Quality of Education:
Curricula

Implementing the LMD System: Experience of the Philosophy Department in the Cadi Ayyad University in Marakkech[*]

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Abstract

In Morocco, the adoption of the LMD system in its new form, derived from the Bologna Process (1999), began in 2003. The Moroccan university community had mixed reactions toward the development, ranging from rejection, under the pretext that it was a purely western product, to acceptance, albeit with a great many reservations about its general structure. Thus, appropriateness of the system to Morocco in the future was regarded with substantial suspicion.

This paper attempts to address the issue through a case study of the Philosophy Department at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech. The "Philosophy and Science in the Islamic West" research group of the Department of Philosophy at Cadi Ayyad University started contemplating research into higher education as a field for theoretical endeavor, with the aim of carrying out precise scientific studies, using rigorous methodologies, of the conditions of Moroccan universities after 2003. This paper presents the personal experience of the author as a member of this group, within which he assumed the responsibility for completing a study based on outlining a "jurisprudence of knowledge about higher education". Theoretical work in this regard is based on two concepts that he believes should be usefully combined: the "self-made university" and the "local project."

The paper argues that management on the basis of local conditions is a strategic choice for higher education that enables creating procedures for rational self-evaluation. This goes hand in hand with pedagogic and curricular reform of higher education. Such a project can be achieved through linking local specificity with the rules of internal operation of the educational system. It reveals that the credit system derived from the Bologna Process is a correct system at the level of internal workings, as it establishes a network of linkages between the superstructure and the base that is responsible for implementation: faculty, students and administrative staff.

I. Introduction

In 2003, Moroccan universities adopted the so-called LMD system (Licence=Bachelor; Maitrise= Master; Doctorat= doctorate). Experts described this transformation as a turning point for high-

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quality higher education. In fact, the new system brings a new perception of the function of universities in Morocco, and enables faculty members to actively contribute to the improvement of national education, through collective participation in organizing educational affairs at all levels[2]. (Ayshan, 2000)

This study sheds light on collective work, as a key mechanism in the new LMD system, based on the experience of the Philosophy Department within the Cadi Ayyad University. I have personally experienced the importance of collective work within faculties under the LMD system, based on organized cooperation between different educational departments, on the one hand, and independent research groups on the other. The first project of this study puts forth suggestions about the participation of departments, in full coordination with research bodies, in assessing and streamlining the highly-complicated higher education reform project.

This process is driven by the deep belief that local efforts ought to be deployed to improve higher education. In fact, working groups shall conduct concrete scientific studies, providing solutions to issues that are hindering the improvement and modernization of universities, in line with international standards. Experts unanimously agree that the most important problem remains the detachment of universities from their socio-economic environment. This environment increases their isolation and reduces the practical value of their majors.

The first part of the paper intends to motivate LMD stakeholders, by shedding light on the importance of experience-sharing to organize higher education in the Arab region. For this purpose, the paper reviews part of a model experience by a working group, which has been active for two years now within the Philosophy Department of the Cadi Ayyad University. It is entitled, Thinking in the Islamic West[3], and is in fact, an independent research unit, which was established upon the implementation of the new academic organization. This was per the internal regulations of the LMD system, with both a legal and financial perspective. The second project mentioned in this paper examines the importance of coordination between the working group and the Philosophy Department, through its Chair or committees. Suggestions presented by the working group, upon practical assessment of the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences in the Cadi Ayyad University, are examined below. The importance of this cooperation is verified when examining the practical benefits of changes brought by the LMD implementation, in two examples of cooperation between the aforementioned working group and the Philosophy Department.

The first experience reviews the results of common efforts to assess the Bachelor in Philosophy as per the form suggested by the Ministry of Higher Education for 2009 / 2010. This new project was completed after the National Coordination Committee and took into account remarks and suggestions of working groups that have been operational since 2003. In this part of the study, I review the stances of professors in the Philosophy Department in Marakkech of the determined processes, which for the first time in Morocco, provide for a philosophy curriculum in line with modern international standards. The second experiment is of a practical nature, and is related to a Professional Bachelor degree aimed at training pedagogic managers for schools. The main target behind this Bachelor degree is to prove the importance of practical training in philosophy and human sciences. It then refutes the accusation that philosophy is an isolationist major, trapped in theories rather than being in touch with reality.

