The Importance of Quality Assurance in Realising and Maintaining a successful LMD system in the Algerian University

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Abstract

Higher Education is central to economic and political development, and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalizing knowledge society. In the case of Algeria, higher education plays a critical capacity building and professional training role in support of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Thus, the educational institutions are challenged to adjust their programme structures, curricula, teaching and learning methods to adapt to these new demands. In recognition of this challenge, greater attention is being focused on quality assurance as a critical factor to ensuring educational relevance and success of the LMD system.   The present paper communicates the results of the first steps to map and to assess higher education quality assurance (QA) in the Algerian universities. One purpose of my presentation would be to establish a baseline on the status of quality assurance in higher education in Algeria. A second would be to provide information and to propose relevant strategies that may assist in enhancing and improving the new reforms taking place in the Algerian higher education context.

ملخص

يكتسي التعليم العالي أهمية بالغة في التنمية الاقتصادية والسياسية كما أنه ضرورة حيوية بالنسبة للتنافسية في مجتمع المعرفة والعولمة، وفي الجزائر يلعب التعليم العالي دورا رئيسا في بناء الإمكانات الأساسية والتدريب المهني في مواجهة تحديات الألفية الثالثة. ولهذا تجد المؤسسات التعليمية نفسها مضطرة لتكييف برامجها ومناهجها وطرق التدريس لتستجيب لهذه المتطلبات الجديدة، ومن هنا جاء الاهتمام المتزايد بتأمين النوعية كعنصر أساسي لضمان نجاعة التعليم ونجاح نظام (ل-م-د). يضع هذا المقال الخطوط الأولى في خريطة تأمين النوعية في التعليم العالي وتقييمها في الجامعات الجزائرية، حيث يهدف أولا إلى توفير المعلومات القاعدية بخصوص مكانة تأمين النوعية في التعليم العالي الجزائري، ثم يقترح استراتيجيات ناجعة من شأنها أن تساهم في إنجاح الإصلاحات الجديدة الجارية في ميدان التعليم العالي في الجزائر.

Introduction

The strategic position of the university in Algeria has developed since independence in 1962 and has gone far beyond the expectations set for it. However, compared to other developed countries in Europe and America, much is left to be done in order to reach the standards of an outstanding body. With the introduction of the LMD system in recent years, it is high time we review the quality of education and the boundaries that delimit the roles and expectations of the system.

The original mission of university is to promote knowledge through research and teaching. It is, also, to find out solutions to the country's problems and assist the larger community in achieving its objectives in areas of human, social and economic development. Thus, the national policy on education (2004) captures the essence of tertiary education and the national expectations when it says that:

> "The reform in Higher Education is wanted to be global in its conception participative in its procedure, progressive and integrative in its applicability." (Pr. Rachid HERAOUBIA, 2004)

Faced with considerable pressure from the social demand for Higher Education, the Algerian university has accumulated failures over the years and has found itself in a mismatch with the rapid changes that characterized the society in recent years.

The National Commission on the reform of the Educational system (C.N.R.S.E) and, in its final report, highlighted the numerous constrains the Algerian university faces while playing its role as a leader in adapting the system of its training requirements. Thus, in the light of its recommendations and guidelines, the Council of ministers adopted the implementation of an educational reform by April the 30th, 2002. On the act, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has adopted a ten

year strategy development sector for the period stretching between 2004 and 2013.

> One of the main thrusts of this strategy is concerned with " the development and implementation of a comprehensive and thorough reform of Higher Education, the first step is the establishment of a new architecture of lessons, accompanied by an updating and an upgrading of various educational programmes, and a reorganisation of the educational managements." (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2004)

Consequently, it became apparently urgent to endow the Algerian university through educational, scientific, human and structural materials which will meet the society's expectations while aligning with the new guidelines and global trends of Higher Education.

It is in this context of emergency needs that the new reform of Higher Education called the "LMD Reform" initiated its implementation in the academic year 2003-2004. Its main objective was to put the Algerian system of Higher Education on track with the growing demands of globalisation. This could promote and provide opportunities for Algeria to play a pivotal role of social and economic development based on research and innovation. As such, the Algerian university would contribute in meeting the challenge of the knowledge society.

