

*Globalisation in Higher Education: some  
implications for algerian universities*

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In his report of the early 1960s, Sir Robbins, head of the Commission of Prospective Development of Education in England defined the aims of higher education as the: “provision of general knowledge, transmission of culture and citizenship, advancement of learning and the rovision of labour skills.”<sup>1</sup> The objectives of higher education were seen as part of national aims for the advancement of society. Learning was regarded as international in its scientific aspects and national because universities had also the mission of transmitting national culture and values. More than 40 years later, at the beginning of the 21st century, the objectives and aims of higher education are defined within the new perspective of globalisation and global economy in which learning is international in its scientific aspects and less national, particularly for the Third World countries, because in the global perspective, university education is less concerned with the transmission of cultural and national values. The concern and emphasis are more and more on labour skills and

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<sup>1</sup>. Trouvé Susan, “The Dearing Report July 1997: Origins and Outcome” in revue française de civilisation britannique, vol. 3, Nov. 1999 p. 41

adaptation capacities to the market needs. According to David E. Bloom, form Harvard University:

“Globalization refers to the process whereby countries become more integrated via movements of goods, capital, labor, and ideas. Trade (the main channel through which globalization is occurring) offers great advantages because it allows each country to specialize in what it does best- in other words, to have a more refined international division of labor. Globalization has both facilitated, and been facilitated by advances in information and communications technology. These advances, coupled with the increasingly refined international division of labor, have meant that new ideas are quickly brought to fruition and new technologies developed, and superseded, more rapidly than at any other time in history. Knowledge has become an increasingly important determinant of the wealth of nations, and access to knowledge, and the ability to disseminate it, has become a major source of competitive advantage.”<sup>2</sup> Universities all over the world are rapidly endorsing this new view brought about by globalisation; they are hurriedly introducing the reform dictated by capital though it is in many ways detrimental to their cultural values. Third World universities are international in their outlook and have always considered themselves part of a global structure. Indeed, the majority of universities in former colonies have been patterned on those of the North<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> . Goolam mohamedibha, “Globalization and its Implication on Universities in Developing Countries”. Paper given at the Laval University, Quebec, Canada, September, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> . Ibid. p. 1

Today, Third World university authorities are bewildered because they are finding it difficult to abandon a system which, despite all its colonial connotation, provides some room for national identity and culture.

Algerian universities, as far as they are concerned, are patterned on the French model. A great number of their faculty members have qualified in France and have in one way or another reproduced the French model in Algeria. Most of the institutions with which they have “collaborative ventures and exchange programmes are in France. The curricula and programmes structures of Algerian university degrees are not very different from those of French universities.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, different departments such as the departments of English, physics, French, economics etc. have a substantial number of their faculty members qualified in Great Britain, the US, France, and in the former Soviet Union, to name but a few. On the basis of the diversity of her faculty members’ qualification, one can say that Algeria which did not have a university system of its own is in the international university system through her curricula, degrees and the teaching staff who have collaborative ventures for research with many foreign higher education institutions, particularly in France. However, these are aspects of internationalization of higher education in Algeria. “Globalization,” according to Goolam Mohamedbhai, “has resulted in higher education being regarded as a commercial product, governed essentially by market forces, and has brought in the concept of competitiveness. The result of commercialisation and competitiveness-

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4 . Ibid. p. 2

concepts which until recently were considered anathemas in the university world- can be the very opposite of those of internationalisation.”<sup>5</sup> There is now the proposal by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to liberalise trade in education services, including higher education, through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

#### - Globalisation in Education

Globalisation imposes curricula reforms in higher education in both developed and developing countries with the objective of producing graduates capable of participating and competing in the emerging global economy of the global society. Universities need to develop new procedures apt to help students adapt to the rapid changes of the market and be apt to “produce” graduates sensitive to context and take research for knowledge and solutions beyond university walls to embrace wider social participation. In this new international context, the Algerian higher education authorities have decided to join and introduce this wide reform. This reform, newly started in a limited number of Algerian universities, known as the LMD ( Licence, Master, Doctorat), is a carbon copy of the European reform introduced in 1999, following the Bologna Declaration. With this reform the Europeans intend to establish a European Area of higher education by 2010 and promote the European System of higher education

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5. Knight Jane, “The impact of Trade on Liberalization on Higher Education: Policy Implications,” Paper given at the Laval University, Quebec, Canada, September 2002

worldwide<sup>6</sup>. One of the main features of this reform is the standardisation, in Europe, of studies duration shortened to what has become known as 3, 2, 3 system corresponding to the study duration of respectively the Bachelor, the Master and the Doctorate. An other important feature of this reform is the capitalisation and possibility of transfer of credits from one university to another to permit the mobility of students throughout Europe.

