

Evaluation Practices and the LMD

Rekia BOUROUMI
Université de Saida

Abstract

Les réformes de l'éducation en Algérie semble être très fidèle aux traditions. Même au niveau du Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de Recherche, les nouvelles «choses» sont toujours faites selon les vieilles méthodes. Malheureusement, tel est le cas du système LMD adopté récemment dans nos établissements d'enseignement supérieur, une réforme qui fais en fait, et sans doute, face à de grands obstacles, en particulier avec (1) l'absence totale du mécanisme d'évaluation et de réorientation des projets et avec (2) les solutions improvisées et mises en œuvre dans le domaine. Parmi les atouts de ce nouveau système, il y'a l'évaluation; une évaluation qui doit être effectuée selon les principes inhérents à l'LMD. Toutefois, il n'est pas exagéré de dire que, du moins au niveau de la classe la majorité des enseignants (qui peuvent être une totalité dans certains établissements) n'ont pas encore totalement ou sincèrement intégrer ce nouveau système d'évaluation dans leurs attitudes pédagogiques (profondément ancrées) et leurs pratiques - sans parler d'autres aspects comme l'enseignement, le tutorat ... Le présent document est une tentative d'énumérer quelques-unes des faiblesses dans les «méthodes» d'évaluation les enseignants et de présenter quelques outils qui doivent être effectivement adoptées par les enseignants s'ils veulent sincèrement adhérer à une politique de réforme réussie: (1) le portfolio et (2) l'évaluation des cours par les étudiants.

1. Educational reform in Algeria (Introduction)

Dealing with teaching and learning is often an unsteady and somehow controversial issue. Yet, there is always a necessity to do one's best to reflect on these matters and to undergo some search for Truth. Moreover, change is a natural process and in Education it is more than

necessary for betterment and in a pursuit of good quality standards... However, Reforming within Education in Algeria seems to be very faithful to 'old traditions', and a quick view of the variety of changes that have been introduced into our schools and universities is just enough to prove this.

Granted that it is great and valuable that our government has always been ready to adopt the newest and most up-to-date systems and curricula in a continual attempt to adhere to the most developed countries (Nadia Ahouari Idri; 2010), isn't it sound to bring this into question? For instance, why is reform in our educational system mainly and merely done for the purpose of creating an innovation or for the sake of following the international or global flow? Why don't we try to take / make decisions by learning from old failures through a thorough examination of the SWOT² of either an already applied or a new / reforming project, for the purpose of 'doing things' as they should be done, that's on the basis of scientific foundations? Why is the piloting phase of any project or reform always neglected and experience drawn from it never considered by the next implementers? And why is Evaluation always absent, starting from the skeptical undesired -to some- or hopeful -to others- genesis till the unsuccessful withdrawal or sheer abandon of our educational programmes?

² "...SWOT analysis ... involves examination of a language programme's internal *strengths* and *weaknesses* in addition to external *opportunities* and *threats* to the existence or successful operation of the language programme." (Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics; p488)

2. LMD and evaluation

Theoretically, the sound planning / design of any educational curriculum or programme must be a process of 'study-develop-implement-evaluate' phases. No doubt, Evaluation serves as an invaluable tool; it must be conducted not only to assess the weaknesses and strengths of the programme, but most importantly to assist both teachers and students by determining the impact and effectiveness of their performances in the programme.

Nonetheless, it is too apparent that even at the level of the Ministry of Higher Education and **Research**, new 'things' are still done in the same old 'ways'; thus making the most efficiently planned reform/ project bound to failure in practice. Unfortunately, this is the case of the recently adopted *LMD System* in our Higher Education institutions. It is true that entrusting the responsibility of initiating the change to first the teachers themselves and, even more than that: empowering the academics to plan the curriculum is a valuable change in our Higher Education System: a change towards less centralisation and more autonomy, less top-down reformation and more bottom –up initiatives (Miliani,M; 2003), and less 'amateurism' to more expertise and professionalism. Yet this is not enough, neither theoretically nor in practice. Reforming must be done according to sound principles and this has to be firmly ensured by the system firstly and ultimately, but it must also be seriously observed by the advocates of the LMD and precisely the academics who have endowed themselves with the responsibility of initiating this reform. Truly, if they want to take in an informed and principled action, so as to guarantee the

success of *'their'* projects, they are to reconsider deeply their plans and integrate the mechanism of project evaluation, i.e. to cater for a systematic evaluation of not only the subjects and their contents but the teaching and learning practices as well as the extra-curricular activities.

