

## Exploratory Study of Teachers' Perceptions, Beliefs and Practices: Teachers' Recognition of the Necessary Link between Pre-tertiary and Tertiary Study of EFL in Algeria

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### Abstract

An investigation of coordination and the link that should exist between pre-tertiary and tertiary study of EFL was carried out. The study relied only on one means of research for implementation: the questionnaire. The questions mainly sought direct answers about the kind of linkage between the aforementioned phases either in the form of coordination or other ones. The issues which are addressed are: the nature of contact, taking one form or another, between teachers of pre-tertiary and tertiary study of EFL; criteria of syllabus design at university; and sources of pedagogical solutions to some problems that teachers of pre-university study of EFL might face. The results are analyzed and subsequent implications are formed.

**Keywords:** Pre-tertiary study, tertiary study, coordination, nature of contact, necessary link.

### ملخص:

لقد تم في هذا البحث دراسة طبيعة التنسيق و كذا الرابط الذي يجب أن يجمع بين مرحلتين من دراسة الإنجليزية كلغية أجنبية: ما قبل الجامعة و مرحلة الجامعة. إن منهج البحث المتبع هنا هو الاستبيان. كما أن الهدف من الأسئلة الموضوعية هو الحصول على إجابات مباشرة حول نوع الرابط بين المرحلتين السالفتي الذكر سواء في شكل تنسيق أو أي نوع اخر. الموضوعات قيد الدراسة تشمل:

- طبيعة الاحتكاك بين أساتذة المرحلتين المذكورتين أنفا في شكل أو في آخر
  - المعايير المعتمدة لوضع برامج مختلف المقاييس في الجامعة
  - مصادر حلول المشاكل البيداغوجية التي من الممكن أن يواجهها أساتذة أطوار ما قبل التعليم العالي
- و بعد تحليل النتائج المحصل عليها تم عرض ما استنتج من الدراسة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مرحلة ما قبل الجامعة, مرحلة الجامعة, التنسيق, طبيعة الاحتكاك, الرابط الذي يجب أن يكون.

### Résumé:

Une enquête sur la coordination et le lien de jonction entre les études pré-supérieures et supérieures de l'Anglais a été réalisée. Cette étude repose sur un moyen unique de recherche pour la mise en œuvre: le questionnaire. Les questions cherchent principalement des réponses directes sur le type de lien existant entre les phases mentionnées ci-dessus, soit sous la forme de coordination ou autres. Les questions abordées sont: la nature du contact, en prenant une forme ou une autre, entre les enseignants d'études pré-supérieures et supérieures des EFL; les critères de conception des cours à l'université; et les sources de solutions à certains problèmes pédagogiques auxquels les enseignants de l'étude pré-universitaire des EFL pourraient être confrontés. Les résultats sont analysés et conduisent à former des incidences ultérieures.

**Mots Clés :** étude pré-supérieure, étude supérieure, coordination, nature de contact, lien de conjonction.

## Introduction

Education is the basis of prosperity and development for every nation. This is the reason why, decision-makers should give it unique priority and management. According to Marginson (1993), education “is an important social activity ... It plays a central role in public policy and political debate” (cited in Robertson, 1994, p. 1). The issue of teaching English as a foreign language is continuously attracting researchers’ attention because of its vastness as well as complexity. This can be due to a number of elements and factors in relation with its teaching and learning. Moreover, all the academic stages of teaching English equally play part in the subsequent results. University teachers are always complaining about the low level of their students. Of course, many researchers discussed most of the causes of this and they are wide and varied. But in fact, few researches tried to define the true existing link between pre-tertiary and tertiary teaching of EFL. This aspect is raised here because it is believed that it contributes to successful EFL teaching and learning.

In Algeria, pre-university study of EFL is directed by the Ministry of Education where as university teaching and learning belong to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. This initially suggests that formally speaking there are two separate “blocks” of EFL teaching in Algeria. This does not of course mean that there is no contact between university teachers and other teachers; however, there is doubt that this contact is large and considerable.

The aim of this study is to explore the link between these stages of EFL teaching and the nature of the contact and rapport, if any, between teachers of all stages of EFL teaching.

