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## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ALGERIAN AND TUNISIAN LAST YEAR SECONDARY EDUCATION SYLLABUSES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### Abstract

Generally, in undertaking a new educational reform, the first and most essential step is accorded to the design of new syllabuses. Both Algeria and Tunisia have designed new syllabi when reformed their educational systems to cope with the world's development and globalisation. The aim of this work is to analyse and compare the Algerian and Tunisian syllabuses of the last year secondary education. The aim of this comparison is to highlight the similarities and differences in the syllabuses to have an idea about how two historically and geographically related countries perceive and teach English as a foreign language. Both syllabuses are commonly designed in relation to the fact that learners study different streams. The two syllabuses are first analysed in terms of general goals and specific objectives, design procedures, syllabus type, language content (aspects and skills). Then, a comparison of each of these elements is made. The results indicate that both syllabuses are based on the same teaching approach- i.e. the Competency-Based Language Teaching, and pursue nearly the same goals and objectives. Both are communicative, task-based and cyclical. The two syllabuses draw a central importance to the teaching of the language skills as well as language aspects though the formulation and presentation of the contents is different.

**Keywords:** Algerian syllabus, EFL, last year secondary education, Tunisian syllabus.

### 1. Introduction

The international status of English has led many countries to adopt reforms in foreign language policy. The educational reform is crucial for the development of any country since it mainly concerns the improvement of the living style and the thinking process of the educated people, because education is the pathway to the new changes and progress occurring in the world. Algeria (2002) and Tunisia (2000) are among the countries that have introduced reforms in their educational systems in order to meet the demands of globalization and universality. The reforms have touched all educational levels and all subject matters. Moreover, it started from the heart of the educational system in both countries; that is from the ministry requirements and needs. English represents a foreign language in both countries.

Generally, in undertaking a new educational reform, the first and most essential step is accorded to the design of new syllabuses. Since English is a worldwide language which establishes communication between all peoples of the globe and allows access to a set of conceptual, scientific and cultural fields, Algeria and Tunisia have designed new syllabuses of English for all educational levels in order to achieve such objectives. The secondary education in both countries is characterized by many differences. The Algerian secondary education lasts for three years in which students study common content in the first year and follow a specific field in the second and third years. However, the Tunisian secondary education lasts

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for four years. Learners are supposed to have a common education for two years and specialize in the third and fourth years. Notwithstanding these differences, secondary education in both countries ends with a national exam-*the baccalaureate exam-* which is the ticket that opens the doors of university to bachelors.

Since Algeria and Tunisia are situated in the same geographical area, have grown through time nearly with the same history, share cultural features and political policy, they constitute a geo-political entry that makes expect similar educational principles, thus similarities in syllabuses such as the one of English. Thus, the paper aims at answering the following questions:

- Do the Algerian and Tunisian syllabuses of English (last year secondary education) underline similar objectives?
- Are they based on the same syllabus type?
- Do they contain similar content (language aspects and skills) and present it in a similar way?

## 2-Review of the Literature

### 2-1-definitions of Syllabus

There are, in literature, many alternative and confusing definitions to the concept "syllabus". A syllabus is, in general, the selection and the gradation of content. Syllabus is a detailed and ready statement of teaching and learning elements reflecting the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading in order to achieve specific and defined objectives.

The 3rd year secondary school Algerian syllabus of English defines the concept as: "*un programme scolaire comprend les finalités du système éducatif, les objectifs ou les compétences poursuivies et les contenus dans les différentes disciplines*»(Algerian 3SE syllabus, 2007, p.15). That is to say, a school syllabus is a document which supplies the objectives of the educational system, the competences, to be developed and the contents of the different disciplines, as it integrates the activities that lead to achieve the predefined objectives.

Luke, Woods & Weir (2013, p.10) define syllabus as "*a map and a descriptive overview of the curriculum. It stands as a structured summary or outline of what should be taught and learned across the schooling years*". The syllabus should provide information about the needs, objectives and culture of the learners. Its content should be organized through inventories of items and gives methodological recommendations (how to teach and evaluate the content). Therefore, it should gather structures, notions, functions, skills and tasks which are required to achieve the objectives set.