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[2] The National Pact for Education in Morocco reflects the unique experience of Morocco in tackling education problems. It also includes several solutions and suggestions determined by faculty members since independence, by examining the pitfalls of classical educational systems adopted before 2003.

[3] This concept (Islamic West) refers to Maghreb and Andalusia during the middle ages under the rule of AlMouahiddin and Almurabitin.

II. Role of Working Groups in Reforming Higher Higher Education through Accurate Scientific Studies

Teaching is undoubtedly not an exact science, with relative principles varying according to time and place. As teaching is part of the epistemological category of "practical sciences", it is based on two pillars (Abd Al-Halim, 1988). This aspect, I believe, should be constantly mentioned as an introduction, when analyzing education in the Arab region in general, or when developing programs to reform conventional systems unable to keep up with innovations within globalization (Lucas, 1999).

The first pillar[4], namely theory, is the teaching of theoretical knowledge pertaining to the specialization in higher education and was specifically defined by faculty members. Therefore, the analysis of conditions of LMD implementation in the Arab region relied on the deduction method, after reviewing the outcome of direct daily inspection, based on "participant observation" as a research method (Jones, 1999).

Professors at the Philosophy Department, who were members of the Working Group, have constantly adopted the observation technique, in every field of higher education. Once this activity was completed, they wrote books on the results of direct field inspection of the new teaching trends in universities after LMD implementation, by providing a thorough organization of these trends with pyramids for structural trends and others for technical trends.

The second pillar, namely practice, was the testing of scientific conclusions from the aforementioned examination, in universities, by the authority or city in charge of the university. The target was to test the usefulness and operability of the European educational model, imported as a complete model, and utterly different from the Moroccan and Arab reality. (Koehn, 2002)

For two years, I have worked within the programs set by the working group. As I was double-tasking as a member of the working group and Chair of the Philosophy department, I realized that behind the scientific attention paid to the changes after LMD implementation in universities, there were three interrelated targets that remarkably changed the teaching of Philosophy.

For the first target, the working group analyzed the problems faced by Philosophy in higher education, after accurately examining direct data on pedagogies, education, organization and knowledge. Based on the observations, the second target was to prepare complete files to be submitted to the committees in charge of coordination between the philosophy departments and the Ministry. These were to contain all relevant information to support projects submitted by Philosophy departments via the Faculty and the University Boards. Beyond philosophical studies, the members of the working group participated in national programs to find practical solutions guaranteeing operational benefit from the new European LMD. These programs aimed at determining ways to enable the Cadi Ayyad University to meet local needs, rather than blindly cling to a literal application of the credit-based LMD system issued by the Bologna process. (Coombs, 1971).

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[4] The teacher-researcher plays a primary role in implementing the theoretical and practical pillars in research projects. Unfortunately, the role of the professor is not clear in the Arab region, and is often restricted to "teaching". Yet, the teacher is certainly an important player in any social project to reform higher education. Faculty members should therefore be involved in the reform process from start till end. For new perceptions of the teaching profession, refer to the "Green Book" (French National Ministry of Education, 2008)

III. Working Group Findings for 2007/ 2008: How is the Reform of Higher Education Measured and how Important is a Regional and Local Approach in University Organization?

A few months after the research was conducted, the model experience of the Philosophy department in Marrakech concluded that careful examination of the changes in Morocco, as of 2003 when the LMD system was first implemented in universities, leads to two paradoxically interrelated facts:

1. Assessing the strength of the European model in university management outside Europe is very complicated, and requires more time so that national authorities can take into account all types of possibilities. This process is crucial to determine accurate standards for the results of compatibility between European and national universities, as they could be completely different from Western universities. It is worth noting in this regard, that issuing a general judgment is not possible, as some universities within one country succeeded in implementing the LMD system where others failed. The success was due to having a more mature and appropriate management in some facilities than others apparently had.

