

## LANGUAGE POLICY IN ALGERIA: AN OUTLOOK INTO REFORMS

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### Abstract:

The query of language education policies in Algeria appears to be among the most crucial issues involved in current language research. It is believed that Algeria absorbed heavy colonial impact not only in its social life but also in its educational policy. The present paper attempts to deeply describe foreign language policy in Algerian education in general and at higher education in particular after the adaptation of the LMD system.

**Keywords:** Foreign language policy - Algeria - reforms - LMD.

## سياسة اللغات في الجزائر: نظرة شاملة حول الإصلاحات

### الملخص:

يعد البحث في سياسات تعليم اللغة في الجزائر من بين أهم القضايا التي تنطوي عليها الأبحاث الحالية. استوعبت الجزائر تأثيراً استعمارياً كثيفاً ليس فقط في حياتها الاجتماعية ولكن أيضاً في سياستها التعليمية ، يظهر هذا التأثير من خلال الإصلاحات المتنوعة التي مست القطاعات التعليمية . تحاول هذه الورقة وصف سياسة تعليم اللغة الأجنبية بشكل عميق في الجزائر بشكل عام وفي التعليم العالي على وجه الخصوص خاصة بعد اعتماد نظام (LMD).

الكلمات المفتاح : سياسة اللغات الأجنبية - الجزائر - الإصلاحات - LMD.

## POLITIQUE LINGUISTIQUE EN ALGÉRIE: NOUVELLE PERSPECTIVE DE RÉFORMES

### Résumé:

La question des politiques d'enseignement des langues en Algérie est l'une des questions les plus cruciales de la recherche actuelle. La colonisation a eu un très grand impact sur l'Algérie non seulement sur le plan social mais aussi sur le plan éducatif. Le présent article tente de décrire en profondeur la politique linguistique dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères en Algérie en général et dans l'enseignement supérieur en particulier après l'adoption du système LMD.

**Mots clés:** Politique des langues étrangères - Algérie - réformes - LMD.

## Introduction

The query of language education policies in Algeria appears to be among the most crucial issues involved in language research. It is a fact that Algeria absorbed heavy colonial impact not only in its social life but also in its educational policy. The French controlled all aspects of life, namely government, business, economy and education for around 132 years. French imperialism tried to follow the policy of removing Algerian cultural identity and moulding it along French lines. The results of this colonial policy, which continued to exist even after independence, have perhaps been one of the most evident impacts on the current Algerian educational system.

The Algerian educational system has been influenced, according to Benrabah (2007:225-226), by three main phases as explained in the following table:

**Table 1.** The Algerian Educational System

Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Characterized by the colonial legacies	The late 1960s to the late 1990s	Began in the early 2000s
A network of schools and an educational system dominated by the French language with Arabic growing steadily in importance.	Corresponded to the socialist-era central planning economy, called the nationalist transition. The Arabic language was gradually imposed in the educational sector.	Corresponding to the transition to the free economic market with less assertive arabisation policies. During this phase, the authorities have encountered hostility to the reform of the schooling system

Based on the three phases, it would be reasonable to examine the shift in the Algerian educational system. After independence, in 1962, Algeria has resisted a number of colonial attempts, whether culturally, politically or educationally. This resistance is explained by the power of Islam and Arabic stated by (Gordon, 1966: 137, in Benrabah (2007:229): "*Islam and the Arabic language were effective forces of resistance against the attempt of the colonial regime to depersonalise Algeria*".

Ahmed Ben Bella (1916-2012) the first president of Independent Algeria (1963-1965), instigated "*the policy of linguistic arabisation in primary schools*" Benrabah (2007:229) and later he stated that "*Literary Arabic was to be introduced to the educational system*" (Grandguillaume, 2004: 27). Besides, religious lessons and civics were supplemented on top of this. (Grandguillaume, 2004: 27). The Second president was Houari Boumediene (1931-1978). During his presidency (1965-1978), arabisation achieved great attention, although it had no clear future, and this is well-explained by the declaration made by his first Minister of Education, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi: "*This [arabisation]*

*will not work, but we have to do it...*" (Grandguillaume, (1995: 18). Strangely enough, the arabisation process was gradually narrowed in 1977, when Mostefa Lacheraf was appointed Minister of Education. He believed that: "*French could serve as a 'reference point, a 'stimulant' that would force the Arabic language 'to be on the alert' (Berri, 1973: 16).*" In 1979, Mohamed Cherif Kharroubi was appointed as Minister of Primary and Secondary Education. His major achievement was the establishment of French as the first foreign language in the fourth primary school grade and English as the second foreign language in the eighth middle school grade.

