the outward mobility of domestic students and scholars. Governments are often ill-prepared to reap the benefits of cross-border mobility and to assure education quality. The rival powers are competing to influence the direction of the flow.

In Algeria, however, recent changes in the flow of cross-border students indicate that the dominant wave continues to be toward Europe. As a matter of fact, this article tries to delimit the boundaries of cross-border mobility as presented by the LMD system and analyses its relations to capacity-building strategy.

1. The Algerian university and the LMD System

The European Higher Education reform process is having an impact way beyond its borders. In June 1999, Ministers of Education from twenty-nine countries gathered in Bologna to sign a declaration aimed at harmonizing degree structures and quality assurance procedures across their diverse Higher Education systems by 2010.

Four years later, Algeria has joined the flow of change trying to go in pace with the competing demands of the twenty first century. Globalization presents many challenges and opportunities for Higher Education systems and institutions around the world. These changes have affected the old system of education Algeria has been adopting hitherto. Increased student and faculty mobility offers new and exciting opportunities for international academic collaboration and cultural exchange. However, this new spirit of international cooperation in Higher Education represents a host of challenges related to issues such as academic recognition, quality assurance and compatibility of qualification frameworks.

On the other hand, and since the 1990s, the trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (TEMPUS) has been highly successful in promoting cooperation between the Higher Education Sector in the European Union and its "partner countries". Today, the programme promotes exchange with Algeria as part of an overall Higher Education reform effort. Institutions of higher Education are becoming important agents in the production of skills for the knowledge economy. Therefore, expanding the sector in our country is a necessary knowledge economy. The latter would enable faster technological catch up and improvement of the country's ability to maximise its economic output. Very often, in Algeria, skill requirements outstrip the capacities of the educational system of Higher Education. However, the LMD reform seems to encourage the Higher Education sector to orient its production to the requirements of the global market

through cross-border education. Through this paper, I attempt to analyse different aspects of cross-border education to draw some implications for the national system of Higher Education.

2. Bologna as a model for Higher Education reform

The European Higher Education reform process is having an impact way beyond its borders. This inward-looking, European focus has undergone something of a sea change in recent years, and is looking to share its experiences beyond the borders of Europe while also seeking to understand its impact and relevance in a global setting.

As Bologna framers look to expand their horizons, so Higher Education professionals in Algeria are beginning to look at Bologna as a potential model for educational reform. Globalisation presents many challenges and opportunities for Higher Education systems and institutions around the world (Fegan, 2009). Thus, increased student and faculty mobility offers new and exciting opportunities for international academic collaboration and cultural exchange. However, this new spirit of international cooperation in Higher Education represents Algeria with a host of challenges related to issues such as, academic recognition, quality assurance standards and compatibility of qualification frameworks.

The World Declaration Service declares that:

“In many ways, Bologna sits at the centre of this flux as one of the biggest

And boldest modern examples of change and reform in Higher Education.

As such, it is emerging, not only as a recognition and mobility vehicle within

And between EHEA member state, but also as a model for change in other

Countries and regions of the world from which lessons can be learned, templates

Borrowed and ideas exchanged.” (p.1)

There appear to be one way in which Bologna is impacting the reform in Algeria. Many efforts are being adopted in order to restructure Higher Education in terms of the three-cycle Bologna model (Licence, Master Doctorat).

3. Algerian Higher Education and the LMD System

Perhaps the clearest example of the impact Bologna is having beyond the borders of Europe is the Algerian LMD reform of 2003-2004. With Higher Education traditions modelled after the French system, Algeria is currently in the process of realising its Higher Education Systems along

similar lines to the new Bologna-inspired French qualifications framework. Thus, the Licence, Master, Doctorat (LMD 3-5-8) architecture that is now part of the French Higher Education landscape is being used as a model to promote Higher Education Reform in the country.

With that in mind, Bologna also presents a number of challenges to national cooperation. Not least among which is the increased appeal to Europe as a study destination for Algerian students (Brooks, 2006). Institutions and government departments involved in drafting and implementing the LMD reform have been working in a spirit of international cooperation. There has also been a high degree of Cross-Mediterranean consultation and discussion through Tempus initiatives.

Much of the language in the speech over Tempus covers action lines similar to those in the Bologna Declaration and other supporting documents: comparability and readability of Higher Education systems, transferable credits, easily readable qualifications relevant to academia and the labour market, and shared quality assurance goals to promote the mobility of students and faculty (WES, 2010).

The 2007 conference of the African Union aimed to discuss ways in which African universities could use lessons learned from the Bologna process to build more cooperative international relationships across four main areas:

- The decision process that has brought African universities or countries to opt for the Bologna model,
- The direct or indirect effect of the decision to adopt the Bologna model: curriculum reform, quality assurance and accreditation, mobility, recognition and joint degrees, professional master's/research master's degrees and doctorat schools.
- The curriculum evolution of the emerging countries' universities, and their place in globalisation.
- The role of international and/or financial organisations in the promotion of the Bologna Model (African Union, 2007).