According to Reilly (1988), a language syllabus involves integration of two important matters-the subject matter (what to talk about) and the linguistic matter (how to talk about it). He gathers six main types of syllabus on the basis of their content and objectives. The structural or formal syllabus is based on **grammatical** forms and structures. The **notional-functional** syllabus emphasizes language functions and notions. The **situational** syllabus focuses real or imaginary situations in which language occurs. The **skill-based** syllabus includes linguistic competences-as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation- into the four language skills. **Task-based** syllabus includes purposeful tasks to perform through language and other skills in specific settings of language use, therefore, integrates different language aspects and skills. The **content-based** syllabus concerns content and information; that is learning a subject matter through a foreign language. The **communicative** syllabus according

to Dubin and Olshtain (1986) integrates three essential features: the *language content*concerning language aspects and social skills, the *process* concerning the different types of activities to include, and the *product/outcome* concerning the language skills, in the form of inventories.

### 2-2-Algerian and Tunisian Secondary Education

Algerian as well as Tunisian secondary education is open for all learners who succeed in the final exam closing the middle education and obtain the *Brevet* diploma. This latter is a certification of the acquisition of the competences supposed to allow the learners follow their studies in secondary school. It is a diploma developed after four years of study in Algeria and three years of study in Tunisia. That is; it is an entrance exam to secondary education.

In Algeria, all secondary education students follow and study under the same syllabus for one year (common stream) before being streamed at one of the major fields: literary (letters and philosophy, and foreign languages), scientific (experimental sciences, mathematics, technical mathematics, and economy and management). At the entrance of the secondary school, learners have already learned English for four years, thus they leave secondary education with seven years English study. The Algerian educational reform aims at providing new opportunities that enable the country deal with the new requirements resulting from the political, economic and social mutations it undergoes.

In Tunisia, secondary education lasts longer since students have to follow a two years syllabus before being oriented to one of the various streams: letters, economy and management, mathematics, technology, and experimental studies. At the entrance of the secondary school, learners have already studied English for two years; therefore, leave the secondary level with six years of English study. The Tunisian reform aims at forming citizens who can cope with the new world and its conditions and demands.

### 3-Research Method

The method adopted in this research paper is comparative in nature, since it aims to highlight similarities and differences underlying both syllabuses. The materials on which the research is relied are two syllabuses designed for teaching English for last year secondary education students in Algeria and Tunisia.

To answer the questions raised in the introduction, an analysis of both syllabuses is needed then a comparison of the results. The paper sustains the findings with reference to Dubin and Olshtain's work (1986) on communicative syllabus design and Reilly's work (1988) on syllabus type as well as Rabbini's (2002) principles on task-based syllabus. Concerning the objectives of both syllabuses, they are compared according to their orientations (linguistic, methodological and socio-cultural). The language aspects and skills are compared in terms of content provided and presentation.

### 4-Results and Discussion

It is clearly mentioned in both syllabuses that they are based on the Competency-Based Language Teaching Approach. This latter is chosen as an answer to the 21rst century needs and the world's changes and development. Therefore, the type to choose for syllabus design, the content to include the teaching strategies…should follow the competency-based language teaching. This is the case in both syllabuses though the way of presentation is different.

### 4-1-The General Goals from Teaching English in Both Syllabuses

Both syllabuses are designed with a humanist philosophy of education that emphasizes the learner; thus English is considered as a personal enrichment of the learners to become citizens of their country and the modern world they belong to. Therefore, English is considered in both syllabuses as a subject matter and as a means of communication. The following citations are examples from the syllabuses that show clearly the similarities in general goals from teaching English in this level:

> Le but de l'enseignement de l'anglais est d'aider notre société à **s'intégrer** harmonieusement dans la **modernité** en participant pleinement à la communauté linguistique qui utilise cette langue pour tous types **d'interaction** (English as a means of communication)…l'enseignement de l'anglais implique, non seulement l'acquisition de compétences linguistiques et de communication, mais également de compétences transversales d'ordre méthodologique/technologique, culturel, social chez l'élève… (English as a subject matter) and (Algerian syllabus 3AS, 2007, p.7)