   In this connection, I have reviewed some OECD reports (OCDE, 2008) confirming that some Eastern European countries required a careful approach before implementing the LMD system in their universities. This was through studies that were conducted over a long period of time, before making a final decision on a number of issues that might not at first have seemed complicated. I believe we should benefit from this experience in our Arab region, as there are many external factors guiding higher education, inherent to our Arab society which is structurally different from Western societies[5].

2. Reforming higher education is a long-term project, for it has educational, sociologic and human dimensions, and is not achieved by a mere literal implementation of imported systems from the developed world. I believe that chairmen of national councils, who firmly reject any amendment to the system, have placed a primitive bet that education systems in the Arab region and in Europe are in harmony, which is not currently the case. As the situation is similar in universities throughout the Arab region, the Moroccan example is an interesting model illustrating the issues faced by Arab countries that have decided to implement the same European system.

IV. Achieving Reforms by focusing on the Local Model: New Training in Philosophy and the Professional Bachelor degree

Based on the aforementioned outcome of theoretical studies, and the attention of the working group to obstacles hindering the LMD system benefits (based on daily follow-up of problems within the Philosophy department of the Cadi Ayyad University), the studies conducted by professors within the group were compiled in the local project of the university and considered a priority. Three research fields were determined: the first was to develop a strategy for further openness to society; the second was to develop training programs aimed at promoting practical

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[5] In the Arab region, we are in dire need for such organizations in which specialists from different backgrounds regularly meet to assess national policies; economic situation and education, and then develop programs for experience sharing.

skills in the first place, to help graduates in the labor market; and the third was to develop plans to convince economic actors of society to invest in specific market-oriented training programs, in partnership with the administration of universities, departments and research units.

After studies were conducted in all three fields, with the generous help of advanced students and higher education independent researchers, faculty members determined the results guiding the partnership within the research group (with members from the Group on Philosophy and Science in the Islamic West on the one hand, and the Philosophy Department on the other) towards two topics of interest for this paper:

-    Achieving total harmonization between the three-year educations provided under the LMD system and the integration of the university in its local environment. Therefore, the socio-economic characteristic of the environment was a main guideline to choose career-oriented training.
-    Paying further attention to Professional Bachelor degrees, as a means to reject the accusation that literary education produces unemployed graduates.

Based on the research for both fields, theoretical aspects of the objective of the working group were defined, based on a constant comparison of the local situation in Marrakech and the link between some French cities and their universities. Researchers have accurately examined results of studies as the outcome of two years of collective efforts, and these results are practically useful. Results are divided into three categories. First, it is necessary to promote a decentralization policy in higher education even in training programs. As the Moroccan economy is not evenly distributed in all cities, with the desert in the South and the North close to Europe, it is no longer useful to impose the same training programs in all regions. Second, the university plays a pivotal role in building a knowledge society. It would not be wrong in this regard to consider universities responsible for the quality of training of pre-baccalaureate teachers, and students in training centers and teaching schools. The last part was destined to look for new initiatives to attract foreign material and moral support, to provide a healthy university environment to transform practical scientific research of teaching specializations into a continuum of the training in the L-M-D, so that this system can adapt to the needs of the socio-economic environment in specialized competencies[6] for specific jobs.

The Philosophy Department, convinced of these findings, firmly rejected the idea that the credit system was another curriculum ready to be implemented, and rather sought to highlight its positive aspects through practical local activities. This experience was based on two objectives: determining the differences between the LMD system and the old system, as several professors were nostalgic, and classical educational systems were usually more appealing, though outdated in education and training. The second objective was to indicate that it is important for universities to benefit from changes linked to the LMD system, whether through the elaboration of specific programs to implement a decentralization policy promoting openness of higher education to its environment, or controlling the quality of training. Determining the differences between the LMD system and the classical system adopted in Morocco since independence, could underline the benefits of the European system, namely the liberation of university activities from the constraints of horizontal management (table 1).

