

Issues in the EFL University Classroom: A Psycho-Educational Overview

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Abstract:

Algeria among other countries has recently implemented new reforms in the educational sector for the main objective of responding to needs of the digital generation of students. In higher education, the introduction of the LMD (*Licence-Master-Doctorate*) -an alternative system in teaching and learning- represents a major step towards innovation and challenge. Under this system different roles and responsibilities are required from the teacher and the student in the foreign language classroom where the former is not only a model but also a supervisor and the latter is the principle actor. The present work is a case study that aims at presenting a psych-educational analysis of the major issues teachers and students encounter in the EFL classroom before and after recent reforms. It tries to know students and teachers attitudes towards the LMD classroom and the set of roles they are called-upon to perform under this system.

Key Words: Issues- EFL University Classroom- LMD Reforms-Teacher-Student- Educational Psychology.

الملخص:

أجرت الجزائر مؤخرًا جملة من الاصلاحات مبتداة مختلف القطاعات لاسيما قطاع التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي من أجل مواكبة متطلبات عصر الرقمنة و تطلعات جيل التكنولوجيا. في خضم هذه التعديلات أدرج نظام الـ ل.م.د (ليسانس-ماستر-دكتوره) كبديل للنظام الكلاسيكي في كل الجامعات ليشمل تدريجيا جل التخصصات كخطوة عملاقة نحو التجديد. في ظل هذا النظام تحددت أدوار و مسؤوليات جديدة لكل من الأستاذ و الطالب الجامعي، ففي تخصص اللغات و بالتحديد في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية أصبح للأستاذ و بالإضافة لكونه نموذجا يقتدى به، المشرف و المؤطر الأساسي للطالب الذي أصبح يمثل الفاعل الأساسي في العملية التعليمية. تقدم هذه الورقة دراسة ميدانية تهدف إلى تحليل نفسي تربوي لبعض الاشكالات التي تواجه الأستاذ و الطالب في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية قبل و بعد ادراج نظام الـ ل.م.د. كما نحاول فهم مواقفهم اتجاه هذا النظام و اتجاه الأدوار الجديدة المنظر منهم آداؤها .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاشكالات-قسم اللغة الإنجليزية-اصلاحات نظام الـ ل.م.د-الأستاذ الجامعي-الطالب الجامعي-علم النفس التربوي.

1. Educational Psychology and the Instructional Process

Conducting scientific inquiry into the issues of teaching and learning has long been one among the most important concerns of educational psychology. Education is concerned with the instructional process (communication of knowledge and behaviours between teachers and students), and psychology with behaviours, attitudes and motives. Educational psychology is concerned with all those variables affecting the behaviours, attitudes and motives of teachers and students in an educational setting, probably the classroom. Simply put, Educational Psychology as an applied social science aims to:

“provide comprehensive, systematic data about the psychological issues that undergird education. Although these issues cover a vast range of topics, they all usually involve the examination of some variable or variables about learners, the materials of learning, or the outcomes of learning in relation to one another...the objective of inquiry or research in educational psychology is to add to the body of dependable knowledge-in this case, knowledge about some aspect of education...[it] seeks to find the answers to practical questions, especially those that pertain to teaching and learning in school-type or other kinds of educational settings” (Bryce *et al*, 1983, p. 07-08).

It is well recognized that a great deal of research investigated in the field of foreign language teaching/learning examines different phenomena in order to provide pertinent information that help propose and/or recommend practical techniques of instruction. The purpose, however, in researches that seek for a psycho-educational analysis of issues related to the classroom is *“not primarily to propose, discover, or recommend particular strategies or techniques of instruction. Rather it is to examine and analyze issues in such a way as to help ... teachers to understand the underlying issues that affect educational policies and classroom decisions”* (Ibid, p.08). In this concern and with reference to the case under study, a psycho-educational analysis of students and teachers behaviours in relation to issues they face in the EFL classroom will be presented. General interpretations, discussions and recommendations will also be provided at a final stage of the work in order to guide teachers and students in their decisions to cope with issues in the classroom.

2. EFL Classroom within the LMD Reforms

The EFL- LMD classroom is not very different from the classical classroom. The main difference lies primarily in the system itself and not the set of courses. What is noticed at the level of our department of English is that teachers in both systems use approximately the same methodology to attain somehow the same objective: making students read with comprehension and score good in examinations. In short, the most important points of similarity and divergence are presented in the table below.