Three years after the launch of the reform, however, some constrains remained. The apprehension of the students' population and their parents' required more input information. Difficulties were also faced among teachers who lacked apprenticeship and training in the new system. Large flows of students remained formed in the old university tradition. Consequently, these problems and others challenged my understanding to introduce the notion of Quality Assurance as a core element in the success of the LMD system. This paper reviews the current status of national policy for Quality Assurance. It offers a brief assessment of recent trends and identifies some areas of emerging consensus as well as issues still being debated. It concludes with some suggestions for ways that the Algerian government might hasten the pace of change.

1. Definition of Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance is a holistic term, which is directed toward education as an entity. It entails the supplier and consumer and the various activities put in place to produce quality products and services (MKpandiok, 2007). Consequently, it aims at preventing quality problems and at ensuring conformity. It is clear, therefore, that an assurance process recognizes the need for a university to accept responsibility for its own management processes. This makes the distinction from inspection or evaluation which are at the heart of the old teaching system. In this context, the LMD system

should put greater emphasis on Quality Assurance, which, in turn, expresses its relationship with the consumer. As a matter of fact, the university will be more autonomous in its capacity of operating in a responsive way.

As governments, in most parts of the world, have considered their agenda for Higher Education over the last few decades, issues of Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement have been a major focus of attention (El-Khawas, 1998). Despite differences in the size and stage of development of their Higher Education sectors, many governments have decided that traditional academic controls are inadequate to today's challenges. Thus, more explicit assurances about quality were needed. Organizations, such as the European Commission or the OECD, have reinforced this trend by their own calls for new structures and new approaches to Quality Assurance (IMHE), 1997).

Although circumstances may vary among countries, several broad trends have contributed to growing governmental interests in establishing policy mechanisms to ensure quality and accountability in Higher Education. Particularly has been the trend toward mass Higher Education. Algeria, however, has seen a doubting and tripling of university enrollments in the last few decades, along with increases participation rates for young people. An investigation by the World Bank (1998) revealed that, in Algeria, between twenty five and forty five percent of young people enroll for Higher Education. The Algerian university has become larger and more specialized. Thus, new measures should be adopted in order to serve the needs of business and industry or to strengthen their contributions to local, regional or national needs.

2. General Quality objectives for the LMD system

The introduction of Quality Assurance methodology in the Algerian universities should be considered by all educational institutions. Contrary to quality control, which focuses on testing the results, Quality Assurance includes all activities needed to provide effective services for customers during the basic educational process and the full life cycle of the graduate. The official goals of the AERES (Agence d'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur, 2009) follow these given rules:

1. To encourage the development of National Higher Education institutions (HEI);
2. To provide a source of assistance to HEI and relevant organisms in developing their own culture of Quality Assurance;
3. To fulfill the expectations of its stakeholders, national authorities, HEI employers about the processes and outcomes of Higher Education;
4. To provide a reference for the evaluation of:
   - Higher Education Institutions;
   - Programmes and diploma;

- Basic and applied research;

On the other hand, this general description should be customized to be a set of local quality objectives. Thus, a clear definition of customers' needs should be appropriate with quality measures.

2.1. The process of internalization

The reform in Higher Education has been first pronounced in the Bologna Process in 1999. The latter has been enlarged in 2001, 2003 and 2005 by the joint efforts and participation of Prague, Berlin and Bergen respectively. However, to reach a stage of internalization, the Bologna process had, first, to achieve the transition before moving to any advanced stage of development. On the other hand, the educational scene is a very special and delicate area where merging views gather. Consequently, effective Quality Assurance in large and complex organization is the capacity of individuals using informal methods. A systematic approach should be based on the requirements of the organization as a whole rather than the needs of local subsystems. Burge and Tannock (1992) mentioned two example of internalization:

- "The university intends to strengthen its current position as a provider of undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses of the highest international academic standards in all disciplines**."** This is the traditional and non-flexible mission statement.
- "The college aims to continuously enhance and improve the quality of its entire range of programmes of study to fulfill the needs of students who will be employed by industry, commerce and public sector organizations." This mission statement identifies students as customers and explicitly defines acceptance of continuous quality improvement processes.