And

> (English is) Both as a means of communication and a subject matter, English will be a means to collect information, process data… English will foster self-expression as well as appropriate interaction with peers and other interlocutors which, in turn, will ensure access to universal culture through Anglophone contexts and …use communication technology, be it at the individual or cooperative modes through working procedures (English as a means of communication)… English will develop the learners' analytical and critical skills required by the syllabus mainly by drawing upon prior and academic knowledge to comprehend and use language as a system orally and in written form (English as a subject matter) (Tunisian syllabus 4AS, 2008, p.38)

### 4-2-The Specific Objectives from Teaching English in both Syllabuses

The specific objectives set in the two syllabuses are from three natures: linguistic and communication, methodological/technological, and socio-cultural. These objectives share many similarities. As examples from the syllabuses:

> «Doter l'apprenant d'une base linguistique solide (grammaire, syntaxe, vocabulaire, prononciation, maitrise des codes de l'oral et de l'écrit ». (Algerian syllabus 3AS, 2007, p.8). And "Language is seen as a means of communication (interactional, transactional and functional) rather a set of decontextualized grammatical structures, word lists and isolated language skills". Tunisian syllabus 4AS, 2008, p.39)

These statements are examples of linguistic and communication objectives. The Algerian and Tunisian syllabuses show great similarity in formulating this kind of objectives.

> «Consolider les capacités intellectuelles de l'élève telles que l'analyse, l'évaluation à travers des activités pertinentes ». (Algerian syllabus 3AS, 2007, p.8). And "The teacher should create conditions conductive to learning…the teacher acts as a professional, creative manager of classroom activities and of student learning". (Tunisian syllabus 4AS, 2008, p.39)

These statements show similarities in methodological/technological objectives cited in both syllabuses. There are many similarities; however, the Algerian syllabus listed objectives that are not included in the Tunisian one. For instance: "teach students to learn how to use different types of documentation in order to prepare them for university or any other milieu". (Algerian syllabus 3AS, 2007, p.8)

«Stimuler la curiosité de l'apprenant et contribuer à son ouverture d'esprit en l'exposant à divers contextes de civilisation et en l'intéressant plus particulièrement à la culture anglophone ». (Algerian syllabus 3AS, 2007, p.9). and "The learner's participation and interaction are important in learning the language and fostering self-confidence and social relationships among learners. Such relationships and interactions are among learners within the context of learning English will nurture in learners positive values and a sense of identity". (Tunisian syllabus 4AS, 2008, p.39)

These statements illustrate the standpoint Algeria and Tunisia share regarding the teaching of one's culture and the culture(s) of the English language. Hence, the cross-cultural teaching conducts them to efficiently and successfully integrate the active and foreign milieu outside the classroom and the country.

### 4-3-The Types of the Algerian and the Tunisian Syllabuses

Concerning the syllabus type on which the Algerian and Tunisian syllabuses are based, it seems that it is task-based and communicative, thus they respond to the communicative purposes they both underline. Through reading the two syllabuses, it is clear that they share orientations with the task-based syllabus principles, as these few examples show:

- The learner is the centre of the language learning which aims at making him/her able to use the language outside the academic context (Rabbini, 2002). This principle is termed as *"le programme par compétence propose des situations d'apprentissage et des situations d'intégration qui mettent l'apprenant au centre de l'apprentissage»*and *"lui permettre de poursuivre avec succès une formation supérieure en anglais, en milieu universitaire ou professionnel "* (Algerian syllabus 3AS, 2007, p.8), and *"the learner is the core of the learning process…the teaching/learning process should foster learner independence to enable the learner to use English effectively both in its spoken and written forms so that he/she may continue learning by himself/herself, beyond the programme»*(Tunisian syllabus 4AS, 2008, p.39)
- Task-based syllabus is based on the belief that learners become analytical in the exploration process of communication in the foreign language and the ability to use it. Thus interaction is a basic element. (Rabbini, 2002). This principle is termed "*lui permettre de comprendre et communiquer aisément dans la langue étrangère»*(Algerian syllabus 3AS, 2007, p.8)and "*the learner's participation and interaction are important in learning the language and fostering self-confidence and social relationships among learners*" (Tunisian syllabus 4AS, 2008, p.39)

These principles are examples among the several ones mentioned in both syllabuses and which correspond to the principles of task-based syllabuses claimed by Rabbini (2002). Therefore, both syllabuses are task-based in nature since they are based on the learner, tasks and problem-solving situations. This in fact fits the competency-based approach adopted by both syllabuses. These principles claim to be communicative because they are based on principles claiming to develop learners' communication skills and respect the requirements of the competency-based language teaching. That is, both syllabuses are designed with harmony regarding their type and the approach they rely on. In this respect, Nunan (2001, nd.) sustained that "a task-based syllabus represents a particular realization of communicative language teaching. It relates purely pedagogical goals to real-world activities".