	Classical System	LMD System
<i>Programme (Content)</i>	- Elaborated by the teacher or group of teachers to fit the designed objectives of the EFL courses.	- Elaborated by the teacher or group of teachers to fit the designed objectives of the nature of licence opted for (academic or professional).
<i>Methodology</i>	- More teacher <u>centered</u>	- More student <u>centered</u>
<i>Examinations</i>	- Annual (two exams a year + make up)/no units (separated modules)	- Semesters (two semesters a year)/units (made of two to three modules)
<i>Grades</i>	- Compensation (no credits)	- Credits
<i>Teachers Roles</i>	- Prepare students for teaching.	- Prepare students for the Master mainly
<i>Students Roles</i>	-Guided by the teacher in the learning process.	- Active practitioners. - Centered in the learning process. - More autonomous.

Table1: LMD VS Classical EFL Classroom (Divergence and similarity).

3. Case Study: Description

The present case study was held at the department of English (Hassiba Ben-Bouali University of Chlef-Algeria) during the academic year (2010-2011) with twenty 1st year EFL students (14 females and 6 males). The number of informants was restricted to twenty for the mere reason that those students chosen randomly to participate in the study experienced EFL before and after LMD reforms, i.e., they studied their first year again but with the new LMD system (*Licence-Master-Doctorate*).

Teachers as a second important pole in the teaching/learning process also participated in the study. Three teachers of varying teaching experience (from 5 to 12 years of English teaching) were selected to take part in the study on a voluntary basis.

In order to carry on this work, we chose the questionnaire as a primarily tool of collecting data because it is less time consuming. In this respect two questionnaires were carefully prepared to fit the main objectives of the research.

4. Research Instruments: Aims and Steps

The major objectives of this small scale case study are to:

- Highlight EFL university students as well as teachers' attitudes towards the new reforms, i.e., LMD system.
- Spot differences and similarities between the classical EFL classroom and the LMD classroom.
- Know about students and teachers awareness of their roles in the EFL classroom (LMD).
- Identify students and teachers' preferences and expectations for future reforms as far as EFL teaching/learning is concerned.

Accordingly and in order to achieve the already stated objectives we asked the following research questions:

- What are EFL university students and teachers reactions to the new reforms?
- What are their attitudes toward the LMD classroom?

- Are teachers and students aware of their roles in the LMD classroom? and are they motivated to play them effectively in the EFL classroom?
- What about their preferences for future implementations in the EFL classroom?

We hypothesized that:

- EFL students as well as teachers reactions to the new reforms are approximately similar and somehow ambiguous.
- EFL students' attitudes towards the LMD are more positive than teachers' attitudes which are more or less negative.
- EFL students are not aware of the specific roles they have to perform in being centred in their learning. Simultaneously, teachers keep exercising their roles as the unique authority in the classroom without carrying about their new roles in the LMD classroom. A fact which makes of both teachers and students de-motivated in playing new roles they are neither accustomed to nor trained in.
- EFL students prefer a classroom where they can use technologies, whereas teachers show preference for intensive guided lessons.

To test our hypotheses we relied basically on the questionnaire as a main instrument of collecting data: two questionnaires were thus prepared, a first one was addressed to the twenty students (**Appendix A**) and a second questionnaire was administered to three EFL teachers; particularly those who taught EFL in the classical as well as the LMD system (**Appendix B**).

5. Data Analysis and Results' Interpretation

Data gathered from the informants were collected, analyzed and interpreted separately.

5-1- Students' Questionnaire

This first questionnaire comprises ten questions (**Appendix A**). Each question was dealt with individually:

Question 1: *What do you think of EFL learning at the university?*

This first question aims to know students' opinions about EFL learning at the university. All students answered this question but differently. The great majority represented by 14 students (70%) think that learning EFL at the university is very interesting whereas 20% of them (04 students) believe EFL learning at the university is interesting. Two students only (10%) answered that EFL learning at the university is boring. Students who commented on this question were only those who find the learning of EFL at the university either very interesting or interesting. Comments fall in the idea that the learning of English at the university is challenging and that the university provides them with various opportunities to learn the language more effectively through different modules.

Question 2: *What do you know about the LMD system?*

This second question tries to test students' knowledge about the LMD system. Surprisingly, most students have only some details about the LMD; a majority represented by 14 students (70%). No one of the twenty students chose choice number one "A lot". The rest of students 30% (06 students) mentioned that they know absolutely no thing about the LMD. Students' comments to this question were few, the high majority commented stating that the LMD is an international system which succeeded in many European countries and that it is different from the classical system. Other students indicated that they belong to the LMD but they still have no idea about the functioning of this system as a whole.