### 1. Pre-tertiary EFL Teaching Background

In Algeria, English is the second foreign language. Pre-tertiary study of EFL includes middle and secondary education. In fact, the primary school was equally another cycle in which English was introduced but certainly not in the same way. For clarification, in 1993, “school-children who accessed Grade Four had to choose between French and English as the first mandatory foreign language” (Bennoune, 2000; cited in Benrabah, 2007, p.233). Consequently, English could have gained the status of the first foreign language in Algeria. However, “a small number of schoolchildren were taught English as the first obligatory foreign language, starting from the Fourth grade” (Benrabah, 2005, p. 408). This was the case between the years 1993 and 2003.

Teachers of EFL are classified according to their qualifications:

- 1-university graduates with various degrees: licence classique (4 years of study), licence LMD (3 years of study), and master (5 years of study).
- 2-The other category includes teachers who received no university instruction, but just some kind of training in the English language in College.

All these teachers receive some kind of training from time to time in order to improve their level and therefore, ameliorate the quality of teaching and assure better learning outcomes.

The reality about education is changing every when and where. According to Rijlaarsdam, Bergh and Couzijn (2005), “Great changes are taking place in the educational landscape. The diversity of the school population, in terms of multilingualism, or in terms of heterogeneity, new communication technologies, new ways of expression, globalisation, etc.” (pp. 1-2). In Algeria, numerous kinds of problems threaten the future of education and can greatly hinder its prosperity. To begin with, one issue that has to be drawn attention to is the overcrowded classes in schools (more than 40 per group). This of course, creates many problems that we are not going to explain all but the one that we are directly concerned with. Of course, teachers try to put all they know into practice but the problem of over-crowdedness

obstructs this and unfortunately forces them to leave behind many important techniques and practices that can be of great use to students. Molnar (2002) argues that reduced-size classes positively affect learning and teaching. However, scholars should attempt to find solutions to problems in a way that goes with the existing materials. Another problem is lack of experience. This applies more to novice teachers i.e. new graduates. When the latter start teaching, they come with a considerable number of ideas and set of instructions about teaching; nonetheless, they face problems like inability to put what they know into practice. In other words, they know but cannot do. This will not of course result in complete failure of the teaching/learning process but students might miss extremely important tips that can facilitate learning to them. In addition, most teachers, whether of English or other modules look at teaching just as a job with a salary at the end of the month. That is to say, they are there to work and be paid, and not for the sake of introducing what is new, trying to improve the quality of teaching or even enjoying the pleasure of enabling other people to learn a foreign language. In my opinion, it is of paramount importance to attempt to know at least some of these reasons hoping for some improvement of the quality of teaching. One shouldn't expect this to take place in a couple of days or weeks. In fact, it is a long and complicated process in which more than one side is involved. Teachers, researchers, students/pupils and decision-makers are all appealed to help save teaching in Algeria.

An investigation of the syllabus used to teach English in both stages (middle and secondary schools) shows that pre-tertiary teaching of English is totally dependent on unified textbooks devised by language experts and revised whenever necessary. Hence, teachers cannot go beyond the program or add extra elements and even the framework of the methodology is defined in the textbooks. It means that all teachers have to do is application since everything is available: what and how to carry out a given teaching task.

In fact, the two stages should be complementary on the basis that the latter is the subsequent outcome of the former. This is the reason why, serious and deep concern should be given to both stages for the sake of trying to find the exact nature of the link that should exist between both phases. This independence is both official and pedagogical. Clearly stated, pre-university study belongs to one ministry, and university teaching belongs to another. Pedagogically speaking, the case is similar and it is assumed that no contact really exists between pre-university and university teachers of English.

## 2. Gap between Pre-tertiary and Tertiary Teaching

Of course, the secondary school is not the last level of study. Those who pass the baccalaureate exam can carry on their studies and specialize in the English language at university (or other higher-education institutions). There, things are a little bit different in the sense that students become more dependent on themselves and the teacher is only a guide and facilitator of the learning process. Once there, the student is what he has been taught in the secondary school. Basic rules and practices of writing and speaking in English should have been learned there, and once specialized, the student should have acquired what he needs to study the foreign language.