Nevertheless, Professionalism and the Scholarship of teaching put a heavy burden on the shoulders of every academic taking part in this process of change. It is true that we are all observing, reflecting and judging, but this is not enough to take action because if we want our attitudes and decisions to be justified and valuable, they have to be first well-informed and then they must be supported by more reliable and valid sources of evidence. Therefore, every teacher – as a member of the Higher Education Community- should think and act as a *researcher* in his field and put into question his/her teaching and assessment practices.

It should be -and it is- continuously stressed that the success of the LMD –and this is true for any other educational project- requires coherence between the philosophy, purpose and objectives of the project and the teachers'/ educators' beliefs, attitudes and practices. Hence, the lack of understanding –not to say the misunderstanding- of the assets of the LMD especially on the part of those implementing it , that's to say instructors or teachers in the classroom, will undoubtedly engender drastic results simply because this

will certainly- but not only- engender a lack of *curriculum alignment*³.

Undoubtedly, the LMD reform nationwide is already facing great obstacles; this is natural for any new project; however, with (1) the total absence of the mechanism of projects' evaluation and reorientation that should have been inherent from the start in the plan of the project and with (2) the improvised solutions that are being implemented in the field, these 'natural obstacles/drawbacks' are snowballing on the road of failure, withdrawal or abandon -as the 'traditions' dictate - unless we start working as a real pedagogical *team*, that's all of us doing our best and pulling towards improvement, success and good quality. Hence, cooperation, exchange of experiences and sharing competences are now fundamental prerequisites, especially if we want to confute the firm theory that educational projects in Algeria fail because of the poor implementation, tokenism or dereliction of duty.

3. LMD and continual assessment

Actually, as a member of the community concerned with and for the success of the LMD reform, it's my belief that all of us: our institutions - as luminous sources of Knowledge and Research- and ourselves - as professionals, scholars and 'field officers'- have to coordinate and issue recommendations that are valuable for practice. First, let's start on common grounds and real and declared facts. In one of her articles, Nadia Idri

³ "...the extent to which the different elements of the curriculum (goals, syllabus, teaching, assessment) match." (Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics; p139-140)

(2005), presenting a brief study about the piloting application of the LMD in the University of Bejaia⁴, (2004-2005) asserted:

"The evaluation system during the last year was not homogeneous as teachers use different evaluation techniques where a learner obtained very elevated marks in one subject and very an extremely poor outcome in another. This caused even a great debate and discussion." (IDRI N:2005; p8)

Unfortunately, this has always been the case within our higher education institutions: and it is worse when it is about teachers of the same subject to different groups. Nevertheless, this was not exactly the case of the teachers within my department, the English Department of Saida University. During the previous semester of the first year of the LMD implementation, all teachers adopted the same techniques of evaluation for all groups and all subjects! A brief survey was conducted about the tools of assessment the teachers of first year LMD used for the attribution of the Continual Assessment mark / grade (Control Continue) to their students. For all subjects, it revealed the following results as summarized in Table1:

⁴ Together with the University of Canstantine and the University of Mostaghanem

Criteria for Evaluation				Number of teachers (%)
Written test(s)	Participation	Attendances	Oral Quiz	
+	-	-	-	1(10%)
-	+	+	-	1(10%)
+	+	-	-	4(40%)
+	+	+	-	3(30%)
+	+	-	+	1(10%)

Table1: Evaluation Techniques used by Teachers to Attribute Continual Assessment Grade

All of the teachers adopted participation, attendances or written / oral tests as the only criteria/ techniques for evaluating the 1st year LMD students, just the same method they are/were used to. None of the surveyed teachers concerned with Continual Assessment adopted or even thought –for a variety of reasons- about another means for evaluation, or even questioned the adequacy of their 'old ways' to the new reform. Isn't there a mismatch or more technically a lack of curriculum alignment between the teachers' actual evaluation practices and the LMD philosophy and principles? Aren't the teachers using the same old wrong techniques for the new system? Aren't they still focusing on the wrong 'criteria / objects to be evaluated? Shouldn't they –within the Continual Assessment at least - deal more with certain "multidimensional competences" ⁵ ?