Question 3: *Do you like learning EFL?*

The aim behind this question is to know students' attitudes towards EFL learning. From students answers it was noticed that the majority of them (14 students=70%) like reading the EFL, only 02 students (10%) dislike it and a small minority represented by 04 students (20%) do not always like what they learn in English. An acceptable number of the informants commented on their answers.

Some of them stated that they feel happy when they speak, read or write in English. Others reported that they like studying the EFL because they learn a lot about this language and its speakers, while a restricted number of students find reading a hard task especially when the content of some lectures is boring.

Question 4: Do you prefer the LMD classroom or the classical system classroom?

Answers to this question were in favour of the first choice; 9 students (45%) answered that they prefer the LMD classroom while 11 of them (55%) feel better in the classical classroom. The majority of informants provided important comments to this question.

For example, one student stated that: "*The system is not important for me. What is important is EFL itself*". Another student who preferred the classical classroom said: "*I from time to time participate and communicate with my teacher and class mates in the classical classroom but this year no opportunity was given to me to speak from the beginning of the year due to many tasks we are supposed to do in the classroom*".

Question 5: What are the points of similarity between the two classrooms?

Students' answers to this question were different. Ten students (50%) of the total number chose teachers roles. Six students (30%) prefer to examinations and the remaining minority (exactly 04 students=20%) chose the fourth choice, i.e, their roles.

Students comments on their choices for this question were very few; of the twenty students only four students commented stating that they feel no difference between the two classrooms.

Question 6: What are the points of divergence between the two classes?

For this question some students (06 students=30%) prefer to the content as a whole. The same number of students (30%) chose the teachers' methodology and eight students (40%) think that the main difference is in grades.

No one of the subjects thought of their roles, teachers roles or the examinations. Here again most students did not comment on their answers. Those who commented state briefly that the difference between the two classes is felt after examinations mainly when they get their marks and start thinking about the credits.

Question 7: Do you think the LMD system will help you learn better the English foreign language and score good in your examinations?

Not all students provide answers to this question; the minority who answered (8 students) representing a percentage of (40%) had no idea. Comments to this question were unfortunately very few compared to the previous questions.

The only student who commented said: "*the LMD did not bring many changes and I hope this new system will help me improve my marks this year*".

Question 8: What do you suggest to your classmates to help them learn EFL, enjoy the classroom and score better in their examinations within the LMD system?

Not all students gave suggestions in this part. Exactly (06 students=30%) gave some suggestions they consider helpful:

- Help the teacher in the classroom mainly through participation
- Do not rely on the teacher but on your work outside the classroom especially
- Use the foreign language both inside and outside the classroom
- Think not only of examinations but also of ways to improve your English in general .

Question 9: What do you suggest to your teachers to help you learn EFL, enjoy the classroom and score better in their examinations within the LMD system?

Students' suggestions for their teachers were numerous compared to their suggestions for their mates (all students gave suggestions, i.e, the 20 students). They proposed the following:

- Help us become autonomous in learning EFL
- Guide us to use effective strategies and techniques to score good in examinations

- Encouragement is also important
- Motivate us to learn not only for examinations but also for future life
- Show us the right path for success in EFL learning
- Help us overcome stress in the classroom, especially during exams

Question 10: What do you suggest to authority makers as far as future reforms are concerned?

Here again students' answers were restricted to 4 students (20%) while the other 16 students (80%) did not participate in this final question. Unfortunately, students' suggestions were few:

- Any reform should be carefully studied before its implementation
- Students points of view need to be taken into consideration before any new reforms and not after
- Students future career (professional life) should be taken into account
- Teachers should be trained and prepared for any change
- Students involvement in any change in the system is very important for the success or failure of the system.

5-2- Teachers' Questionnaire

Each of the ten questions in this questionnaire was dealt with separately as follows:

Question 1: What do you think of the status of ELT in Algeria in general and the university in particular?

The main aim behind this first question was to get a bird's eye view on teachers' viewpoints about the actual status of ELT in Algeria in general and in higher education in particular. Answers were in fact similar for the three teachers who all agreed on the fact that ELT in Algeria is in constant improvement and that ELT situation in higher education is improving. However, comments to this question were different with reference to the three teachers. The first teacher for example thinks that the new changes (referring to the LMD system at the university level and the competency-based approach at middle and secondary education) contributed in one way or another to development in the status of ELT in different settings. The second teacher thinks that ELT in Algeria cannot be assessed as having a good status due to the limitless issues teachers still suffer from (methodology, time allotment, students' de-motivation, overcrowded groups...). The third teacher believes that ELT in our country needs a lot to achieve the status it has achieved in other neighboring Arabic countries.