Another issue that actually deserves deep clarification is the extent to which middle school and high school teachers try to be in contact with university teachers. This, of course, aims at informing them with what is new in the field of research. But whether this happens or not is another matter. Ignorance and reluctance can be the major reasons for this. The former reason consists of teachers, at least some of them, having no ideas about the importance of research and its fruits. They might be partially or completely convinced that since they have textbooks on which they rely, then there is no need to look for other pedagogical resources elsewhere.

The problem of coordination between what is taught in the secondary school concerning the module of the English language for third-year classes and first year university level for

English has been raised before. A study carried out by Rahal and Meddour (2010) about foreign culture and civilization and the extent to which textbooks in secondary school can prepare students for more enriched insights into foreign society showed that no sufficient exposure to this culture is taken into account in those textbooks. This is the reason why, first year LMD students of English find themselves facing difficulties in understanding the module in question. For this reason, syllabus makers are technically forced to introduce students first to culture and civilization before any serious attempt to talk about British or American history for example. In the case of writing, if students are not well prepared to write, big difficulties will inevitably face them when they specialize in the English language. Still, a far more enriched clarification has to be made. We all know that the program of all school levels is determined by a committee of experts at the level of ministry of education; thus, no teacher can actually change the content. They are obliged to stick to it. At university; however, it is not the case. The responsible for modules with the help of other teachers decide about what to teach ending up with a syllabus for each module.

Research about language teaching tries to highlight different and various sides, issues, and problems in the teaching/learning process, and it equally tries to introduce new techniques and methods that would improve the quality of teaching and facilitates learning. I believe that sometimes things are not as complicated as people would think, and solutions might be very simple. The issue of coordination and linkage between high school and university should be given more attention because it can lead to considerable repair at the level of our schools and universities. What I want to draw attention to is that research should start with basic things and then we move on to more complicated matters.

The ministry of national education is and has always faced real and serious defies so far as teaching is concerned. Research and the results it brings each time should be highly taken into consideration by people in charge. Intensive concentration on seminars and conferences that discusses what is new is an urgent need for the sake of improving the quality of education in Algeria. This has always been the preoccupation of the ministry of education, and researches in Algeria should take part in achieving those objectives.

### **Methodology**

The framework of this study in defined in terms of the following questions:

1. Do university teachers of English check and rely on the high school program or at least consider it as a basis to devise the various syllabuses?
2. Is there a pedagogical contact between pre-university and university teachers of EFL?
3. To what extent can creating a link between pre-tertiary and tertiary study of English be useful for both stages?

#### ▪ **Sample**

The responses were obtained from 90 randomly-selected teachers who work in the region of Mila (45 subjects from the middle school and 45 from the secondary school). The second questionnaire was administered to 20 university teachers from the universities of Mila, Constantine and Jijel.

#### ▪ **Description and Analysis**

The present questionnaire includes twenty five questions embedded under two major topics: the teaching/learning process and the link between pre-university and university study of English. Open-ended questions are used. This is to give the respondent-teachers more space for more insightful data about teaching in general. Though this research is mainly concerned with the link that should exist between pre-university and university study of EFL, it was found necessary to explore some issues for the sake of trying to know whether teachers' views about teaching affect one way or another their awareness of this should-existing link between the two stages of study under study.