⁵ Miliani, M (Call for papers of the seminar) "les compétences multidimensionnelles prédéfinies dans les offres de formation LMD "

Therefore, there is no doubt that the majority of teachers (who may be a totality in some institutions) are not yet fully or sincerely integrating the new evaluation system into their deeply entrenched pedagogical attitudes and practices – let alone other aspects like teaching, lecturing, tutoring... Assessment has always been considered as only a purpose (to give/get a grade) and it is time for it to be a means. It should become a tool in the hands of educators to both inform and guide their instruction and in the hands of students to inform and guide their learning. The teachers' attitudes and practices towards evaluation and assessment are not yielding: neither to their teaching nor to their students' learning. Basically, there is a distinction between summative and formative evaluation: the former is a means to administrative decision-making; the latter focuses on using evaluative information to improve performance; so what does our evaluation actually aim at and what role should it ideally play, precisely within the LMD? In fact, only the knowledge about and the actual use of adequate assessment tools can allow the teacher to determine which instructional strategies are effective and which need to be modified, and only through a clear idea about the role and efficiency of evaluation that both teachers and students can make of it the means to an *autonomous and life-long learning and success*, an ultimate goal in the LMD.

Moreover, and regardless of the reasons behind these actual weaknesses – reasons that may range from personal 'beliefs' or a Culture of Indifference to bureaucratic overburdening or tokenism or to simply a

lack of time and management skill-, it is only by adopting the *Proper Attitude* towards assessment and evaluation that both teachers and students will restore the "*principles related to **Validity and Fairness**, to **Reliability**, to **Significance**, and to **Efficiency***" (William Badders ; 2008) around which assessment revolves.

Granted that issues about assessment and evaluation have always been a missing ingredient in faculty development programmes, the issues of why, how, and what we, as teachers, assess in our classrooms are of a great priority and a major challenge in the LMD reform. As educators we have to change our ideas about what constitutes exemplary assessment that aims at more learning on the part of students and on us; we have to recognize that empowering our students with a higher-order thinking and problem solving requires a revamp in our attitudes towards curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In reality, and it is not exaggerated to say that we, the teachers, with our wrong and uninformed evaluation approach constitute a real menace to the success of the new reform:

"Furthermore, our apprehension facing the LMD system is justified by the fact that it is easier to change laws than attitudes, and reform is only achieved by persons who are to implement it."⁶

⁶ in The statement of the problem of the NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON "PROMISES AND CHALLENGES OF THE ALGERIAN UNIVERSITY AFTER THE FIVE-YEAR LMD REFORM" April 11th and 12th, 2011 DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE CALL FOR PAPERS FERHAT ABBAS UNIVERSITY, SETIF

Thanks to the easy and cheap availability of information and most importantly to the increased interest in evaluation and quality assurance issues, there is a wealth of assessment methods used in higher education to assess students' achievements and to assist them in their life-long learning. The only question to ask is 'How to choose?' Unfortunately the criterion has generally been 'the easiest and the least costing in terms of time and effort for both teacher and student'! However, assessment should be done on the basis of which is the most effective to assess the objectives of the subject / the learning outcomes. In addition, the choice of assessment techniques should be aligned with the overall aims of the LMD reform which entails, for instance, to include the development of skills, such as critical thinking or problem solving and to support the development of competencies, such as team skills. The LMD is not only about some new subjects and new names for others, or only about innovative contents... It is also about a transformation and enhancement of some pedagogical attitudes and practices in Higher Education. The classroom experience has to be transformed in profound ways; this transformation necessarily involves both students and teachers.

