

International Mobility and Recognition of Diplomas: The Case of the LMD System in Algeria

Mimouna Zitouni^{1, a}, Farida Djaileb^{2, b}

¹University of Oran, Algeria

²University of USTO, Oran, Algeria

^azitouni_mouna@hotmail.fr, ^bfdjaileb@yahoo.fr

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Abstract. This paper sheds the light on the outcomes of the LMD system in Algeria where special emphasis will be put on the problematic issue of international mobility of students favoured by LMD programs. In fact, since the introduction of the three-cycle degree system in 2004, one can notice a re-conceptualization of the Algerian educational system outcomes in the eyes of most students who are interested in international mobility.

After the implementation of the LMD system, most Algerian universities have been awarding LMD diploma to their students. However, in this new context, the challenge for higher education is to do more than satisfy the Algerian labour market, rather to go further by offering a dimension focused on satisfying Algerian students' needs for international mobility and also welcoming qualified foreign labour by recognizing their diplomas.

In this concern, our research will hopefully try to focus on highlighting policy planners and makers' objectives behind operating within such system and see to what extent international mobility and diplomas' recognition is beneficial for the Algerian context nationally and internationally.

1-Introduction

Education is potentially a powerful instrument of both short and long term development, which is alone capable of deciding the fate of labour and economic promotion at all levels. It also serves as cement for the different sectors (economic, touristic, industrial...etc) in search for inter-relational dimensions for prosperity and reliance. The higher educational system in Algeria is no exception. The National Democratic Republic of Algeria, which consists of universities, academies, institutes, and conservatories, is seeking through its efforts in reforming the higher educational system to bring to terrain a well qualified labour so that to reinforce scientific and professional productivity. This article presents an overview on the outcomes of a *new* educational reform in Algeria. It brings to light how much integrating the world most common educational system, that is the LMD system, has re-conceptualised the Algerian educational system in the eyes of most Algerian students. Attention will be given to considering the Algerian educational policy and its outcomes as far as international mobility and recognition of diplomas are concerned.

2-Higher Education Environment after Independence: An Inherited System

In the traditional societies the role of the elite is constituted, according to *Giovani Busino* (1998:32), to guarantee social stability, to elaborate the ways of life, to create and institute values. He (op cit:8) furthermore believes the elite necessary to the construction of the young nations as it plays an important role in elaborating new values and introducing social change.

The elite is then conceived as an agent of change. This explains the reasons why the colonial policy in Algeria, while putting constraints upon the education of the indigenous population to retard or hinder development of the major population, permitted the formation of elite for the purpose of marketing its educational values and system. As the chief director of Bouzareah School admitted in 1908 that it is not by pure generous act that the French university intended to expand education in the Kabyle area. In actual facts, it is in the interest of France, this only interest, which is basically an instrument of authority and influence.

The elite of French language background in Algeria represented the eventual ambassador of the colonial philosophy¹. M. S. Hermassi, (2004: 135) argues, colonialism contributed to isolate the elite by converting it to the French language as a way to preserve its interests after independence .This partly explains the reasons behind the fact that the elite who framed the national movement of liberation insisted upon a parallel traditional educational system to shield the colonial one.

At the dawn of independence, Algeria was confronted to underdevelopment traced back the long period of the French colonialism. It also inherited an alarming illiteracy rate that M. Benoune (2000: 143) ranks to 88%. The very few who constituted the elite belonged to two different schools: the French one, as the majority group, and the Arabo-muslim traditional school, as the minority one. These were to take the reign to rule the country.

In general, Algeria had to undertake a range of activities with extremely limited material and human resources to face all the problems which required instant attention among which higher education.

The objectives of higher education at that time suffered from the enormous social, economic, educational, and financial problems Algeria confronted immediately after independence. Analysing the discrepancy between higher educational policy goals and outcomes, Psacharopoulos argues that the reason of failure is that “ the intended policy was never implemented” and that policies were “vaguely stated” financial implications were not worked out, and policies were based on “good will” rather than on research proven cause effect relationship” (in J. Zajda , 2005: xxiii).

While Emmerij (in J. Zajda, 2005: 5) focuses on the economic impact of education and the school-work issue arguing:

“Education at the policy level should reflect national efforts of a more equal income redistribution and seek to diminish the gap between the ‘world of work’ and ‘the world of school’: one of the main objective of education policy in developing countries should be to inter-relate more closely the world of work and the world of school in order to bring individual aspirations into

¹ Malcoln Pagne (2008:59) observes that colonialism often involves constructing the colonized nation incompletely representing it in terms that the colonizer can understand, and evaluating its culture and civilization according to the colonizer’s values and attitudes. Colonizers use education and cultural experiences to shift the colonized people’s culture and values towards that of the colonized power.

closer harmony with actual opportunities offered by the environment (...) to diminish the gap between the policy and labour-market and employment policies”.

Failure to provide socio-professional chances of promotion for young Algerian university students has paved the terrain for new reflexions and visualization on the outcomes of the current Algerian higher educational policy. However not all blame can be put on the policy engineering of the Algerian authorities. Another not less important and project hindrance problem Algeria confronted has been the illiteracy burden that also puts a brake on the dynamics of development.