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[6] As already mentioned, the general outline of this project was defined during the 21st Conference of the Al-Tamimi Association of Computer Science and Information Technology in Tunisia, in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Association on 5 - 7 February 2009. Conference documents are available on the website of the Abd-Al-Jalili Tamimi Association. Al-Tamimi is a pioneer in developing pillars of academic work in the Arab Maghreb via his private scientific association. He is also a perseverant man.

Table 1: The differences between the old system and the new system

New system	Old system
Department committees are in charge of registration based on the choice of students after an accurate examination of their files. The Committee then interviews students for an oral examination to determine those who are enrolled	Random registration of students with no prior organization
Students have the freedom to switch majors anytime during their studies, through a standardized process, thanks to cooperation between departments and respect of the student's choices to enroll in purely professional majors	Students do not have the freedom to switch majors, or are allowed to, but through a difficult process and without standardization.
Departments provide students with all necessary information on the major they choose during determined meetings before the start of the year	Students start their studies with no introduction or preparation
University education is a continuum of secondary school education	Large gap separating university training from secondary school education
Students have the freedom to choose the major that suits their personality, provided they prove their choice is right based on their previous competencies	Students are forced to choose majors in university that are related to the type of baccalaureate they obtained
Majors are flexible and allow for free movement of students, which does not hinder student assessment	Majors are closed units
More flexible rules, allowing students to pass their courses, and students are given another chance to sit for exams just for the credits they failed to earn.	Strict regulations for success are imposed for courses, a large number of students are unable to make it through the first year and have to drop out of university
Students have the freedom to benefit from credits provided in all the faculty sections	Students are restricted to one major, with no possibility to develop their skills in other fields
Students are encouraged to take personal initiatives through continuous assessment of their performance through various means	Students only sit for one exam at the end of the year
Reducing the timeframe between the Bachelor and the Doctorate : Bachelor: 3 years i.e. 6 semesters, Master: 3 years Doctorate: 2 to 3 years.	Time frame between Bachelor and Doctorate : Bachelor : 4 years, DEA : 1 or 2 years, DESS : 3 to 5 years, Doctorate: no time frame, can last a lifetime

Continuous learning centers are open for different social categories wishing to achieve self-development, which promotes the openness of the university	Not available
Professional bachelor degrees are provided as independent majors for outstanding students from all majors	Not available
Centers for Doctorate are available, with an independent management, working on projects from active research linked to their specialties	A structure for Doctorate training is unavailable
Research structures are an independent system within the university, organizing working groups, and overseeing the implementation of material and moral support for working groups	No available structure
Bachelor system is continuously reviewed every 3 years	System is operational all the time
Annual material support is regulated, whether for research structures or continuous learning projects, or professional bachelor degrees, based on objective assessment of their activities	Arbitrary support

As both educational systems are widely different, the aforementioned working group is constantly coordinating with the Philosophy Bureau, to benefit from the LMD system, to determine results of a pragmatic approach adopted in line with procedures that are based on practical data. Since the LMD system is an integrated unit of strategies, after 2003, the Cadi Ayyad University has managed to achieve considerable benefits from it which have changed the daily life of students and teachers alike, and have had a positive impact on the university's ties with the socio-economic environment.

Teachers have increasingly become interested in collective work with their colleagues, within specialized research structures. The LMD system has helped in developing scientific research by encouraging creativity among teachers.

Regarding students, teachers have unanimously agreed that the relationship between students and the university has improved. The university is no longer a simple closed educational framework, but has rather become an interesting field for development of competencies, by acquiring new skills. The LMD has encouraged outstanding students to take initiatives, and allowed them to access purely practical majors, through professional bachelor degrees or continuous learning programs. This process has achieved two interrelated objectives, namely, ensuring strict quality standards through the system for continuous monitoring of the students' performance, and actively contributing to their integration in the labor market.

Moreover, regarding the environment, the credit system has changed the image of the university within society, after the professional education built bridges between the university and the economic environment. The experience of the Cadi Ayyadi University has proven that as the LMD system is flexible, it can swiftly adapt to all human aspects surrounding the educational

process, through main majors, or the Masters, Professional bachelor degrees, Doctorate Centers or continuous learning centers.