It is clearly important to ensure articulation between different countries' qualifications and regimes to ensure ease of mobility across borders.

However, this is not the only reason for advancing a bologna-inspired restructuring of Higher Education in Algeria. It is also being used to generate new forms of regionalism. The World Education Service (2010), for example, reports that for the countries of the Maghreb, much of this regional collaboration was undertaken with an eye to developing a "Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area".

A founding document for the proposed education area was signed in January 2006 and is known as the Catania Declaration.

Thus, while the advance of the Bologna Process, in Europe, does have important implications for those countries to have strong ties with European systems of Higher Education and labour markets, it also triggers new pockets and forms of regionalism. It is in this sense, however, that the LMD reform, in Algeria, is both aspirational and inspirational.

4. Global trends of cross border education and capacity building strategy

Globalisation in Education has led to a market increase in mobility of people, programmes and institutions across national borders. There has also been a marked increase in participation of the private sector in provision of Higher Education. Several new programmes have been established, including short courses leading to certificates (UNESCO, 2005). Cross-border provision has also increased in type and scope. Some national institutions have begun to use ICT for teaching, learning, information, management and dissemination purposes. On the other hand, many cross-border providers have adopted ICT as their main mode of programme delivery.

As a consequence of these developments, the portability of qualifications in Higher Education is becoming an issue of concern in Algeria. Expansion of Cross-border provision has

the potential of introducing innovations and greater efficiency in management. However, it also poses challenges to quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications. Likewise, the use of ICT for programme delivery in Higher Education has the potential to increase access and efficiency in programme delivery. Yet, without a proper regulatory framework in place, it also carries the risk of compromising quality, equity and programme diversity (Magagula, 2005). In Algeria, these new initiatives do not fulfil minimal conditions required for accreditation of Higher Education programmes and quality assurance. A global response to these and related economic challenges of globalisation would be a greater regional and international cooperation, partnership and integration through cross-border mobility.

5. The use of cross-border education within the LMD system

As cross-border provision of Higher Education grows and evolves, there is a clear need for new international initiatives to enhance quality provision in cross-border Higher Education. This could be achieved by strengthening quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications' schemes at all levels.

In response to increasing cross-border education initiatives, some measures were taken by the International Association of Universities and outline the following principles:

- Cross-border Higher Education should strive to contribute to the broader economic, social and cultural well-being of communities (ACE, 2007),
- While cross-border education can flow in many different directions, in a variety of contexts, it should strengthen developing countries' Higher Education capacities in order to promote global equity,
- In addition to providing disciplinary and professional expertise, cross-border Higher Education should strive to instil in learners the critical thinking that underpins responsible citizenship at the local, national and global levels,
- Cross-border Higher Education should be accessible, not only to students who can afford to pay, but also to qualified students with financial need.
- Cross-border Higher Education should meet the same high standards of academic and organisational quality no matter where it is delivered,
- Cross-border Higher education should be accountable to the public, students and governments,

- Cross-border Higher Education should expand the opportunities for international mobility of faculty, researchers and students,
- Higher education institutions and other providers of cross-border mobility should provide clear and full information to students and external stakeholders about the education they provide.

However, and despite the steady progress made in implementing the LMD reform in Algeria, degree structures among and between universities remain different. The two-cycle system is more clearly defined in some disciplines than in others. The introduction of the new "Master's" degree can, also, cause problems due to the unclear relations to existing terminology and other degrees.

Concern is also put upon the students inside the LMD system. The former are to be employed after completing the lower degree and, thus, the Bachelor programme will become rigid and specified in order to enable the students acquire all the knowledge and skills needed to meet the demands of the labour market. Efforts of standardisation may also result in a fixed programme and are likely to lead to narrower degrees in space and courses.

6. Mobility in the Algerian context of Higher Education

At the grassroots level, mobility is not an easy concept to put in practice. Productivity demands and national

requirements on shortened completion times might have a negative effect on student mobility. As cross-border education operations are increasing in Algeria, national values about the increasing amount of student fees are emerging as an educational imperative.

On the other hand, accreditation is a recent phenomenon in the Arab world. Only few quality assurance initiatives and enhancement frameworks are offered (UNESCO, 2005). In the Algerian context, very few institutions have sought external accreditation. Efforts were only focused on engineering and medicine to cater for evaluation and accreditation at a national level.

Moreover, there has been a growing tendency for the Algerian government to liberize its economies, including education provision. As a matter of fact, the LMD reform is growing rapidly without the necessary assessment to ensure that private providers are offering relevant quality education that promotes human resource development and responds to socio-economic needs of the country (Naidoo, 2004).