### *4-5-Language Aspects in both Syllabuses*

The language components (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) are given a great emphasis in both syllabuses, since the mastery of a foreign language needs the mastery of the linguistic competence. That is, training in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation helps the learners build knowledge s/he can use in everyday life, in every situation, in oral as well as in written perspectives. The grammatical structures help the listener/reader to understand the others and help the speaker/writer express their ideas correctly. Vocabulary instruction helps learners acquire words and expressions in their contexts; thus avoid misunderstanding or being misunderstood. Pronunciation is seen as the best way to evaluate one's communicative competence. Thus, knowing to pronounce means knowing to speak and articulate correctly and eventually understand correctly.

In the Algerian syllabus, there are two sections concerned with the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation: "*objectifs linguistiques et de communication*»and "*des savoirs/contenus linguistiques (language outcomes*". The syllabus argues that the learners need to be endowed with a solid linguistic baggage in English (syntax, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) in order to make them able to master oral and written skills, understand and communicate in English. The grammar and vocabulary of English should be taught in context and be related to the theme of the lesson or unit-that is contextualized grammar and vocabulary teaching. The learner needs to understand how the language system works, how language conventions vary according to communicative situations and contexts, and apply this knowledge in speech as well as in writing. Therefore, teaching of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation is an essential part of language teaching which helps the pupils to use English effectively both in spoken and written modes.

Similarly, the Tunisian syllabus devotes two sections for the teaching of grammar: "*principles, assumptions and methodology*»and "*grammar*". Grammar instruction is among the crucial language aspects to teach in any language. This is because if a learner does not learn how the language is structured and how its system functions, s/he could not achieve any communicative competence. Thus, knowing the grammar of a language and how it functions contributes to effective language acquisition. Vocabulary and pronunciation are also formulated in such a way that makes the textbook designers aware of their importance. Thus, the syllabus gives guidelines for how to insert them in the textbook considering different parts of the language (as context, learner's needs and interests, and the baccalaureate exam).

Both syllabuses formulated clear objectives regarding the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. These latter are among the basic language components to master in order to get an efficient communicative competence-the basic principle of the competency-based language teaching. The importance of these language aspects is reflected in the textbooks, designed on the basis of the two syllabuses, with various tasks and lessons related to them. The different vital fact is the audio CD provided to help the Tunisian students achieve better pronunciation competence. The organization and presentation of materials are different in the textbooks; however, it is worthy to say that both syllabuses respond to the communicative syllabus regarding language aspects though with different formulation and presentation.

*4-6-Language Skills in both Syllabuses*

The four language skills are provided in both syllabuses with a significant position. The Algerian syllabus lists the main objectives to achieve in relation to each skill whereas the Tunisian syllabus categorizes the different sub-skills meant to develop in the learners with different strategies to adopt for each sub-skill in addition to the general objectives to achieve at the end of secondary education. In the Algerian syllabus, this is formulated mainly through skills and strategy outcomes in which different strategies are provided while the Tunisian syllabus devotes a large part to the sub-skills to develop and strategies to adopt for each skill.

Both syllabuses discuss the objectives to achieve considering the listening ability, though the presentation and organization of the materials are different. The Algerian syllabus formulates this through *compétence 2* that deals with the interpretation of oral and written texts, while the Tunisian syllabus shows a list of the different listening sub-skills and strategies to develop in the learners. However, the aim from teaching listening is the same: to help the learners understand and interpret oral discourse, to negotiate meaning, to infer and transfer information, and analyze the structure of different types and genres of oral discourse. Three sections in the Algerian syllabus are devoted to the listening skill "compétence 2: intérpreter des messages oraux ou écrits", "des saviors-être: social skills outcomes", and "dessavoirs/contenus linguistiques". Listening is formulated in the Tunisian syllabus through the different sub-skills and strategies. That is, only one section is devoted to listening entitled "reading and listening strategies".