Despite the fact that French was still considered as a cultural necessity until the late seventies, the Arabic language was steadily imposed in the educational sector. Besides, in spring 2001, a period of riot broke out in the Kabylie area where demands calling for the recognition of Berber culture and of Tamazigh as an official language were renewed. Hence, Tamazigh was officially recognized as a national language and was inserted in the Algerian educational system as well. As clarified by the Permanent Committee of Geographical Names PCGN (2003:6):

*By way of response, Bouteflika recognised Tamazigh as a national language in a constitutional amendment of February 2002, amending Ordinance N° 35/76 of the 1976 constitution. Tamazigh became an accepted language in Algeria's educational system at all levels, and the Amazigh cultural dimension of all subjects was to be respected.*

From another angle, the socioeconomic situation turned to be opened to more worldwide connections, and thus, French domination was lessened due to the urgent need to use English as a means of communication in a would-be globalised Algeria. In this sense, Mami (2013: 243) believes that: "*disparities in the use of French started to fade away at the cross-roads leaving more space to the teaching of English as a second foreign language*". And this is a shared belief by Miliani (2000:13):

*In a situation where the French language has lost much of its ground in the sociocultural and educational environments of the country; the introduction of English is being heralded as the magic solution to all possible ills including economic, technological and education ones.*

Thus, the major target was to establish an educational system personalized to the needs of Algeria's population. Therefore, in a step towards internationalisation, it was thought by the Algerian government in the late 1980s to introduce English as a subject at the primary level instead of French. As stated by the British Council (2010:13):

*It was felt that English as a historically neutral language in the Algerian context would be able to play the modernising role that was hoped for from French but without the colonialist and non-Islamic associations that French had.*

Oddly enough, this fundamental suggestion was not really put into practice and the experience was failed to a certain extent. By the mid 2000, Algerian educational system was subject to a number of reforms and adopted a series of changes to develop not only the structure of the educational system but also the outcomes. With the advance of Information and Communication Technologies in this globalised age, the introduction of English into schools became more necessary than ever.

### **EDUCATION AND ELT IN ALGERIA**

Mapping the linguistic situation in Algeria, one would rank Algeria under the heading of “*linguistic plurality (or diversity)*” (Medjahed, 2011:73). Classical Arabic is used as the national language in the media, while Algerian Colloquial Arabic and Berber are spoken in informal daily life situations. Because of historical reasons, French is used as a second language or as a first foreign language. English, on the other hand, is considered as a foreign language or as a second foreign language; unlike French, it is not socially used.

Therefore, notwithstanding all reasons, English imposes itself as an international language which has been widely used for years and for different purposes, and implicitly becoming part of the Algerian sociocultural sphere. Seeing that the value of English is increasing day by day in different forms and in different contexts, awareness of its importance is of great interest, and it is currently taught in Algerian middle, secondary schools and most Algerian universities.

Admittedly, the National Curriculum considers that the ability to communicate in English is regarded as part of the core competences students should acquire in their educational career, in a way to partake in the country’s global economy and operate effectively in the social and cultural environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as responsible citizens. The curriculum stipulates that our EFL students are supposed to be taught the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in an integrated way, so that they can improve their whole range of skills.

### **ELT Process Development**

As schools of thought have come and gone, the Algerian educational framework has witnessed a slow but deliberate shift and progress regarding its curriculum development and teaching methodologies. A number of reforms have been introduced to prepare students to take part in the economic growth of the country, in the light of intensive modern research and on-going globalization process. The language teaching profession has responded to these challenging changes with methods which reflect the current situation, adopting a new approach namely CBA (Competency-Based Approach).