Other challenges facing Higher education in Algeria include the following:

- Gender and regional disparities,
- A mismatch between skills acquired by university graduates and those demands by the industry,

- Imbalances in terms of the number of students studying sciences and humanities,
- Rigid admission criteria,
- Lack of modalities for credit transfers between universities and other post-secondary institutions,
- Lack of recognition of prior learning,
- The brain drain (AAU, 2006)

Within this challenging context, the implementation of mobility procedures to enhance cross-border education within the LMD reform seems a national imperative.

In February 2006, the first conference on Accreditation, Quality Assurance and recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Algeria was convened in Nairobi. Algeria, which was a participating agent in the conference, agreed on the following objectives:

- Examine international, regional and national experiences in order to inform development of effective mechanisms for accreditation of institutions and programmes, quality assurance and recognition of Higher Education in Africa,
- Promote the use of UNESCO/OECD cross-border Higher Education guidelines in Africa,

- Consider progress made in the process of revision of the regional conventions on recognition of qualifications,
- Review existing global and regional initiatives for capacity-building in quality assurance, including those offered through cross-border Higher Education,
- Map a way forward regarding strengthening of mechanisms for accreditation, quality assurance, and recognition of qualification in Africa (AAU, 2006).

As a matter of fact, there is a need to establish new models, in Algerian higher Education, in order to maintain quality and recognise qualifications and skills acquired. This includes addressing issues of cross-border education and mobility of students. My vision of the LMD reform is one of a national framework that is a driving force for regional integration, quality assurance and global competitiveness of education and training systems. The role of the LMD system would be to improve the productivity and performance of individuals, to encourage capacity building and human development and to sustain mobility of students through credit transfer. The latter would improve quality and impact upon education and recognition of qualifications.

7. The implication of cross-border education on capacity building

It is clear from what has been said above that an urge to focus energy on capacity building is an issue of paramount concern. The latter would assure harmonization around quality assurance. On the other hand, cross-border mobility may lead to the challenge of changing or, at least, rationalizing national policies. This supports the central idea of the Bologna Process (1999) that initial cooperation for harmonization needs to be driven from top-down to create buy-in to the process and to lead changes in Higher Education. The development of such a national body should have the mandate to impact directly on Higher Education activities. Locating these activities at a national level will ensure that the results are acceptable to all participating stakeholders. This would facilitate engagement of the entire Higher education Community and, thus, would guarantee success.

Cross-border provision of Higher Education offers students new opportunities of increased access, improvement and innovations in higher education. However, it has to be managed appropriately in order to limit low quality provision and rogue providers. This would make it increasingly important for students and other relevant stakeholders to be better informed of Higher Education quality programmes (Magagula, 2005).

Moreover, cross-border education can provide greater access to specific knowledge-or skill-based education and

training. It can provide access to reputable international institutions which students, in Algeria, would not, otherwise, be able to access. However, cross-border Higher Education is also accompanied by several challenges and problems. In Algeria, the majority of cross-border projects have been developed by the AUF (Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie) (Magagula, 2005) being the forefront of Higher Education developments in the country.

Notwithstanding such criticism, a critical part of the LMD system is to be able to compare the performance of universities in Algeria against common agreed criteria. These processes would establish a deepening commitment to quality across higher Education systems while providing benchmarks at an international level. This would equip our universities to position themselves as equal players in a globalizing market. The purpose would be to raise the status of Higher Education in Algeria to a global scale by competing against international counterparts. Furthermore, the risk of brain drain may be exacerbated by cross-border mobility. Developed countries may attract high skilled students and workers under the new norms and priorities of the country. All in all, the issue described in this paper outside the purview of the Higher Education sector is beyond the scope of the strategy presently adopted as far as the LMD system is concerned. Moreover, it may become a priority challenge that will need to be tackled by educators and stakeholder alike. This may imply that various organisations of Higher Education will need to play an active role in developing complementary strategies to assure

the success of cross-border mobility in Algeria's Higher Education.

Conclusion

There has been a widespread agreement that provision of quality in Higher Education is a key factor in national development and knowledge economy. Of equal importance is the crucial role of higher Education in the socio-economic and political development of Algeria. Thus, investment within universities is vital. Cross-border education has a significant role to play in encouraging mobility of students while being a vehicle for capacity building strategy.

However, discussing and initiating processes are exponentially easier than sustaining them and driving them to conclusion. To avoid this coming pitfall in the Algerian context, a comprehensive long-term strategy is required. On the other hand, some strategies create unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved within identified time frames. Therefore, a careful balance will need to be struck between these two problems. Within a conceptual platform in mind, Algeria may stay in the race of the most challenging expectations of the twenty-first century.

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