A comprehensive renovation of the Algerian higher education and training system was developed in a participatory manner in the seventies and eighties, which led to the vision for long-term expansion of this sector in response to the country's social and economic development requirements. Achievements were to a great extent noticeable but not enough.

3-Educational Policies in Algeria: An Overview

Since independence, the Algerian higher education sector focused its attention on restructuring and planning the higher educational policy of the country and providing qualified labour for the different educational and socio-economic sectors. To this end, different programs have been launched since 1962 where focus was put on encouraging educated Algerians to participate in the revitalization and renovation of the Algerian higher education system.

3.1-Educational Policy in Algeria before 2004

The need of a higher educational policy in Algeria stems first from a historical as well as a nation state building worry and second from the educational situation Algeria inherited as a result of colonization.

The Algerian Higher educational system consists of free and compulsory basic education. Algerian Higher Education developed steadily after independence especially over the past two decades regarding content, programmes, and methods of teaching and learning that affect both quality and quantity. The Ministry of Higher Education oversees and evaluates programs' effectiveness in implementing higher education's vision, mission, and objectives.

Access to higher education in Algeria is opened to holders of a *Baccalaureat* Certificate (a secondary education certificate). Higher education is provided by universities (10 public and 14 private) and by non-university institutions (private and public community colleges).

As a process, the principal objective of the Algerian higher educational system, before 2004, focuses on participating in the overall process of society's development. The Ministry's most focused missions include, among others: improving higher education sector management, improving the quality of higher education environment, enhancing scientific research quality and the role of higher education institutions, and providing national quality data-bases in accordance with international best practices. To achieve these goals, a set of strategies have been developed and approved by the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

3.2-Educational Policy in Algeria after 2004

3.2.1-Planning the LMD Reform in Algeria

Put in plain words, Planning is everywhere and is an absolute necessity. It is a forward looking management process which intends to control the future through present decision taking. Planning is defined as the designing of the desired future and the required means necessary for realization

J.P.Helfer and J.Orsoni (1990: 103). In fact, it concerns all walks of life and aims at creating a new potential to prepare the human and material environment so as to satisfy the planning policy objectives.

In planning the LMD Reform in Algeria nothing was guaranteed. Decision makers did understand that implementing LMD does not excrete all the risks or the future uncertainty; yet a strong will and wish to achieve the desired goals was there. This was apparent throughout the huge work that was undertaken by experts and decision makers at the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education where emphasis was put on the identification of:

- The targets and their feasibility,
- Measurement in relation to past experience ,
- Funding ,
- A scale of priorities ,
- Length,
- Strategies of implementation,
- Evaluation of possible shortcomings and human resources.

3.2.2-The Three-Cycle Degree System in Algeria

Improving the quality of outcomes in the higher education sector has become a key priority for the Algerian's government. To overcome the challenges, the government embarked on a comprehensive reform of the education. In 2004, Algeria joined an in-depth reform of higher education which has previously started in Europe². This reform has been seen by most experts and decision makers as one of the most important pedagogical reforms of Higher education Algeria has ever seen. It is a transition undertaken in compliance with a new law on education. This transition marks the movement from the Traditional/Classical system that is modeled on the French structure to a three-tier system deemed to be more internationally compatible which is the LMD system (Licence, Master, and Doctorat).

- The *licence*, corresponding to three years of study beyond the *baccalauréat* (bac+3);
- The *master*, corresponding to two years further study beyond the *licence* (bac+5);
- The *doctorat*, corresponding to three years of research beyond the *master* (bac+8).