#### - Introducing the LMD

The Algerian authorities have adopted the goals set by the Europeans for their higher education reform namely: students' mobility, employability, degrees compatibility and lifelong learning, attractiveness/competitiveness of universities world-wide. Are the Algerian universities prepared to enter the global society competition in higher education? The Algerian universities lack qualified human resources be these in the teaching or administrative fields. Departments are under-equipped and lack connectivity with the rest of the world of research. Adjusting rapidly to the changes is the solution. But how could they adjust themselves rapidly to the changing academic world if the political will is lacking and if there is no good governance, and if they lack autonomy and academic freedom? Could they compete in the field of education and research? Today's world requires problem-solving skills and flexibility. Many of

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<sup>6</sup> . Hormuth Stefan, "Germany: Through the Reform and European Compatibility to Internationalization," paper given at the Laval University, Quebec Canada

today's developing countries universities focus on rote learning where memory and not creativity is rewarded. In most Algerian Universities this is the way students learn and are tested on their memory capacity. In certain departments students are not encouraged to read if not discouraged to read certain books. There are common instances of students who have completed their bachelor course and graduated without having ever read a single book. Critical thinking is not encouraged in students who are rather encouraged to memorise and repeat. So the kind of education given in Algerian universities is rather traditional, not oriented towards "producing" graduates independent-minded, critical and equipped with problem-solving skills. Furthermore, in the appointments for the teaching and research positions at the university, there is no competition. In these rather handicapping conditions it is very difficult to speak of research and quality at the university. The absence of competition and good perspective for advancement of the faculty members is the best means by which to discourage quality teaching and research. Another major issue handicapping the Algerian higher education progress is the brain drain to Europe and North America.

Decision makers, for the time being, seem to be incapable of thinking of quality; their only concern for the moment seems to be the ever growing number of students arriving each year at the university and for whom they have to provide seats grants, transportation means and accommodation. This has led to a multitude of under-equipped and understaffed universities and university centres all over Algeria. In these conditions it is difficult to speak of Algeria being competitive in the

field of higher education and research. The absence of competitiveness between universities on the one hand and departments at the national level, on the other, tells that Algerian higher education is not up to the required standard for the global competition involving aggressive for-profit institutions from Europe and America.

According to the GATS provisions: “.... L'accord le plus effrayant est l'accord général sur le commerce des services. Les services incluent des 'choses' comme les banques, les écoles, l'électricité, la santé, l'eau, les bibliothèques, le transport, le tourisme, la radio, la télévision, la poste et les télécommunications...et la suite est loin d'être exhaustive. L'accord a pour but de transformer tous les services dont la plupart font partie des droits de l'homme les plus fondamentaux, l'éducation et la santé plus particulièrement, en entités commerciales et à les extraire à l'intervention des gouvernements en les ouvrant à la concurrence commerciale internationale »<sup>7</sup>.

Under favour of the GATS provisions, global competition in higher education is going to be detrimental to the unprepared Algerian universities for the simple reason that they lack competitiveness in the new domains of higher education concern pointed out by the GATS as:

- the emergence of new-profit education providers;
- the growth of alternate electronic delivery modes both domestically and internationally (teaching through the internet);
- the response to the labour market;

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7. Ibid. p.2

- the increase of international academic mobility of students, professors and programmes;
- the limited governmental budget capacity<sup>8</sup>.

In this new perspective, governments support for higher education will be limited by international conventions meaning the erosion of state sovereignty.

J. Knight commented on the GATS objectives saying that: *“In short, these trends are contributing to, as well as responding to the expanding business of cross-border delivery of higher education services.”* Therefore, according to her “the GATS aims to capitalize on this market potential and promote further international trade in education services by establishing rules and procedures to eliminate barriers to trade.”<sup>9</sup>

In a nutshell, if the aims and objectives of higher education are the provision of general knowledge, transmission of culture and citizenship, advancement of learning and the provision of labour skills, these aims and objectives are being totally challenged by the GATS policy of the global market in which education is a simple commodity for profit making.

In Algeria, it is already possible to notice the presence of some foreign education institutions. Some of them are joint-ventures in which the main commercial provider of education establishes or has presence of commercial facilities in another country in order to render service by working with local branches, satellite campuses, twining partnership. Some Algerian schools are already

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<sup>8</sup> . Knight Jane, op. Cit. p. 2

<sup>9</sup> . Ibid. p. 2



delivering degrees such as masters in management, business, and languages in partnership with foreign institutions. The GATS stands for limited intervention of national governments in higher education to have the doors open for private foreign education institutions.

Nation-states are having their sovereignty eroded as alternative international, in fact western dominated bodies, such as the WTO are set up legislate in of the rich countries. This means higher education tuition fees, more standardised curricula (Americanisation), less national identity as there is less national culture ( less of religion and history). Eventually this trend would lead to the weakening of the nation-states, the gradual erosion of national sovereignty and would give birth to less culturally marked societies open to foreign trade and values, more particularly to western values and goods.

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