2.2. Study programme quality plan

During the past three years, the activities of the Algerian institutions have remained focused on the level 'L' (Licence). However, in a Quality Assurance plan, it became important to prepare the establishment of the two upper levels 'M' (Master) and 'D' (Doctorat). To meet the challenge therein, the Algerian university is expected to face the following multiple records for the year 2009-2010:

- The arrival of 1.5 million students graduated;
- The construction, in addition to what exists, of 520.000 pedagogical seats and 288.000 accommodation places;
- The growth of the number of research laboratories to 1200;
- The emergence of several research centres;
- The recruitment of 25 000 new teachers and researchers;
- The creation of clusters
  (MOHESR, circular N° 07 on June, 2004)

These elements define the rapidly growing development of Higher Education in the five coming years, however, a second stage of the implementation will require the commitment and rapid establishment of a study quality plan for the master and the doctorate.

The study programme quality plan should be prepared for each programme of study offered by an academic unit. The following points have been developed as a result of a thorough investigation by practitioners in the field and should cover the following:

a. The purpose of the programme of study, with respect to **student demand**;

b. The objectives of the programme of study, with respect to the **balance of the knowledge**, understanding and skills to be achieved;

c. The content, level, structure and teaching/learning strategy of the programme. Using modern tools and introduction of **modular credit scheme** with partial or full freedom in choosing the modules may be essential to attract students and to get feedback on actual students' preferences (Adjei, et.al, 1996).

d. **Responsibility** for conducting the programme of study;

e. **The place of the proposal** within the context of already existing programmes:

- Availability of resources (academic staff, technicians, buildings, laboratory equipment, **CAL software**, etc) within the unit, to support the new proposal.
- Availability of resources from support and administrative services, (also any external input needed from other institutions, industry, commerce) to support the new proposal.

f. The means for **assuring the quality** of teaching and assessment.

Correcting various problems highlighted, both in terms of managing that level of performance and effectiveness of the Algerian university is, thus, necessary for the implementation of a comprehensive and deep reform grading these different aspects.

3. Objectives of Quality Assurance for the LMD system

The LMD reform, for the Algerian Higher Education, and while confirming its public nature, must reaffirm the essential principles underlying Quality Assurance. The latter may be as follows:

- Ensure quality training by supporting the satisfaction of social demand, self, in access to Higher Education;
- Achieve genuine harmony with the socio-economic development creating interactions between university and the world;

- Consolidate its cultural mission by promoting universal values expressed by the university spirit, especially those of tolerance and respect for others;
- Be more open to global developments, particularly those of science and technology;
- Encourage and diversify international cooperation in the most appropriate manner;
- Lay the foundations for good governance based on participation and consultation.

Thus, the LMD reform, centering on the three levels of training: Bachelor, Master, Doctorate, came to meet those goals.
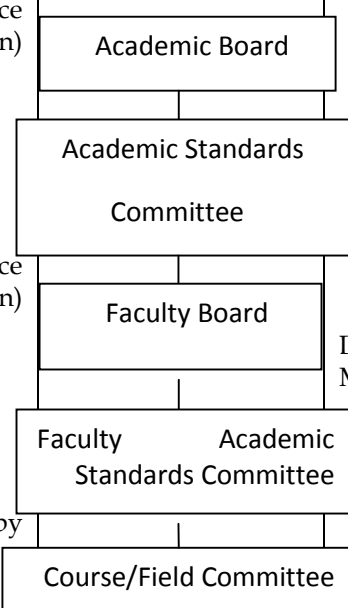
To achieve quality objectives, however, the highest level of management should establish a quality system with a structure for effective control, evaluation and improvement of service quality. To ensure that critical tasks are not neglected, responsibility for key activities should be assigned to specific staff. The responsibility and authority defined should be consistent with the means and methods necessary for achieving the objectives. However, involvement, commitment and effective collaborative working of all personnel is essential.

4. Supporting tools and techniques

For Quality Assurance to be successful, senior management must encourage and motivate the staff whole-heartedly. Many industrial organizations have failed to implement effective Quality Assurance programmes because proposals from staff were not adopted. The following is an example of a Quality Assurance system presently in use at the University of Luton (Harris and Forsyth, 1995).

