

Teaching the "Licence Nouveau Régime": Towards more collaborative methodologies

Prof. Mohamed Miliani, FWIF,

Department of English, University of Oran, Algeria

Introduction

The present paper tries to tackle a double issue raised by the introduction of the current higher education reform or LMD Reform (Licence-Masters-Doctorate) - close to the BMD in the British higher education system-the issues of innovation and change, and the link between theory and practice

- Innovation and change: our intention was initially to understand how people react to innovation and change after years of adaptation to the old degree format. We hypothesised that very often it is teachers' force of inertia that is the cause of all inadequacies or mismanagement.
- Link between theory and practice: very often there is quite a gap between the determined theory and the implementation of the mentioned theory.

We have tried to understand what was at stake in the implementation of the LMD Reform, but also singled out an aspect of the mechanisms involved in order to unveil the problem-areas likely to constitute obstacles to the whole process and to suggest ways of avoiding failure of the identified stages.

The way we consider the prospect of this reform pushes to posit that the latter entails three possible outcomes:

- **Change** in the form of an updating of the languages curricula that have not been renewed since 1983. If there is a positive evaluation to make of the reform it will be this transformation that will count most.
- **Innovation** as new teaching and learning strategies are bound to take place with the introduction of the LMD system. The LMD reform is

supposed to put the university in front of new challenges which are likely to spell progress for the whole country.

- **Overhaul** of the entire system because this will generate not only change and innovation but also a new mentality (entrepreneurship) away from the traditional *laissez-faire* where no one is accountable for the mistakes/errors they may make or the success they can get.

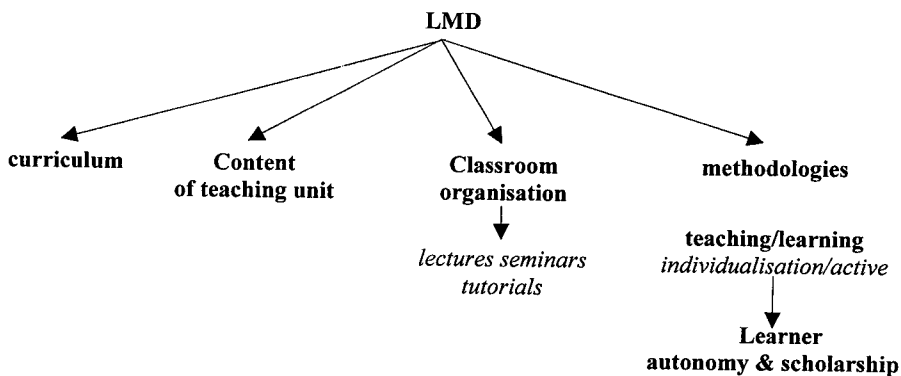
These are then the main points we would like to raise as issues of importance in any given reform. The following points were those planned by the educational authority. This is what theoretically the reform is looking for:

1. Change :

- a) Level of change: The Ministry of Higher Education intends to overhaul the existing system, a way to erase the ever-lasting depreciation borne like a curse because of the French characteristic still clinging onto the educational system
 - b) Areas of change: Those areas of the curricula are aimed at first, followed by a new learning-teaching methodology
2. Innovation: A new B.A degree ('licence') is defined and its contents identified. A committee is in charge of the redefinition of the content of the 'credit system'.

The following diagram illustrates and summarises this plan of action or what is theoretically aimed at in the present Reform. This 'plan of action' raises two questions:

- 1. How new is the change 'planned' by the educational institutions concerned?
- 2. Is this change/innovation not a case of *déjà-vu*?



The above-mentioned diagram clearly identifies the different problem-areas the LMD Reform teachers had to face from September 2004, without offering a 'safety-net' on which to fall back in case of mismanagement.

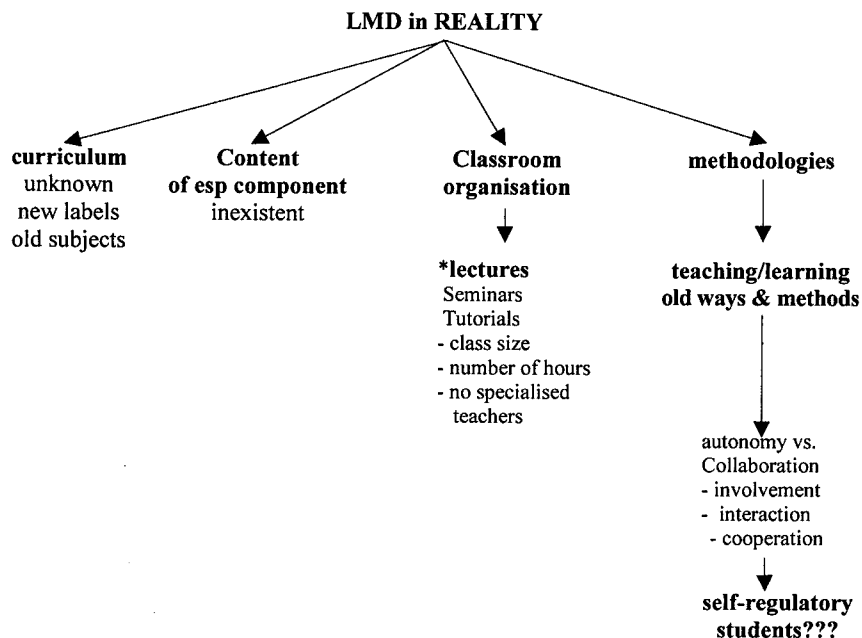
In order to gauge the distance between the theory advocated and the results obtained after the implementation of the reform, we selected three criteria for success:

- VALIDITY
- APPLICABILITY
- FEASIBILITY

Unfortunately, the answers to these three criteria are not clear-cut. There are mixed feelings about the 'level' of implementation. We took the University of Béjaia as a case-study in order to assess, (half-way through the three years of English language teaching) the impact of the reform on the students who 'followed' the LMD curriculum.

Starting with the teaching of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in the first year, our appraisal of the learning situation gave the following results:

This is a sectional view of the actual reform results:



The actual implementation of the reform revealed the following drawbacks:

- Curriculum: Several teachers simply changed the modules' labels of the old subjects, away from the innovative procedure introduced
- The ESP component, which was to be defined content-wise is a simple 'wrapping', an envelop without substance ('an empty shell')
- The classroom organization is still traditional: full-frontal teaching in front of 250 students
- The methodologies rest on 'old ways' against the autonomy of the students and their involvement in the classroom activities

Considering such a gloomy picture, two questions must be raised:

- Is the LMD Reform necessary?
- Is the educational system not victim, again, of the bandwagon effect, of fashion?

We believe that what is plain to see is the fashion-addict tendency of the decision-makers not questioning the adaptability of the imported ideas (ecological validity). It is also true that 'reinventing the wheel' is counter-productive. However, more than the changes of structures or pedagogy, it is the change of mentality that is important: the famous spirit of the LMD reform.

The first results of the reform can be misleading because it is too early to have a comprehensive evaluation of the reform's impact. On the other hand, is it not too late to get autonomous self-regulatory learners after years of formatting in the primary and secondary levels of education? Despite the environment's enthusiasm, it is believed that the plight of higher education is such that the Reform sounds more like wishful thinking.