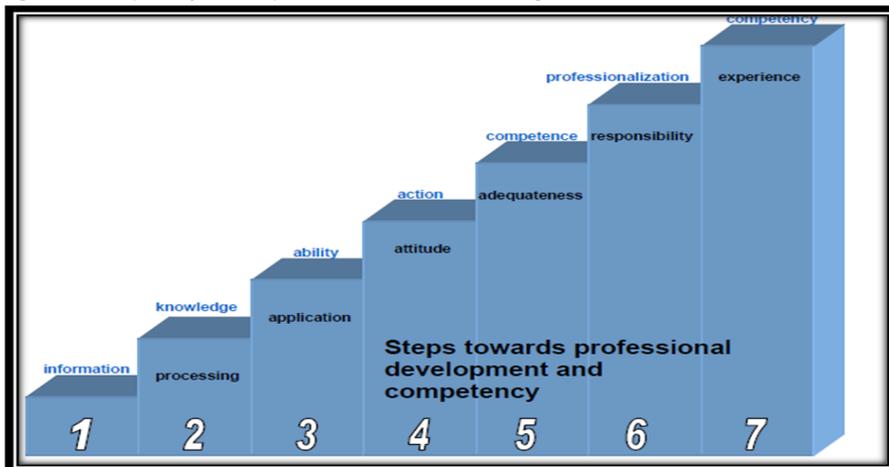
In 2003, EFL teaching methodology swung to using the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) answering the 21st century requirements and coping with this global age. This approach aims at providing students with the knowledge and skills which enable them recognize and solve complex

problems in their fields. It is a specialized and systemic method of organizing skill-specific instructions. In this respect, (Louznadji 2003, Cited in Medjahed 2011:74) defines competence as: *A know-how-to-act process which integrates and mobilises a set of capacities and skills and an account of knowledge that will be used effectively in various problem-solving situations or circumstances that have never occurred before, i.e., a competency continues throughout and beyond the school curriculum.*

Besides, competence is a lively objective feature which is strongly rooted in experience and situational practice. Throughout activities, within a variety of circumstances, a learner constructs competency. Consequently, competency is a realization of a need for self-development.

In an attempt to explain competency development, Schneckenberg and Wildt (2006) provide a ladder process to achieve competency. The process starts with perception of information from the teacher which leads, then, to collecting knowledge by learners to apply it in certain contexts, enhancing the learners' ability. Ability is coupled with specific attitudes which normally prompt action performance through activities. If, at the fifth step, the selected activity is suitable to the target aim, competence may be achieved. Competence therefore, is highly related to the degree of responsibility for the 'product', which will result to professionalism. Through time, learners will experience different situations to finally achieve competency. The ladder process is represented as follows:

**Figure 1.** Competency Development Model (Schneckenberg and Wildt, 2006)



Surprisingly, these principles and aims represent theoretical ends; whereas, in practice, there are a set of shortages and negative aspects regarding its implementation. This implies either that the theoretical suggestions are not applied in the right way or they are inappropriately adapted to the Algerian context. In this vein, Miliani (2010:71) conceives that:

*This new development at school level has generated uneasiness of teachers who are supposed to teach through it but know nearly nothing about it. Furthermore, the textbooks that have been designed along CBA characteristics are posing problems to the teachers who return systematically to their old ways and practices.*

This is a common point of view shared by Tardif (2006; qtd. In Blais & Nguen (2007:224), « *dans la plupart des programmes de formation axés sur le développement de compétences et pour la majorité des compétences ciblées, il n'existe aucun modèle cognitif de l'apprentissage* », i.e., in most teaching programmes under CBA, and for the majority of competences, there exist no cognitive model of learning. (Translation from French to English made by the current author).

Miliani (2010) further narrows down his point of view by asserting that this approach was used for political purposes “*Algeria uses here another ‘fad’ to turn upside down an education system that needs stability*”. He (ibid) also views that even the results of the baccalaureate examination are doubtful, he posits in this context:

*Teachers who have not been really introduced to CBA have acknowledged the fact that pupils’ level is at a record low, and without the ministry’s handling of the baccalaureate examination, the results would have been catastrophic. That is why the Minister of National Education has been accused of developing ‘un bac politique’ to hide the extremely worrying level to which CBA has been of no contribution.*

### **ELT at Middle School Level**

The beginning of the academic year 2002-2003 witnessed the implementation of the newly educational reform and the adaptation of newly designed textbooks for all levels.