In this Quality Assurance system, for each committee, an executive member of staff chairs the committee in order to ensure that decisions are implemented. In addition, elected student representatives are full members of the committees where their views are sought and welcomed. The views of all the students are also collected through the use of Student Perception Of Module (SPOM) and Student Perception of University Questionnaires (SPQ) collected at the end of each semester. The results of these questionnaires are, then, fed back to the course/field committee and, then, to the module coordinators to act on them.

In this respect, the LMD system introduces an important dynamic in the teaching practice of our institutions and requires a new educational organization. The following recommendations are made in order to improve system performance:

Student representatives	Committee Structure	Executive Structure
Role: Enabling students to influence decisions on academic policy	Role: Deciding academic policies and priorities, and judges quality	Role: Ensuring academic leadership and implementing committee decisions
President and Vice President (Education) of Student Union	Academic Board	Vice Chancellor
	Academic Standards Committee	Dean of Quality Assurance
President and Vice President (Education) of Student Union	Faculty Board	Dean of Faculty/Head of Modular Schemes
2 students elected by course/field representatives	Faculty Academic Standards Committee	
	Course/Field Committee	
No student representation		Chairs of Faculty Academic Standards Committee
Minimum of two representatives elected by students on course/field		Course and Field Managers

4.1. Installing new structures:

4.1.1. Structures responsible for training: these structures will be implemented at different levels (departments, faculties and university). Their role is to:

- Manage relationships with external partners for the reception of trainees;
- Assume the specific needs of the organization of courses;
- Supervise the trainees in the training field;
- Manage the evaluation and optimization of work placement.

4.1.2. Structure responsible for the Quality Assurance approach: it defines and installs the various levels of internal training in progress. The assessment should involve all stakeholders in training: training teams, students, industries using the training product.

4.1.3. Structure responsible for compliance with requirements of the job-market: it helps maintain the line with technological developments and needs of the labour market. This structure should include partners from outside the university and help to efficiently assess the relevance and selection of new formations to develop.

4.1.4. Structure responsible for managing and monitoring individual pathways. This is the cell of what is known as the IOAE (Information, Orientation and Students' home).

Undoubtedly, in university education, the quality of student input is crucial to their eventual outcome what knowledge and abilities do they already possess? Some we assume they have learnt what was expected from them at lower levels of educational structure. If they did not, however, the deficiencies will persist and, eventually, manifest in them as low quality products.

The university does not perform miracles. If the society offers effective raw materials, it can only, at best, ameliorate the effects at the output end of the processes. To assure quality in student output, however, is to put more emphasis on Primary and Secondary levels of productivity.

5. Recommendations for a successful implementation of Quality Assurance in Algerian Universities

The LMD reform is now being performed at the heart of globalization. Thus, for Higher Education to be evolving in this broader context, it should adopt the following notions:

a. Performance, combining quality and competitiveness;
b. Equitable, ensuring equality and opportunity;
c. Be able to be part of a fruitful North-South and also South-South;

d. Ensure efficiency with futuristic vision responsiveness based on new reforms of governance;

e. Able to guide the development of scientific research and technology to further innovation and creativity, generating knowledge and industry-university relationships.

f. Creator of a dynamic training, especially in graduate, Master and Doctoral schools;

g. Acquisition of a system of internal and external approach to Quality Assurance and training in place.

Quality must be measurable and clearly defined. In other words, there should be clearly defined learning outcomes such as, knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Conclusion

Although the policy debate continues, some elements of consensus have emerged, especially around the core elements of an approach to Quality Assurance that is appropriate for the LMD reform. In part, there is undoubtedly a convergence reflected by the wide-scale cultural "borrowing" among countries. However, Quality Assurance structures share common features because they represent modifications of traditional academic review processes.

Significant differences still exist in many policy and implementation issues regarding the LMD system in Algeria. The same issues tend to appear in the debates occurring inside the country, while other issues of equal importance receive much less attention. Generally speaking, issues of policy and practice have received more attention that some of the educational or training issues that undergrid approaches to Quality Assurance.

In this paper, I have tried to examine the necessity for Quality Assurance in the Algerian university. Quality Assurance systems will find continuing challenges in the decade ahead, not only on their procedural decisions, but, also, on the fundamental educational issues they must address. Complex questions about how to measure educational quality in our universities are gaining new urgency. There has been some effort to explain such concepts as the LMD and Quality Assurance, however, to my understanding, much remains to be answered.

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