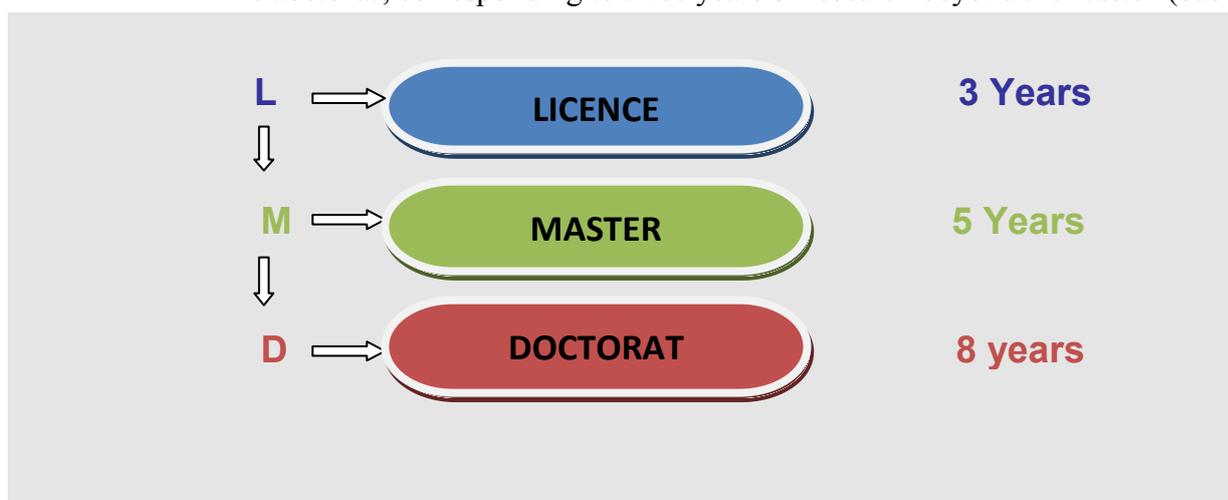


Figure: Organisation of the Three-Cycle Degree System (LMD) in Algeria

² The new degree framework has been adapted to the reforms being undertaken in Europe through the Bologna Process.

Algeria joined the Bologna process through its executive decree of 2004. The reforms have been undertaken as a pilot project: 10 Algerian universities have been chosen to implement the LMD system at that time and have been attributed support from a number of European universities. The new degree framework has been adopted principally to achieve, among others, the following objectives:

- Developing a common framework for education and training courses,
- Promoting mobility,
- Cooperating on evaluation of programs of studies
- Modernizing the provision of training in universities
- Making the system more efficient
- Providing adequate training relevant to the different socio-economic sectors
- Tackling problems of employability
- Opening the Algerian university on the world (Recognition of Algerian and foreign Diplomas)

4-LMD: a Reform Transforming Higher Education and Research Landscape in Algeria

In a recent speech, the former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Pr Rachid Harroubia, stipulated that Algeria currently spends about DZD20 billion (US\$262 million) a year on the higher education sector. Significantly, the state's funding and efforts are being made to ratchet up public funding and raise standards. The government went further by increasing the wages of university teachers by around 50% to prevent them from emigrating abroad. Brahim Touhami, a dean at the University of Skikda in eastern Algeria, told *University World News*: "The Algerian government is adopting an advantageous policy in terms of higher education by encouraging scientific research aimed at the acquisition of the latest knowledge and developing competence in related techniques."

5. What has the LMD System Brought to Students in Algeria?

With the implementation of the LMD system in Algeria, The Ministry of Higher Education administered a new philosophy through which students are considered to be the central actor in the teaching /learning process. "*Learning*" is then more important than "*Teaching*". It is this new perception which has paved the terrain for a re-conceptualization of the Algerian educational system's outcomes in the eyes of most Algerian university students. The LMD system will, then, allow students to have an additional training to facilitate their entry into the labor market, will provide possibilities for new positions, will maximize chances for national and international mobility, and will equip students with the capacity to become proficient in some important tools such as languages and computer.

6. International Mobility and Recognition of Diplomas: a Problematic Issue in Algeria

With respect to its expectations and challenges, one of the main objectives of the LMD system is to facilitate the movement of students from one university to another, from one country to another. Mobility is one of the important principles of the Bologna agreement. Indeed, this system offers the possibility to open up to other countries and other universities. It is similarly true for academic and Diplomas' recognition which is seen as a condition sine qua non of mobility within the LMD system. For instance, academic recognition assumes that the study period abroad in the hosting institution (including examinations and other forms of assessment) replaces a period of study comparable (including examinations or other forms of assessment) in the home institution , despite possible differences in the content and program set.

By 2007, most Algerian universities have been awarding LMD diploma to their students.

However, in this new context, the challenge for higher education is to do more than satisfy the Algerian labour market, rather to go further by offering a dimension focused on satisfying Algerian students' needs for international mobility and also welcoming qualified foreign labour by recognizing their diplomas. Policy makers, on their part, hoped that the new system will make program offerings from Algerian universities more compatible with those around the world, thereby increasing international mobility of Algerian faculty and students.

In this concern, The EU agreement on scientific and technological cooperation, signed in December 2011, was one of the best decisions taken for the promotion of Algerian students' international mobility. The agreement was expected to boost higher education quality and students' mobility. The agreement has also been designed to use science and technology to develop Algeria's economy and society. This is of key importance to the government, which is promoting research excellence within the LMD framework.

The agreement will enable European universities to work with their Algerian counterparts. Both partners were expected to exchange and recognize diplomas of both sides³. As for the recognition of Diplomas, Measures were undertaken for the recognition of the Algerian and foreign students' diplomas. With the adoption of LMD, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education appointed experts and a Permanent Commission to facilitate the procedure of recognising international universities' diplomas in Algeria. Now Algeria welcomes qualified foreign labour from all over the world.

7. Conclusion

Nowadays, Algeria defines its development priorities in close relation with dynamism of a rich and well planned higher educational politics that is able to integrate and become part and partial of the international higher education area. This principle is the driving force for the Algerian higher educational reforms which have been up to now realised: There is a strong will and desire to join the Global Education Home. To achieve these objectives, Algerian Higher Education is ready to optimize wider bilateral and multilateral collaboration levels and is preparing for the establishment of an extensive network involving worldwide universities.

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³ Touhami said the agreement would "improve the level of research in our country", he told *University World News*.