**Table 2.** English Coursebooks at Middle School

Year of Study	Textbook	N of hours/week
1st year : première année Moyenne 1 <sup>o</sup> A.M	Spotlight on English	3hours
2 <sup>nd</sup> year : deuxième année Moyenne 2 <sup>o</sup> A.M:	The Second English Coursebook	3hours
3rd year : troisième année Moyenne 3 <sup>o</sup> A.M:	Spotlight on English	3hours
4th year : quatrième année Moyenne 4 <sup>o</sup> A.M:	On the Move	3hours

During the four years of instruction, the Ministry of National Education in its revised version of the syllabus states that learners must receive the basic knowledge required to acquire a reasonable command of the basic structure of English. Evidently, the curriculum is based on CBA. It is meant to

develop language awareness and skills; in addition to this, it is defined so as to develop learners' team work and collaboration through projects where learners are supposed to work together, discussing and solving language problems. This will lead them to use and enhance their speaking capacities and strategies. The programme also is rich in terms of amusing activities and units.

The ministry of education put forward three broad objectives to the newly adopted teaching methodology, namely linguistic, methodological and cultural. They are put as follows:

**Table 3.** Middle School Curriculum Objectives

Adapted from "Guidelines for Teachers of English in Charge of 3<sup>rd</sup> AM Classes"

Linguistic	Methodological	Cultural
<p>The syllabus aims at consolidating and developing:</p> <p><b>Grammar:</b> the learners will be trained in discovering the rules of English.</p> <p><b>Phonetics:</b> improving the pronunciation and intonation.</p> <p><b>Vocabulary:</b> increasing the learner's stock of lexical words.</p> <p><b>The four skills:</b> more training in listening, speaking, reading and writing aiming at communication &amp; interaction in a free and creative way.</p>	<p>Promoting the pupils' learning strategies aiming at autonomy.</p> <p>Making the pupils acquire methods for working and thinking.</p> <p>Getting pupils acquire strategies of self-evaluation.</p> <p>Getting pupils to be able to exploit various documents and feel interested in subjects that are not dealt with in class</p>	<p>Making the pupil open up his mind through discovering the context of English civilization and culture. Thus, there is a necessity to:</p> <p>Identify the pupils' real needs.</p> <p>Regard English as a real tool of communication.</p> <p>Develop oral communication ( listening and speaking) and written Communication (reading and writing)</p> <p>Set up situations of real communication.</p> <p>Choose topics according to pupils' age and interests.</p> <p>Focus on the pupil (pupil-centred teaching).</p> <p>Use suitable teaching aids.</p>

#### ELT at Secondary School Level

After completing four years of English in the middle school, learners are supposed to be familiar with a basic knowledge of English. At the secondary level, learners are introduced to the four skills,

grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, language functions and forms in addition to phonology. The programme is believed to offer activities to stimulate and develop learners' competencies. One of the major goals of this newly-adopted system is to make both the teacher and the learner come to a fruitful interaction. The following table illustrate the textbooks within the three years of instruction:

**Table 4.** English Coursebooks at Secondary School

Year of Study	Textbook	N of hours/week
Secondary Education Year1: 1 <sup>o</sup> A.S:	<i>At the Crossroads</i>	3hours
Secondary Education Year2: 2 <sup>o</sup> A.S:	<i>Getting Through</i>	3hours
Secondary Education Year3: 3 <sup>o</sup> A.S:	<i>New Prospects</i>	3hours

The new curriculum uses different teaching material and interactive activities, like proverbs and sayings, jokes and games, portfolios and self-assessment, accompanied with pictures and illustrations. As far as speaking is concerned, the course books pay considerable attention to the oral skills. This includes a set of activities and integrative tasks which are intended to foster in the learners a number of abilities such as listening for details, for gist, developing awareness to specific features in English pronunciation, paying attention to discourse markers/sequencers when listening to a lecture, a report etc... These accuracy tasks and activities are usually performed individually, in pairs or in small groups. (Teachers' Book: "*Getting Through*").

#### **Teaching/Learning Difficulties:**

*"Today, if you took an X-ray of the educational dynamics in Algeria one would think straightaway of the word anarchy or unprofessionalism"* Miliani (2010:73)

In order to empower the aforementioned view points, and despite the fact that CBA reflects rich opportunities for learners and teachers alike, a range of shortages have been detected by teachers and educationalists. For instance, Bouabdesselam (2001: 103) believes that:

*The English syllabus in secondary education in Algeria is narrowly defined and restricted to a collection of functions that are randomly selected... however; the major lack of harmony between the various official documents is over the degree of specificity of overall objectives: instructions in the English syllabus are not in harmony with those in New lines and in pedagogical instruction.*

The quality of the resulting design material, as stated by experts was higher in process-oriented worked examples rather than product-oriented worked examples. Amongst these difficulties the following:

- *Overcrowded Classrooms:* The Algerian classroom is generally made up of 30 to 45 pupils sitting in four rows. In this vein, Guerid (1998:14) states: *"Because of the number, teachers are in situations which prevent them from doing their work; the consequence is that the level—inevitably poor—of the receptors, establishes itself to the teacher as the compulsory level of*

*emission*”. Besides, in this situation, problems of discipline will be posed and individualization of language teaching will be difficult if not impossible. The teacher cannot, in all probabilities, manage and control the classroom, as questioned by Krieger (2005: 9): “*What options does a teacher have when his or her high school class consists of H 50 students?*” Teachers’ efforts to organize them and control them always will doom to failure and de-motivation as put by Harmer (1991: 5): “*Classrooms that are badly lit and overcrowded can be excessively de-motivating*”

- *Individual’s Learning Styles and Differences*: Learners learn differently according to their styles and personalities.
- *Teacher Training*: in our educational setting, each teacher relies on his own experience in deciding about the techniques strategies to be applied. Most of them teach the way they have been taught with limited innovation and change.
- *Teaching Materials*: teaching materials are restricted to traditional ones such as the board, the chalk, and the textbook; almost a total absence of audio-visual aids, laboratories and technological tools which may facilitate the learning process and motivate learners.

### **ELT at University Level**

As a result of its importance, English is taught in all Algerian universities and, there is nearly no faculty free from English either in English departments or as ESP teaching in other departments. Like the other educational settings, reforms have been introduced to cope with the current global age, at the university level; the LMD system has been implemented.

### **LMD Implementation: Towards a New Teaching Outlook**

After independence, the Algerian university went through a long journey. Its dramatic changes were meant to meet the needs of the Algerian society and were marked by various reforms. Since then, the contribution of the University to national development has become more crucial than ever.

The higher education system in Algeria is observed to be gradually shifting through different stages punctuated by a series of reforms which attempt to update the educational system according to the socioeconomic, environmental and technological needs of the country. Faced with considerable pressure, it was of great necessity and urgent need to change the Algerian educational system to cope with the expectations of the new directions and global trends of higher education.

Like many countries all over the world, Algeria experienced the policy and principles of the *Bologna Process*, which was launched in 1999 by the Ministers of Education and university leaders of 29 European countries. Its aim was to create a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area (EHEA), its broad target was defined by the European University Association (2004) as: “*The Bologna Process does not aim to harmonise national educational systems but rather to provide tools to connect them*”. Participation in the Bologna Process is a voluntary decision taken by each

country and its higher education community to support the principles underlined in the European Higher Education Area. (European University Association, 2004).

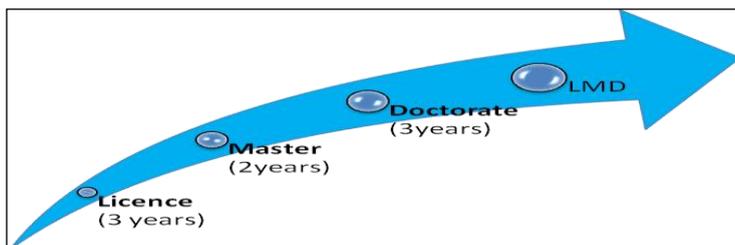
The result of joining this process is the adoption of the LMD principles in the Algerian higher education system. It is worth stating at this level that all participating countries agreed on a three cycle degree system for undergraduates (Bachelor degrees) and graduates (Master and PhD degrees). (European University Association, 2004).

The application of the LMD system in Algeria is regarded as a move towards the ongoing globalisation process since *"this Anglo-Saxon programme has proved its success and it has, more or less, been adopted by most European countries"* (Miliani, 2010:71). Without doubt, the Algerian educational system has become *'obsolete in a world that moves, goes fast and with the everlasting innovations and the necessary changes induced by the digital revolution'* (Haraoubia, Minister of Higher Education, 2007), stated in (Miliani 2010).

### LMD Features and Objectives

It seems appropriate to go through the objectives of this newly adopted system and introduce the three constituent elements of the system. The LMD system is composed of the Licence degree, the equivalence of the BA (Bachelor Degree), with 6 semesters (three years of study) and then a Master degree for two years (4 semesters) and finally, the Doctorate degree for three years of research (6 semesters) as it is shown below:

**Figure2.** LMD Structure



During the "Licence" degree, students are expected to attend 400 hours within six semesters. New modular courses have been added in this stage to allow students have as much choices as possible when moving to the second phase of the system (i.e., the Master Degree).