Question 2: What do you think of the new educational reforms (LMD)?

This question investigates teachers' opinions about and attitudes towards the new educational reforms namely the LMD system. Two of the three informants think that the LMD system is needless and only one of them answered that this system is inappropriate. Only two teachers commented on their answers as follows:

Teacher1: "It is not at all well implemented".

Teacher2: "It is inappropriate to the actual teaching conditions at the university".

Question 3: Do you think your students like EFL?

This question tries to know opinions of teachers about students' attitudes towards EFL learning. Here again teachers answers were similar; the three teachers answered "Yes". They commented approximately in the same way stating that the great majority of students show positive attitudes towards the foreign language, i.e, they like it but it is their previous bad experiences and lack of practice make EFL learning a hard task for most of them.

Question 4: Do you think the LMD classroom is more interesting than the classical one?

The question aims to investigate teachers' opinions about the two systems (LMD and Classical). The three teachers see that the LMD classroom is not more interesting than the classical one. They commented approximately in the same way stating that the classical classroom is more flexible than the LMD classroom and that they feel better with the classical system. One teacher adds that teachers have more or less a lot to do in both classrooms and within whatever system.

Question 5: What differentiate the LMD classroom from the classical classroom?

When asked about the difference between the LMD and the classical classroom, teachers' answers were limited to the content, students' roles and grades. One teacher only commented using the following words: "What makes the real difference is not the system itself ...we really feel no difference in dealing with our students".

Question 6: Where do you feel better in teaching EFL?

This question was addressed to teachers for the crucial objective of knowing more about their preferences comparing the LMD classroom to the classical one. Two informants prefer the classical classroom whereas the third teacher feels better in the LMD classroom. The two teachers who preferred the classical classroom commented stating that they have more freedom to deal with the content of the specific lessons as well as the related assignments in ways they themselves judge interesting for students. One of them further added that the classical classroom is more relaxing even for students, as they have time to learn more and enjoy learning. The teacher who preferred the LMD classroom thinks that the new system provides a good opportunity for teachers to introduce novelty in the classroom and mainly to add more responsibility on the students for the benefits of their learning.

Question 7: Do you think the LMD reforms will succeed to overcome the shortcomings of the previous system (classical system)?

When asked about their expectations for the success of the LMD, all the three teachers chose the third choice "Not really". In their comments they justified their choice with reference to the following:

* LMD is not well implemented

- Overcrowded classrooms impede learning
- Teacher training is not sufficient
- Students autonomy is not an easy objective

Question 8: What are your advice for your students to help them cope with the LMD requirements and improve in learning EFL?

The few advice stated by the three teachers fall in the following:

- Do not always wait for the teacher, do some efforts inside and outside the classroom
- Keep in mind that if you want you can.

Question 9: What do you recommend to your colleagues to cope with the LMD and obtain good results? The general recommendations given by teachers are as follows:

- Do not think of the LMD as a system but think of it as a new way that helps you build students autonomy and improve their level in learning the English foreign language
- Be eclectic in your teaching
- Help your students be centred in their learning

Question 10: What do you recommend to authority makers for future reforms?

Two teachers only answered this question. They both think that they are not given any chance to participate in any novelty (reforms) in the educational system and recommend to authority makers to take their needs and proposals into account for future changes.

6. General Findings

Results of the present empirical study are strikingly homogeneous, even though the informants (teachers and students) filled the questionnaire individually. This reveals that the group members have approximately similar attitudes towards the new reform (LMD) in general.

As it has already been hypothesized, it is clear that learners have not been well informed about the LMD, all what they know about the system they heard it from friends or from some teachers. Simultaneously, teachers have not received any training in teaching within this system and they know little about it. Most of them are even not aware of the objectives behind the implementation of

the LMD and prefer the classical system. It should be noted at this level that the LMD classroom is not trouble free. The main issue for persons implicated in the LMD system (mainly teachers and

students) is "*l' appropriation de ses concepts*" (Herzallah & Baddari, 2007), i.e., the appropriate application and understanding of its concepts. In short, results of the study are summarized as followings:

- EFL students as well as teachers have not yet understood the general aims behind the new reforms (LMD system).
- Students are not aware of their crucial role in learning EFL in general and their responsibilities in the EFL classroom in particular.
- Reforms are not taken seriously by some teachers who still refuse any novelty including the new reforms
- Most teachers and students argue the ambiguity of the new system
- Some teachers are not yet ready to cope with requirements of the LMD
- Because of time constraints fragile bridges are built between most teachers and their students
- The majority of students are passive recipients of knowledge who need always the guidance of their teachers
- Students do only what they are asked to do and it is seldom that they bring more efforts for their language improvement
- Teachers still view themselves as an absolute authority in the classroom leaving no chance for students' participation in their own progress
- Teachers and students are motivated for EFL teaching/learning but not at all motivated for new implementations in the classroom.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The present suggestions and recommendations are addresses to teachers, students and authority makers.

