

Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Algeria

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Abstract: *Initial teacher education is believed to be the first crucial step in the instruction journey. To form then teachers that are able to handle effectively the teaching/learning process is supposed to be at the heart of research. Scholars who endeavour to improve quality of education should start from the very first phase, i.e., pre-service teachers training. This paper in fact aims to shed light on the process of developing a syllabus for initial teacher education with a special focus on the role of the Algerian ministry of higher education and scientific research in the accreditation of those programmes. To meet this end, a conceptual framework besides a detailed description of the programme, its aims, design, the areas of study and the teaching, learning assessment strategies are provided and discussed.*

Keywords: *Initial teacher education, Master, programme, accreditation*

I. Introduction

Teaching, the profession which is almost known for its demanding and complicating assignments is among those favoured opportunities actual students are looking for. Nevertheless, to be appointed as a teacher is not that easy task one would go through. To get a BA ‘Licence’ in many specialties and English in particular may help apprentices apply for teaching vacancies and positions. Again, it is not yet enough to start a very long journey in the instruction land as a real teacher in the case they rely only on the theories they have learned during their studies.

Central to this vision, a number of key-terms need to be discussed in this paper. Teacher training, education and teaching quality are used to unfold the possible ways to prepare actual and prospective teachers to enhance their professional qualifications while taking the particularities of the Algerian context into serious consideration.

II. Conceptual Framework

Before tackling the programme of initial teacher education offered at the Master level in the English language and literature department here in Algeria, one should provide a conceptual framework on which the current study stands on.

Training as a process is about ‘*the formal preparation of prospective teachers*’ that may entail two phases, namely pre-service and in-service training courses. Taking language teachers as a case study, it can be said that they need to be trained before being engaged in the teaching situation. Later on, while involved in such a situation they may call for having an in-service training which should suit their needs and the field they are involved in.

Our central issue as language teachers is that those programmes offered as a part of teachers’ initial education are pre-determined by ‘the decision-makers’. Those latter, in most of the cases, are far from real contexts. This could have a negative impact on its quality as the main aim which stands behind undertaking a pre-service preparation is “*to help them [future teachers] enhance and improve language abilities, pedagogical skills, and cultural knowledge.*” (Song, et al, 2011: 100)

As mentioned previously, pre-service teacher training is of great importance for prospective teachers. Yet, for those who are already involved in teaching situations, in-service teacher training may constitute a tremendous help for them. This can be achieved through attending workshops and seminars by which they seek to cater for a better professional development. Along the same line, Savas (2009:402) writes: “*Language teachers and prospective language teachers can attend professional development workshops to let themselves acquire a second field of expertise, such as medicine, engineering or law.*” Taking part in such training is fruitful as “*new teachers learn from veterans. They become oriented more quickly and effectively.*” Buckley (2000:12)

III. The Programme and its Aim

The actual paper aims to shed light on the different phases a Master programme intended to prepare our future Algerian teachers go through from the design phase to its accreditation. To meet this end, the course components are discussed below. As a first step, I may say that students at the level of the English language and literature department who hold a BA in English can apply for MA position. This latter tends to prepare them to pursue their studies and involve in a Master and Doctorate research in a more specialized areas of teaching English. It also aims to equip them as future instructors with a sound preparation while combining systematically those needed skills including: the professional and cross-professional competences they are required to have, to be effective language tutors.

IV. The Programme Design

In this phase, it should be said that the course should undergo two different steps prior to its implementation, i.e., before and after ministry accreditation. In other words, the course is somehow pre-determined by the Algerian ministry of higher education and scientific research. It is organised around four semesters where students' attendance is a must. The first three semesters are devoted to gaining knowledge in the field. The fourth semester, however, is dedicated to writing and submitting their thesis.

In its first step, the course designer is required to work in collaboration with a number of teachers and outline those areas of studies seem useful to their students. Whenever the overall curriculum is ready, teachers will be asked to provide a detailed programme for each area of study including the list of suggested materials. Before being sent to the ministry of higher education for accreditation, the programme is filled in a predetermined template which should be downloaded from the website of the ministry. Apart from the syllabus, other elements should be included notably; the learners profile, the course objectives, structure, possibilities of employment, teachers' qualifications, experience and expertise, etc. In what follows, the areas of study suggested in the first phase are highlighted, later on, to gain ministry accreditation a number of elements need to be changed.

V. Areas of Study

In this suggested course, there are twelve units. Each unit is further divided into a number of modules. For the first unit, four modules are proposed whereas for the two remaining units two modules need to be covered. The following table summarizes the content of the study units for the first semesters.

Unit	Module
Unit I	Dilemmas in ESP Teaching
	Needs Analysis and Identification
	Syllabus Design
	Applied Linguistics and TEFL
Unit II	Research Methodology
	Research Methods in ESP
Unit III	Discourse Analysis
	Cultural Studies

Table 1. The First Semester Study Units

During the second semester students are supposed to attend the following modules:

Unit	Module
Unit I	Academic Writing
	Discourse Variation in Professional Communities
	Course Design
	Teacher Development
Unit II	Research Methodology
	Case Studies in ESP
Unit III	Discourse Analysis
	Intercultural Communication
Unit IV	Basic Knowledge in Science and Technology

Table 2. The Second Semester Study Units

In their third semester, apprentices are trained in the following areas of research:

Unit	Module
Unit I	Curriculum Design
	Evaluation in ESP
	Programmes Management in ESP
	Learners Evaluation and Assessment
Unit II	Research Methodology

	Language Planning and Education
Unit III	Psycho pedagogy
	Basic Knowledge in Computing Science
Unit IV	Basic Knowledge in Business
	Development of a Research Proposal

Table 3. The Third Semester Study Units

As for the last semester, i.e., semester four, students are asked to submit a dissertation in one of the chosen areas of ESP research. The table below points out this idea:

Tasks	Module
Task I	Dissertation Writing

Table 4. The Fourth Semester Tasks

VI. Assessment Strategies

This is done through the use of the following methods:

- ❖ Final exams;
- ❖ viva mini-projects and projects at the end of the study;
- ❖ individual works such as: submitting papers and writing reports;
- ❖ tests of short duration (continuous assessment during the semester);
- ❖ submitting dissertations.