## ▪ Analysis of Pre-university Teachers' Questionnaire

### 1. Perception of the Teaching/Learning Process

Some teachers think of the teaching/learning process as a set of techniques and methods that is supposed to lead to the understanding of what is being taught; a process that demands personal capacities, competencies and ability of creation. It has three basic elements: planning, implementation, and evaluation on behalf of teachers, and interest, involvement and application on behalf of learners. The teaching/learning process is merely perceived in terms of the course content i.e. what and how to teach in order to obtain good results. The strikingly deceiving matter is that no teacher of all the respondents went beyond the technical side of the teaching/learning process. In fact, what is beyond is in my opinion much weightier than what has been mentioned. For Houle (1996, pp. 29–30), “education is fundamentally the same wherever and whenever it occurs. It deals with such basic concerns as the nature of the learner, the goals sought, the social and physical milieu in which instruction occurs, and the techniques of learning or teaching used” (cited in Merriam 2001, p. 6). The teacher/learner relationship is considered as an essential component of The teaching/learning process (Littlewood, 2003). Research concludes that the teacher/learner relationship should be established basing on a warm atmosphere that would itself lead to the success of The teaching/learning process. Our teachers, then, seem to be ignorant or unaware of the advantages of such interaction between the ‘giver’ and the ‘receiver’ of knowledge. This is extremely important because “good teaching is situational-it varies in response to the learners” (Grow, 1991, p. 127). Moreover, a small percentage of teachers (5%) could write nothing on the nature of The teaching/learning process and their perception of it. This is by all means ‘bizarre’, for not knowing the nature of what one is doing and involved in, that is the The teaching/learning process, is in itself out of perception. This kind of meta-cognitive knowledge that teachers should be equipped with constitute the first step towards good implementation of the process in question.. Put it another way, In conclusion, it is all about some stages that can be classified in terms of: 1. Recognition: it consists of knowing ‘meta-cognitively’ about the process; 2. Understanding the process: its nature and elements; 3. and implementation: being involved in it.

### 2. Teaching Difficulties

The most frequently reported difficulties include: large classes, mixed abilities, the lack of visual aids, insufficiency in the number of sessions; lack of coordination between the lessons and the textbooks (some lessons are not included in the official books), lack of motivation in pupils, and difficulty in establishing a good relationship with the pupils.

Most of the difficulties mentioned by teachers are stated and discussed in research. Teachers seem to be complaining from all kinds of problems: pedagogical, technical and those which are directly related to the learners themselves. The obtained results then unveil the relatively bad conditions under which teachers of EFL undertake their work. This pushes us to ring the bell of danger for an attempt to save what can be saved. This is on the one hand; on the other hand, not all the difficulties reported can be dealt with. To illustrate, the respondents mentioned: mixed abilities. This aspect is not a problem in itself but it can actually lead to some teaching difficulties. It will then depend on teachers’ skills and strategies to teach the same thing for pupils with different abilities and assure learning in all of them. This should be among the most frequently present topics in teacher training programs (if any). In fact, some teaching problems have to be put under scrutiny and others have just to be coped with.

### 3. Training Teachers

Training teachers seems to be an essential and unavoidable procedure for they all claimed to receive or have received training during their career. In a study carried out by Matougui (1999), the results show that teachers of middle schools receive training with a programme of two elements: “Educational Psychology and Subject Methodology”. In general,

the training is about: teaching the four skills: writing, reading, listening and speaking, classroom language, error correction, assessment, new methods of teaching, how to design tests and exams, and teaching through games.

The findings concerning teachers' training programs are deceiving. According to the respondents, there are no special programs for training them. In other words, the administration in charge has no specific schedule for their novice or old teachers to improve the quality of teaching, except of course some pedagogical meetings with the inspectors. This implies that teaching training is not taken into great consideration.

The role that training plays in ameliorating learning outcomes is tremendous. Research supports this view. Other advantages include: enabling teachers to benefit from the new findings of research; giving teachers more opportunities for interaction and contact with each other, and especially those who do not work in the same schools; maintaining and raising teachers' motivation for teaching; and of course fostering learning and obtaining better results. One of the most considerable sources of teachers' pedagogical knowledge is training. The latter then should be emphasized and prioritized to a higher degree.

#### **4. The Role of Textbooks in Teaching: Content, Methods and Techniques.**

Most teachers claim that some lessons are missing from the official textbooks, and others are rather long and boring and their topics are not up-to-date. They, on the whole, claimed that they do not rely only on textbooks but on other media: the internet, CD-ROMS, data show; real objects, pictures, videos, and visual aids in general.

As for the techniques and methods, most teachers (80%) said that those stated in the textbooks do not all work with their pupils and that they are sometimes obliged to change to other techniques and methods. Others claimed that they should change to meet the learners' needs. They also maintained that they receive no written explanation of the new approaches that they are obliged to follow in teaching. Others (20 %) simply said that the techniques stated in the textbooks are suitable to the teaching situations and they help teachers to prepare and explain lessons and help pupils understand their lessons and do their activities easily.