This system is based on "Teaching Units" which students should accumulate at the end of each semester. Furthermore, "Credits" are elements which mean that if students do not get the needed credits for the first semester, they may pass to the second semester with the credits got in the first. Nonetheless, they remain indebted even if they pass to the second year, thus, they should gather these lacking credits at the end. From another angle, this system is based on a number of novel elements as put in this adopted table:

**Table 5.** LMD System Features and Objectives « Guide d'Information sur le Système LMD, 2005»

Element	Aim
<b>Semestrialisation</b>	For a better organisation and more flexibility in the system, the division is based on semesters rather than years of formation.
<b>Three Teaching Units</b>	<i>The teaching process is based on units:</i> <i>Fundamental/Unit:</i> where the basic subjects are grouped; <i>Methodological/Unit:</i> which is primarily destined to prepare learners to acquire skills in methodology, <i>Discovery Unit:</i> where students can get acquainted to new subjects in new fields.
<b>Credits</b>	Each Teaching Unit corresponds to a number of credits that can be capitalized and transferred.
<b>Domains</b>	They cover many coherent disciplines including other subjects that lead to other specialties and particular options proposed to the students.
<b>Tutoring</b>	This is a new pedagogical activity for the teacher introduced in the LMD system. This element permits a direct relation between the teacher and the student outside the academic sessions, i.e., the teacher-learner interaction becomes easier and closer.

This reform is believed to offer further possibilities and opportunities for students and teachers so that both become involved in training process. The teacher has the opportunity to present training courses based on an active pedagogical panel and the student, on the other hand, has the opportunity to contribute vigorously in his training. Therefore, extra teaching hours are supplemented to the training outside university throughout projects and activities.

If one reflects upon this system in the Algerian educational system, one may find that the Algerian ministry of Higher Education “*had to rely on the innovative methods of the linguistic competence. In order to render the LMD architecture more beneficial, a number of measures have to be adopted at the level of curriculum design and integration*” (Mami, 2013:246). Within this process, achievement may rely on the following perspectives:

- Planning and evaluation of the students’ needs as well as those liaised to the socioeconomic market,

- Developing multimedia at the level of oral expression and vocabulary,
- Encouraging student enhancement with mobility,
- Creating cooperation between universities who share the same objectives and interests.
- Create listening cells and audits in order to register students' propositions.
- Prepare students for vocational education through the choice of English. Mami (2013:246).

Another layer of analysis, the LMD system attempts to attain the following objectives set by the Ministry of Higher Education (2003). These essential principles underline the vision of the task, and they can be summarised as follows:

- Ensure a high teaching quality according to the social demand; in terms of access to higher education;
- Achieve harmony with the socio-economic development in all possible interactions between the university and the world.
- Be more open to the global developments, particularly in science and technology;
- Encourage international cooperation and diversity.
- Lay the foundations of good governance based on participation and consultation.

In contrast, a number of educationalists (Megnounif, 2009; Miliani, 2010; Mami, 2013) consider that this reform is not suitable in the Algerian context. For instance, Miliani (2010:70) believes that: *"So much has been said by the ill-intentioned adversaries, the poorly-informed public, and the badly-trained supporters. So between the rock and the hard place, this reform cannot develop harmoniously"*. Within the same line of thought, Megnounif (2009) assumes that despite the settled ideal objectives, a number of limits are diagnosed:

- Educational programs no longer meet the new socioeconomical demands.
- Training monodisciplinary in 'classical' approach where concept of general culture is completely absent.
- A significant failure rate due primarily to uncertainty about the future among students.
- Lack of motivation among teachers and students.
- Centralized management of the university.

Paradoxically, in an attempt to respond to such claims, Haraoubia (2013), Minister of Higher Education, states: *"those stating that the LMD system has failed, did not understand the real content of this system until today!"*

## Conclusion

As abovementioned, the aim behind changing the system of teaching in our educational system at all levels in general and at university in particular is to create an overall innovation within the Algerian universities and permit learners follow the flow of technological growth to keep pace with the world's educational system.

Algerian reforms are meant to develop and cope with the current developments and achievements throughout all the world, however, an important fact worth considering is related to the quality of instruction and the context for adopting new methods and reforms in education.

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