4. Some good practice

It is my strong belief that Assessment is a process of observing and measuring learning. It should provide us as faculty members and educators with a better understanding of what students are learning and as for

our students it should engage them more deeply in the process of learning (Mark Wilson and Kathryn Sloane;2000). Adopting the Proper Attitude should certainly begin with having a clearer vision about our mission as academics. Hence, our ultimate purpose is to reestablish good practices in our Higher Education institutions by firstly getting rid of the old "assessment strategies" so that both teachers and students fully integrate into the assessment process within the LMD.

A. The Portfolio

The *student's portfolio* is one of the most valuable types or strategies for assessment; it is certainly the one that actively engages students in the learning and assessment processes. Basically, a portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas of the curriculum. Although approaches to portfolio development may vary, all of the major research and literature on portfolios reinforce the following characteristics (George, Paul s. 1995):

- Portfolios clearly reflect the stated learning outcomes (declared in the curriculum)
- Portfolios focus upon "students' performance-based learning experiences as well as their acquisition of key knowledge, skills and attitudes
- Portfolios contain samples of work that stretch over a period of time rather than a single point in time
- Portfolios can monitor the student's learning from a diagnostic pre-assessment of his/her knowledge and/or skills to the final conferencing session and mark attribution
- But most importantly, portfolios include and provide the teacher's feedback which is an essential element of the

reflective process as students need to make sense of this feedback and apply it to their learning in order to maximize performance in the future.

Hence opting for the portfolio is opting for a process that guides and directs further learning for both students and teachers and provides additional opportunities for them to learn. Moreover, and in addition to its great potential advantages, this assessment tool is more likely to be coherent with the goals and objectives of the LMD reform that encourage self-directed learning and foster learning for and about learning.

Nevertheless, portfolios are not widely adopted or feared because of their numerous disadvantages: time and effort consuming, challenging to evaluate mainly because the content may vary widely among students, the establishment of reliable and valid grading criteria (especially when teachers vary) is likely to be difficult... However, all these can be overcome or minimized if teachers are careful to issues like having portfolios submitted before the end of the course, like developing specific, measurable criteria so as to save time (in the form of checklists, for instance); like developing rubrics to ensure consistency between different teachers of the same course (Morningside College; 2006) and many others.

Going beyond a "lip service" approach to providing learning experiences for colleagues based on theoretical research, and personal reflections and practice, I have been using the portfolio in students' evaluation or for the purpose of attributing the TD mark (within the Classical System) for years now. Though tiring and time consuming, I consider it an enjoyable and rewarding technique especially when I see the contempt and

satisfaction of my students whether they got the best marks that can reach 19⁷ or - more astonishingly- or got less than 5 because they are convinced about their efforts and their real level which is undoubtedly represented by their whole-year productions. But more than this, I am satisfied because before being granted a final mark, students have many opportunities to practice, to improve and to learn; truly, the portfolio assisted me to promote my students' self-evaluation, reflection and critical thinking. I have not yet come to a final representation or picture about the content, the means and the criteria for evaluation used in my own version of the portfolio but as long as I am aware about the purpose and objectives, things are improving. Every year I am learning more from theory and from practice about the actual value and potential promises of this assessment tool and of course I am encouraged to go on thanks to my students' feedback. Therefore, I invite my colleagues who have not yet experienced this assessment technique to reconsider their classroom assessment, to attempt assessing right by starting with a well informed professional understanding, toward a better practice for improving our students' learning.

Assessment is broadly defined , in educational contexts, as " *...the process of observing learning; describing, collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting information about a student's or one's own learning.* "

⁷ Some of my colleagues may reject the attribution of such high grades as they adopt the roof of 15/16 but as long as the student's production applies to the already set criteria and purpose of the evaluation and the student knows clearly what he has to produce why not?

(Mark Wilson and Kathryn Sloane; 2000) Moreover, every effective teacher is certainly learning from every experience in the field of teaching and research through his ongoing observations, reflections, experimentations, readings... but how many of us are collecting and recording this lore?