The textbook is the official material that teachers use in teaching. It contains the topics, the methods, and the various techniques that help the teacher. The administration in charge publishes new textbooks whenever necessary in order to cope with the changing world: events, technology, new findings in research...etc. The most attractive observation about the findings is the absence of some lessons in the textbooks with the result that teachers find themselves obliged to rely on other materials in order to present the lessons. This is by all means detestable in the sense that it negatively contributes to the teaching/learning process.

#### **5. The Importance of Contact between Pre-tertiary and Tertiary Study of English as a Foreign Language:**

All teachers agreed on the point that there should be a link between pre-university and university study of English. This is for many reasons:-it helps pre-university teachers to learn more from university teachers; -pre-university study constitutes the basis for university study of English; -to motivate teachers to up-date their methods of teaching and ameliorate their students' level in English; -to prepare the pupils for the next level in English.

This is in my opinion an extremely significant issue. The absence of contact can destroy the bridge that might exist between the two phases. This is the reason why it should be given special investigation. This study aims at clarifying and drawing teachers' attention to the fact that teaching English should not be viewed as separate stages and levels that the learner goes through just for the sake of going through. Rather, those stages must be linked so that the next step is the completion of the previous one. This, according to the obtained results is a far-reaching but not impossible goal to achieve. Contact between teachers has many advantages on many levels: 1. The pedagogical level: Pre-tertiary teachers can seek advice from university teachers and the latter may equally need valued information for syllabus design or whatsoever.

## 6. Nature of Contact and its Reasons:

Contact can take place through: seminars;-coordination and cooperation for exchanging knowledge and experience. As for contacting and seeking help from university teachers, only 40% claimed to have contact with university teachers. The others argue that there is no need for that and that:

- coordination, meetings, and pedagogical cells between schools are enough.
- searching for information in the internet.
- relying on themselves.

In the present study, it is of paramount importance to clarify that the gap between pre-tertiary and tertiary study of EFL, the main subject of this research consists of two inseparable parts: contact between teachers for pedagogical purposes and articulation between syllabi of both phases. The former form of coordination can be either formal through seminars, study days...etc, or informal via contact that can take place between teachers who know each other.

### ▪ Analysis of University Teachers' Questionnaire:

#### 1. Devising Syllabuses for EFL University Students:

Teachers mentioned a variety of factors that are considered as a basis for devising syllabuses: level of students, needs' analysis, motivation, course objectives, students' needs, demands of the institution of the university in charge, time available, national goals of education, mental and physical and emotional requirements, and resource availability. On the one hand, we have needs' analysis i.e. considering the needs of what is called the might-be-future citizens need in order to be well-equipped and on the other hand situational analysis i.e. considering the social and environmental conditions of these learners before deciding about the type of materials to be included.

#### 2. Considering Pre-university Text-books When Devising syllabuses:

60% of the respondents claimed that they check pre-university textbooks when devising syllabuses, and consider this an essential step in syllabus design.

A good percentage of teachers' main focus is on preparing students for the outside world. Put it another way, syllabuses must be appropriately designed both at the level of form and content.

#### 3. Contact between Pre-university and University Teachers

90% of the participants reported that they have no contact with teachers of middle and secondary schools. The remaining teachers stated that their knowledge of some teachers is rather personal and that no real pedagogical communication is held between them. This indicated that this issue is ignored or is not at all in the agenda of teachers of both phases. This gain implies that reaching the step when a serious and formally-designated communication is established between pre-tertiary and tertiary teachers is still too far. But we should always remember that a thousand-mile journey starts with a step.

#### 4. Nature of contact:

Teachers' perception of that nature of this contact is wide and considerable.

Teachers' responses about the nature of this should-existing link can be summarized in the following points:

- Awareness of each other's syllabuses.
- Collaboration and coordination between teachers to collect information about elements that are needed most immediately by learners and those that can be overlooked by teachers.
- The two phases are complementary with one of them being the basis of the other.
- Articulation between pre-tertiary cycles and university studies.