After the studies conducted by the working group, within open workshops, had determined underlying causes and results of differences between the classical and the LMD systems, the improvement in training in higher education in Morocco is undoubtedly a direct result of the interaction between universities believing in this new system. These universities have realized they had a specific role to play in the improvement of the European system and to promote its interaction with the local environment. The following part of my study examines this issue, based on models of success achieved by the cooperation of the Philosophy Department and the Working Group in Philosophy and Science in the Islamic West.

1. Bachelor in Philosophy for 2009 - 2010

Developers of higher education curricula face perhaps the most daunting task of drafting applicable material adapted to the local situation of universities. This is a time-consuming task, which depends on the concerted efforts between the faculties and the ministerial committees in charge of drafting the programs. It is then necessary for departments taking part in developing the LMD system to have the courage to deal with suggestions issued directly by the ministry, whether through the national coordinator or different educational committees.

Developing the program for the Bachelor in Philosophy has been through many changes in Morocco since 2003, a heavy yet important task. Programs for the Bachelor in philosophy have been regularly reviewed and philosophy professors have realized the importance of the change that has occurred. These changes have been in the content of the units, or to granting departments a larger freedom to adapt their training to the student needs. It is worth noting that these benefits were achieved thanks to the important role of working groups in philosophy and human sciences within the process of reviewing the general structure of the Bachelor, i.e. the nature of units, the content of courses in the units, and the distribution of courses between the six semesters of the Bachelor. For this purpose, during March last year, the working group on "Philosophy and Science in the Islamic West" organized a seminar on the links between philosophy and cognitive sciences in determining the limits of philosophical studies for Arab societies. The National Coordinator for Philosophy Training took part in the meeting, with a group of professors specialized in different philosophical fields. The event provided an opportunity to share experiences and ideas on the future of philosophy in modern Arab societies.

After six years of constant review by working groups, department bureaus and national preparatory committees, the new program for the Bachelor in Philosophy was drafted.

The general structure for the Philosophy Bachelor is completely new, a qualitative leap in the improvement of Philosophy training in Morocco. The new program suggested by the Ministry brought about changes in five levels, guaranteeing freedom for faculties to guide the program according to local needs, and focusing on practical philosophy of direct benefit to students.

First, changes have affected the internal economics of the philosophy training which has become more practice-oriented. The new program includes units for all six semesters covering diverse topics from classical to modern schools of thought in philosophy. It has achieved serious integration between the history of philosophy on the one hand, and modern philosophy on the other, namely through applied studies.

Second, based on practical responsibilities, special attention was given to building a methodological approach with students, instead of feeding them with information, such as in the classical system. The new Bachelor program allocated, for the first time in Morocco, four

complete units, including courses specific to the curriculum and technical tools. This step aimed at putting an end to the domination of the theoretical aspect in philosophy training; instead it became more practice-oriented, so that universities have become more open to their environment. This is by creating positions in the labor market where a Philosophy diploma holder would be required to coordinate between graduates and employers. The following three changes translate the practical approach sought by the new Bachelor to involve students and departments in determining practical learning objectives, and highlight the importance of local efforts in managing higher education.

Third, the new program underlined the importance of the graduation project, which is the research paper developed by the student at the end of his university studies. Two units (instead of one unit in the old system) were developed under the new program. The second unit, in its last half, provides for internship according to the topic of the student's research. This strategy, in my opinion, would create a new dynamic, encouraging student, through a practical approach, to choose practical majors, instead of being imprisoned in mere theoretical research, unable to perform practical tasks of collective benefit.

Fourth, it is clear that the new program focuses on languages and IT, for the students to consolidate their personal skills with high linguistic and technical skills. As this matter is crucial, the new program determined language and IT courses as a common branch between all faculties of literature and human sciences in Morocco. Five units were determined (117-13-9-5-), and divided through practical fields to benefit from philosophy in matters directly linked to reality.