VII. The Programme Design after Ministry Accreditation

To be accredited by the ministry of higher education and scientific research a number of changes were asked to be performed. This can be done mainly to achieve a national harmonization of the programmes in the field of teaching foreign languages in general and the teaching of English for specific purposes in particular.

The changes asked to be performed can be summarized in the following lines:

Experts have asked us to include a number of modules during the three semesters. In the first semester, they have insisted on the inclusion of a foreign language. The pedagogical committee then decided upon the introduction of Chinese to respond positively to the demands of the Algerian market. Alongside, Chinese the language, we were asked to include specialised translation techniques and strategies as a module, too. This can be explained by the fact that in ESP context learners are the primary knower of their field and the teacher is supposed to help them transfer their knowledge from L1 to L2. To fulfil this task, translation is the adequate solution. In the same semester, oral written communication is regarded as a must. To help students communicate effectively in the target context is supposed to be a pre-requisite.

What is surprising is that for the first time the experts in the Algerian ministry of higher education and scientific research have called for the integration of Ethics and deontology as a module which has never been done before. They have justified this by the authority will to form members of community who are aware of the moral values and who are ready to be fully involved in better modern society.

In the second semester, Ethics and deontology were replaced by Information, Communication and Technology. The inclusion of this module can be motivated by the fact that ICTs are not only regarded as a facilitating tools but also as a prerequisite if we would like to form new generation of professionals with new and fresh competencies.

In the third semester, ICT module is replaced by school legislation. This latter has never been included in a curriculum at the faculty of letter and languages before and especially at the department of English language and literature. Experts have asked to introduce a module that the trainers' team is not familiar with. To design then its content a subject specialist is invited to collaborate in the programme. The new partner in this course explained the importance of incorporating such a module by the fact that changing the behaviours of individuals cannot be done unless they are aware of their own rights and duties within the school context.

VIII. Issues in Initial Teacher Education in Algeria

To respond positively to the demands of the ministry experts, we faced a number of issues as programme designers. Experts have asked us to change time allocation for a number of modules per week. For instance, in research methodology, learners are supposed to sit for seven hours and half per week. Though for many years, research methodology was only three hours per week; one hour and half for a lecture and one hour and a half for a practical session.

The next difficulty was about including totally new modules, we as trainers teams are not familiar with. As a matter of fact, it has never been done before at our faculty and to a lower extent in our department that modules such as: ethics and deontology besides, school legislation are taught. This has called us to look for collaboration with subject specialists to help us develop a detailed course.

Calling subject experts to design syllabus for modules such as: ICT, Chinese language, ethics and deontology and schools legislation is regarded as a welcome idea as they will bring new ideas and new breath to the course. Yet, the central issue is to outline whether they are ready to teach those modules, or not. And what language will be the medium of instruction as those experts often deliver their courses either in Arabic or French, and at our department the language of teaching is English.

The changes asked by the experts to be performed have neglected totally to involve future teachers in trainings or seminars and to provide them with the opportunity of teaching under the supervision of different highly experienced staff to gain not only experience but also to have their useful insights and feedback.

The last issue we may tackle in this part is that any Initial teacher education programme needs to be responsive to an ongoing change, yet, the following question must be answered: are we allowed as programme designers to review our programmes and send them back to the ministry for a new accreditation after a period of practise of around two years, or not? To put it differently, teacher preparation programmes need to be reviewed, updated, adapted based on the context particularities in which its candidates serve besides, the real needs and expectations of both parameters: trainers and trainees.

IX. Conclusion

To unveil the whole process of developing a course to prepare teachers effectively while paying attention to the surrounding circumstances and issues could not be revealed in one moderate work. Therefore, looking for the accreditation of the ministry then the implementation of the course to achieve later on quality teaching and teacher preparation quality cannot be insured if it is relied only on the top-down process, i.e., applying doctrines, models as they are, without further considerations of the real needs of the teachers, learners and even their managers. Moreover, a careful consideration of the context particularities plays an essential role in the teaching/learning process.

As professionals, we should call for the development of programmes that meet at least the following components; finding the curricula balance *within preparation programs among content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and monitored [classroom] experience. Extending teacher preparation into the first years of teaching with high-quality, state-funded new teacher induction programs that includes links to the teacher preparation institution.* (PSEA, 2010: 01)

To conclude, the need to form teachers who would be fully involved in the teaching profession cannot be achieved unless they acquire the ability to reflect critically upon the existed national policies along with organizational features including issues of autonomy, accountability, evaluation in education systems. However, as programme designers we still feel the need *“to update our skills and knowledge continuously, not only in response to a changing world but in response to new research and emerging knowledge about learning and teaching.”* (PSEA, 2010: 02) Then, ministry accreditation is just a first path towards a new beginning of the whole experience in both training prospective teachers and updating the existing knowledge and competencies of their trainers.

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