Basically, the *teacher's portfolio* is a collection of work representing the teacher's professional experiences, competencies, and growth. Apart from providing a holistic view, it develops reflective thinking as the teacher continuously reconsiders and reflects on his/her own performance (teaching) and his/her students' learning. It collects educational experiences and organizes them through documents in a logical manner with the inclusion of reflections and explanations on issues of interest to the teacher (Hani A. Weshah; 2010). Therefore, and so as not to be overwhelmed and absorbed by change –and to keep things under control- the teacher's portfolio is the perfect tool that will assist teachers in assessing and improving their teaching practices within the LMD as it will include not only the necessary information they collect –in an attempt to better understand the reform- but all their experiences, reflections, plans and expectations –be it for personal reference or to share with colleagues in the pedagogical *team*.

B. The Students' Subject / Course Evaluation

In addition to the portfolio, this assessment tool provides important input to the process by which teachers and course / programme implementers develop and improve their teaching; it empowers them with continuous support

to make informed decisions so as to meet quality standards. Its purpose is to collect, analyze and act on relevant data to continuously improve teaching. Course evaluation data can be collected with various techniques: course evaluation questionnaires, exit surveys, students' complaints register, structured interviews and focus groups... It is ideally done on an annual basis.

" Subject Evaluation system is an important tool that helps improve teaching and learning at the Institute. Student feedback assists: (a) Instructors - to modify and improve the approach, pedagogy, and content of the subject for the future ; (b) Departments - to evaluate faculty for promotion and tenure, gather data for accreditation, and make curricular changes; (c) Other students - to guide them in their subject selections."

⁸(Bold mine)

However, and so as to ensure effectiveness and validity of evaluation, there must be a mechanism or unit within the LMD Domain plan for this purpose. Yet, and waiting for the day when online data collection method would be possible, the most suitable tool is printed papers or face-to-face interviews; but in any case, this should be done not by the teacher of the course but by a colleague or an administrative assistant. When any issue requiring improvement is identified, an action plan should be adopted by the teacher/instructor.

Ideally, these steps are eventually planned and implemented within higher education institutions performing good teaching and training practices in educational programmes by an 'academic planning and

⁸ <http://web.mit.edu/subjectevaluation/evaluate.html>

research unit' which not only provides questionnaires but also extracts and analyses the data collected, provides a course evaluation report and deliver it to a nominated committee that delivers recommendations for improvement. As far as our institutions are concerned, change is certainly coming and a day when all this would be possible is very close due to the worldwide quality assurance movement ; then, it will be a necessary and required tool for internal use -by the teaching staff- and external use -by accreditation and quality assurance agencies. Meanwhile -waiting for that day- it is the teacher's individual responsibility, and it would rather be a better and more effective strategy to have a team-work / unit consisting of at least teachers of the same subject and a specialist in evaluation.

Personally, though in a smaller scale, this tool is certainly part of my modules' evaluation (and examinations'). I consider it precious as it guides my choice of content, procedures, activities and above all ensures a good rapport with my students (at least a majority because you cannot please everyone) who certainly care about those who care about them.

5. Conclusion: Seeing the big picture

Eventually, both students and their teachers have to change their attitudes so as to fully and successfully integrate in the ongoing process of worldwide educational reforms and innovations because the matter goes beyond a shallow application or a slavish adoption of the LMD programmes. Hence, if any change has to occur in attitudes, it has to start with deep reconsideration of opinions and beliefs. Furthermore, and going beyond

the issue of assessment, the heart of the issue is actually that most of us teachers and our students have stopped at some first stage of our "development / improvement stairs": as for teachers, how many of us have gone beyond the "developing survival skills" phase in 'the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and knowledge and examining his or her teaching systematically'⁹? And as for students, how many of them do not view learning as simply and exclusively a recalling of facts and assessment as a regurgitation of these facts?

To sum up, we have to try to answer a big question: 'How can we ensure the success of the LMD in the Algerian context?' Well, the answer is not simple, but from the perspective of evaluation and assessment, the answer is clear and precise: first, we as reform implementers should render efficient and effective the mechanism of evaluation in the process of reformation, and second, we as professional academics, instructors and mentors should revamp our old practices, and adopt the Proper Attitude to be good models to our students so as to affect their attitudes and transform them from assessment-led to learner-led students and make of them and ourselves successful life-long learners.