a. Teachers

As an EFL reading comprehension teacher you have to:

- Cope effectively with any novelty in the language classroom
- Engage your students in true learning and do not always blame reforms
- Motivate your students become autonomous learners
- Train them in true learning
- Be a monitor of your own engagement and progress in the programme before you assess students' outcomes.
- Adapt your teaching method to your students needs and interests
- Whatever the imposed system or method are, your wisdom in managing your teaching will make of the classroom a good example for imitation.

b. Students

As an EFL learner, you should:

- Be self-confident in your learning
- Motivate your self to face novelty in your learning
- Success is the outcome of your own efforts, the teacher is only a source of help for you
- Any novelty in the classroom is for your own benefits
- The LMD system is only one step towards your professional career
- Help your teacher so that he can help you.
-

c. Authority Makers

As decision takers and reform makers, do not forget that:

- One successful system in a particular setting may represent failure in another setting
- Students needs' analysis, level, expectation and involvement are crucial parameters that should be taken into account for any pedagogical implementations
- Teachers' training, level and readiness are also to be considered for any novelty in the classroom
- We (authority makers and teachers) have to think of today learners as future citizens and why not future teachers.

8. Conclusion

With reference to results of the present study one can conclude that a great majority of EFL university teachers and students are not well prepared to adapt themselves to the new implementations and changes in higher education. They are unfortunately still hesitant to cope effectively with the new reforms and experience the novelty of a system which may open real horizons to teach and learn the foreign language effectively. It is thus very urgent to raise teachers as well as students' awareness of the necessity for change as a sine-qua-non condition for success in nowadays digital world.

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Appendix A Students' Questionnaire

Dear students, you are kindly requested to answer the questions included in this questionnaire. Your answers are important for future reforms at the university. Please tick the right answer and give your comments when necessary.

1- What do you think of EFL learning at the university?

Very interesting Interesting Boring

Why?Comment,.....

2- What do you know about the LMD system?

A lot some details Absolutely nothing

Why?Comment,.....

3- Do you like learning EFL?

Yes No Sometimes

Why?Comment,.....

4- Do you prefer the LMD classroom or the classical system classroom?

LMD classroom Classical classroom

Why?Comment,.....

5- What are the points of similarity between the two classrooms?

Content
Teachers' roles
Teacher method

Your roles
Examinations
Grades

Others, specify then comment

6- What are the points of divergence between the two classrooms?

Content
Teachers' roles
Teacher method
Your roles
Examinations
Grades

Others, specify then comment.....

7- Do you think the LMD system will help you learn better the English foreign language and score good in your examinations?

Yes

No

No idea

Why? Comment,.....

8- What do you suggest to your classmates to help them learn EFL, enjoy the classroom and score better in their examinations within the LMD system?

9- What do you suggest to your teachers to help you learn EFL, enjoy the classroom and score better in their examinations within the LMD system?

10- What do you suggest to authority makers as far as future reforms are concerned?

Thank you for your Cooperation.

Appendix B
Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teachers and colleagues, you are kindly requested to answer this questionnaire. Your comments are importance for improvement in the EFL classroom.

1. What do you think of the status of ELT in Algeria in general and the university in particular?

Strong

Weak

Improving

Comment.....

2. What do you think of the new educational reforms (LMD)?

Effective

Needless

Inappropriate

comment.....

3. Do you think your EFL students like EFL?

Yes

No

Comment.....

4. Do you think the LMD classroom is more interesting than the classical one?

Yes

No

Why? Comment,.....

5. What differentiate the LMD classroom from the classical classroom?

Time allotment

Content of the lesson

Teachers' roles

Students' roles

Tasks

Others, specify then comment.....

6. Where do you feel better in teaching EFL?

LMD classroom

Classical classroom

Why? Comment,.....

7. Do you think the LMD reforms will succeed to overcome the shortcomings of the previous system (classical system)?

Yes

No

not really

ea

Why? Comment,.....

8. What are your advice for your students to help them cope with the LMD requirements and improve in learning EFL?

9. What do you recommend to your colleagues to cope with the LMD and obtain good results?

10. What do you recommend to authority makers for future reforms?

Thank you for your help and Cooperation.