Both syllabuses articulate objectives for speaking instruction. In the Algerian syllabus, it is formulated through *compétence 1* that intends to make the learners produce oral information relying on the context and situation, using correct grammar and pronunciation and appropriate vocabulary. In the Tunisian syllabus, it is articulated through the different sub-skills and strategies that, in general encourage the learners to produce an oral report relying on context, appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar and pronunciation. That is, the aim of teaching speaking is similar in both syllabuses. In the Algerian syllabus, there are five sections in which speaking objectives, skills and strategies are formulated: "compétence 1: interagir oralement", "des situations d'apprentissage et des situations d'intégration", "dessavoirs/contenus linguistiques", "des savoirs-faire»and "des savoirs-être". Two sections are allocated to speaking in the Tunisian syllabus: "principles, assumptions and methodology" and "speaking and writing skills and strategies".

Reading is formulated in the Algerian syllabus through *competence 2*, as listening, underlying the understanding and interpretation of oral and written language, while in the Tunisian syllabus; it is articulated with sub-skills and strategies as listening. That is, the aim from teaching reading is the same. In the Algerian syllabus, reading is formulated through four sections: "compétence 2:interpréter des messages oraux ou écrits", "des situations d'apprentissage et des situations d'intégration", "des savoirs/contenus linguistiques»and "des savoirs-faire". Only one section, in the Tunisian syllabus, deals with reading: "reading and listening skills and strategies".

Writing is considered as the most important skill in both syllabuses considering the fact that secondary education level ends with a national examination-baccalaureate which is completed in the written mode. Accordingly, learners need to acquire different writing skills and strategies. Nevertheless, the presentation and organization of writing materials in both syllabuses are different. In the Algerian syllabus, competence 3 and the terminal objective shed the light on the importance and objectives of teaching writing; while in the Tunisian syllabus, writing is articulated through strategies and sub-skills. The importance given to writing in the Tunisian syllabus is highlighted when viewing the textbook and the teacher's

book relying on that syllabus. Six sections in the Algerian syllabus are devoted to writing skills: "compétence 3:produire des messages écrits", "objectif terminal d'intégration: profil de sortie de l'élève de 3AS", "des situations d'apprentissage et des situations d'intégration", "des savoirs-faire", "des savoirs/contenus linguistiques", and "description des projets en termes de ressources". One part, in the Tunisian syllabus, is concerned with writing: "speaking and writing skills and strategies". In both syllabuses, writing instruction aims at communicating and reinvesting the acquired and constructed knowledge in a range of situations related to real life. Therefore, learners are required to produce a piece of writing in any text type and genre studied in the textbooks, by using correct grammar, punctuation, text structure, cohesion, coherence, appropriate vocabulary…

## 5-Conclusion

This paper unveils the differences and similarities underlying the Algerian and Tunisian syllabuses designed for learners in the last year secondary education. The comparison essentially goes through some aspects: goals and objectives, syllabus type, language aspects and language skills. Thus, both syllabuses are based on the competency-based language teaching requirements in order to follow the new and continuous progress in the world. Both syllabuses are designed under the same types: communicative, task-based and cyclical but are different in that the Algerian syllabus is also project-based since it emphasises projects as a main learning tool. This type of syllabus is adequate to the use of the approach adopted by the two syllabuses. Both language aspects (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are crucial in both syllabuses. However, their presentation, practice and organization are different.

The Algerian syllabus is mainly formulated through general objectives to achieve at the end of the third year secondary education, and specific objectives to achieve for different contents (aspects, skills, strategies...). Conversely, the Tunisian syllabus is formulated so as to give the reader an insight of what to teach in general, the objectives to reach, and the different strategies to adopt in order to attain the objectives set. The content, in the Algerian syllabus, is mainly planned through three competences to develop in the learners. In contrast, the Tunisian syllabus is planned in terms of strategies for different content and outcomes with a central emphasis on language and social skills.

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