Finally, I believe that we should view the LMD as an opportunity for change and reformation in the Culture that prevails within our campuses: Start CARING and SHARING and BE ENGAGED INTO A POSITIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY.

⁹ Richards, Jack C. & Schmidt, R. with Kendricks, H. & Kim, Y. (2002 ;542)

References:

- Alabi, A.O. and Emmanuel Alayande ; 2010; "Effective Planning as a Factor of Educational Reform and Innovation in Nigeria" in Current Research Journal of Social Sciences 2(6): 316-321, © Maxwell Scientific Organization, (Submitted date: September 15, 2010 Accepted date: November 05, 2010 Published date: December 20, 2010)
- Badders, William ; 2008 ; "Methods of Assessment" .Downloaded from <http://www.eduplace.com/science/profdev/articles/badders.html>
- George, Paul S., (1995). What Is Portfolio Assessment Really and How Can I Use It in My Classroom? Gainesville, FL: Teacher Education Resources.
- Hani A. Weshah; (2010) "Issues of Developing a Professional Teaching Portfolio in Jordan" in European Journal of Social Sciences – Volume 15, Number 1
- HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALGERIA Web site: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/>
- Idri N. (2005). The LMD System Experience as a Struggle between the Educational Development and Reform: An Analytical Study of the Endeavour of the Academic Year 2004/2005 in Bejaia University with Suggested Solutions. Rencontres Internationales sur le Dispositif LMD –Problèmes et Perspectives 4-5 Dec, 2005, Université de Bejaia; <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
- Idri, Nadia Ahouari (Posted on March 10, 2010 at 11:54am); "Algeria and Educational Development; the LMD System as an Algerian Step towards Globalization in Higher Education" ; downloaded from <http://www.futureofeducation.com/profiles/blogs/algeria-and-educational>
- Miliani, M (2003) "Student curriculum counselling , the weakest link in EFL syllabi" in Revue Maghrebine des Langues. Oran: Editions Dar El Gharb
- Morgan, Chris (1999); Adapted by Lee Dunn : "Selecting methods of assessment" from Southern Cross University, New South Wales, Australia. (Unpublished material for Southern Cross University booklet 'Assessing Students') ;; Downloaded from http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/2_learnth/methods.html

Morningside College, Assessment Handbook ; Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Assessment Methods .
<http://www.morningside.edu/academics/research/assessment/documents/advantagesdisadvantages.pdf>, March 2006) Downloaded on 1-1-2011 from
http://www.uta.edu/irp/unit_effectiveness_plans/assets/AssessMethods.pdf
 Paulson, F.L. Paulson, P.R. and Meyer, CA. (1991, February). "What Makes a Portfolio a Portfolio?" Educational Leadership, pp. 60-63. Downloaded from
<http://www.pgcps.pg.k12.md.us/~elc/portfolio.html>
 Race, P (1998) *The Lecturer's Toolkit* 2nd Edition London: Kogan Page Ltd
 Richards, Jack C. & Schmidt, R. with Kendricks, H. & Kim, Y. ; 2002 (3rd Ed.) ;Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics; Pearson Education Limited (1st Ed. 1985)
 Stiggings, Richards; Judy Arter; Jan Chappuis, and Steve Chappuis, Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing it Right-Using it well; Copyright 2004 by Assessement Training Institute : Downloaded from www.assessmenttinst.com
 Texas Christian University; Office for Assessment & Quality Enhancement; " Assessment and Quality Enhancement for Institutional Effectiveness at TCU"; www.assessment.tcu.edu
 Wilson, Mark and Kathryn Sloane; 2000; "From Principles to Practice:An Embedded Assessment System" in APPLIED MEASUREMENT IN EDUCATION, 13(2), 181-208 Copyright © 2000 Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Downloaded from
<http://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/assessment/index.html>
<http://web.mit.edu/subjectevaluation/evaluate.html>

CV

Rekia BOUROUMI
 Section d'Anglais
 Université d'Oran
 Email: abouroumi@yahoo.com