As for having discussion with pre-university teachers about the basis for devising syllabuses at university for EFL students, 98% of teachers answered no. The remaining teachers started as teachers of the middle or secondary school. So they might have had this experience.

## Conclusion

This study then shows that a gap exists between pre-tertiary and university study of EFL. This gap can be extended, narrowed or put to an end depending on the national educational policy and the materials available. For this reason, it is quite difficult to anticipate the success or failure of the issue afore-studied. Training teachers of pre-tertiary study of EFL should be a continuous and continual process whose aim is to foster and improve academic teaching of English on the one hand, and planting the culture of seeing education as a series in which all the episode are interconnected on the other hand.

Teaching English as a foreign language in all its stages should then be viewed differently in the sense that much emphasis has to be given to the link that should bring those blocks together. This has the aim of giving education in Algeria a new and more promising future. All that has been afore-discussed is a big challenge for teachers and decision-makers alike and its implementation requires tremendous effort on behalf of every one.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Pre-university teachers' questionnaire**

Dear teachers,

We would be so grateful if you could answer the following questions for the sake of gathering information about the 'should-existing' link between pre-university and university study of EFL in Algeria.

Please, make a tick in the corresponding box.

**Section One: Personal Information**

- 1. Are you:
  - Middle-school teacher
  - Secondary-school teacher
- 2. Please indicate your age:
  - 22-30 years old
  - 30-40 years old
  - Above 40 years old
- 3. What is your scientific qualification?

4. How long have you been teaching English?  
 .....

**Section Two: Pre-university EFL Teaching**

5. What is your perception of the teaching/learning process?  
 .....  
 .....

6. Do you do research about the teaching/learning process?

- Yes
- No

7. State and explain some teaching difficulties, if any.  
 .....  
 .....

8. When you teach, do you ever think about the following level or stage or even year?

- Yes
- No

9. Please explain.  
 .....  
 .....

10. What issues are discussed when meeting the inspector?  
 .....  
 .....

11. Do you receive any training about teaching?

- Yes
- No

12. If yes, how often and about what?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

13. Do you rely only on the official textbooks?

- Yes
- No

14. Please explain in either case.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

15. Do you rely on other materials and media in teaching?

- Yes
- No

16. If yes, what are they?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

17. Do find the teaching methods and techniques stated in the textbooks suitable to the teaching situations?

- Yes
- No

18. Please, explain.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**Section Three: Link between Pre-university and University study of EFL**

19. Do you think that there should exist a contact whatsoever between pre-university and university teachers of English?

- Yes
- No

20. Justify your answer in either case.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

21. What is the nature of this contact?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

22. Do you have any contact with any university teacher of English?

- Yes
- No

23. If yes, for which purpose?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

24. Have you ever tried to seek help from university teachers of English?

- Yes
  - No
- |  |
|--|
|  |
|  |

25. Please, explain.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**Thank you very much for your cooperation**

**Appendix B: University teachers' questionnaire**

Dear teachers,

We would be so grateful if you could answer the following questions for the sake of gathering information about the 'should-existing' link between pre-university and university study of EFL in Algeria.

Please, make a tick in the corresponding box.

1. How many years have you been teaching English for 1<sup>st</sup> year students?

.....

2. Have you ever made syllabuses for 1<sup>st</sup> university students?

- Yes
  - No
- |  |
|--|
|  |
|  |

3. When syllabuses are devised, what factors are taken into consideration?

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

4. Do you check middle and secondary-school textbooks of English?

- Yes
  - No
- |  |
|--|
|  |
|  |

5. If yes, how do you do it?

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

6. Do you have any academic contact with middle and secondary school teachers of English?

- Yes
  - No
- |  |
|--|
|  |
|  |

7. In your opinion, what is the nature of the contact that should exist between pre-university and university teachers of English?

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

.....  
8. Have you ever had a discussion with a middle or secondary school teacher of English about the bases for devising syllabuses at university for EFL students?

▪ Yes

▪ No


9. Please, explain

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Thank you very much for your cooperation**