Last, and most importantly, the departments were granted the freedom to organize the courses according to the local environment. In fact, philosophy departments were given the authority, through their presidents and bureau committees, to determine the contents of the courses for units of the fifth and sixth semesters of the Bachelor, which are the last two semesters. These two semesters (covering a year) include 6 units, each unit covering two courses.

This strategy promotes the role of local stakeholders in managing higher education, as departments have the right to decide which training they would like to provide for their students, based on the environment. On the one hand, the European system, favoring Professional Bachelor, has restricted this type of education to the last year of university. On the other hand, the new program creates this same dynamic of integration between several majors, as the professional Bachelor is provided through independent coordinators, to attract outstanding students from different specializations (Bringer, 2006).

2. The Professional Bachelor Linking the University to Its Environment: The Example of the Philosophy Department

Based on the practical trend in the new program of the Philosophy Bachelor, and as I am a firm believer in the strategic importance of professional Bachelor, I have personally sought to involve the scientific community in the project of a Professional Bachelor, of which I presented this year as training coordinator. The project will enter into effect next year, once approved by the Faculty Board, the University Board, and the Ministry of Higher Education, which should allocate financial support.

The Bachelor is entitled: Training Specialized Educational Counselors for Preparatory and Intermediate Schools (from childhood until 15 years). The working group within the Philosophy Department determined the direct objectives of this license, which were found to be two interrelated objectives: renewal of the philosophy program by promoting further openness to

the developed world, and educational integration of departments within the Literature faculty, in developing a multidisciplinary approach.

For the renewal of the philosophy program, the proposed Professional Bachelor aims at rejecting accusations that philosophy and human sciences are mere theoretical shells and proving instead they serve education in society. The program aims, as already mentioned, at training professionals specialized in education, working in public or private schools, or civil society institutions training special categories of students, such as associations for the mentally disabled. Regarding the second goal of multidisciplinary training, the program, for the Bachelor, determined a new way to promote openness rather than isolation of departments of the Literature and Human Sciences Faculty. The Bologna process stipulates that a Professional Bachelor shall achieve integration between all literary fields by involving outstanding students from different backgrounds in a market-oriented specialized training.

It would be wrong to believe that a university can integrate into its environment unilaterally, where it would graduate students only armed with theoretical knowledge, who can only access the labor market with personal efforts after graduation[7].

However, as the issue is far more complicated, the solution would be to transform the university into an open space for continuous training, for all social categories. I believe a program entitled "Back to University" would be vital to promote the role of higher education in society. Within the aforementioned Professional Bachelor, university professors, of different relevant specializations, school practitioners such as teachers, supervisors and directors, child psychologists and social workers would be in charge of the two-semester education. IT professionals, image and sound systems' experts, developers of school material and educational leisure would also be involved in the training of these educational counselors.

V. Conclusion

Changes occurring in higher education in Morocco, after 2003, were undoubtedly the direct result of interaction of universities believing in the importance of LMD implementation, and then fulfilling their specific roles in developing the European system, to promote quality of education, and establish ties with their local socio-economic environment. It can be concluded that the changes brought about by the LMD are not automatically stipulated in its legal and organizational structures, but completely depend on local implementation of the LMD. As a research professor, I am aware of the situation in Moroccan universities both before and after the European system was implemented. I am deeply convinced that if Arab universities were to take part in developing the LMD system, courage and patience are required, as reforming higher education is a very complicated modern process.

On the other hand, the success of universities in this modern project depends on the involvement of governments by providing financial support for higher education. Yet, Arab States to this day are still lagging behind in budget allocations to this vital section of education (Coombs, 1971). As a result, the physical structure of universities is still fragile, and teachers- researchers are still disadvantaged due to a lack of resources, which is a major obstacle hindering the success rate of the implementation of the European system in Arab universities[8]. (Unesco, 2007)

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[7] For this reason, teaching remained the only profession attracting graduates from the Faculty of Literature.

[8] "When national decision-makers determine objectives for their education systems (for example, expanding access or improving the quality of education), they must take into account necessary resources and assess these objectives in comparison to other demands. They are increasingly relying on international comparison

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to determine whether sufficient resources are invested in education, and whether these are used efficiently". (Unesco, 2007).