BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF ALGERIAN EFL TEACHERS' ENROLLMENT IN DIDACTICS MASTER'S PROGRAM

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Abstract: This study examines the benefits and challenges of EFL teachers' enrollment in a didactics Master's program through a multiple case study of five teachers. Participants were selected from different contexts where the phenomenon of enrolled versus non-enrolled teachers is central, in order to compare and contrast the data. The data were collected using a) a semi-structured interview, b) the teachers' lessons' plan, c) Licence and Master's degree curriculum development and harmonization, and d) the enrolled teachers' Master's degree timetables to assess time constraints. The results revealed that although the program theoretically intends to enhance the teachers' knowledge base and professional development, it is difficult to determine whether the teachers fully benefit from the program due to time, location, and national education policy constraints.

Keywords: Educational policy, EFL teachers, lesson plans, Masters programs

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1. Introduction

Ensuring an effective teaching-learning process depends to a great extent on teachers' skills and expertise (Jones et al., 2006). EFL teachers' performance has always been and still is believed to influence students' learning outcomes, and for that, teachers need to update their knowledge and practices (Behar-Horenstein et al., 1996; Burroughs, 2019) because in the modern world where knowledge accumulates and technology advances at an extremely rapid rate, sustainable changes are happening in the sectors of education, social life, and digitally at the same time (Haleem et al., 2022; Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023). One way to keep up with these changes is by enrolling in a Master's degree program that would further enhance EFL teachers' expertise in their respective fields (Butterweck, 1961; Bui, 2014; Vural & Başaran, 2021; Mckillop, 2023). Despite the importance of the topic, it is difficult to find a single study on it in Algeria. That being the case, this study aims to examine the effects of Algerian EFL teachers' enrollment in a Master's degree program by asking the following questions:

1- How can EFL teachers benefit from enrolling in a Master's degree program?
  a. In what way does the knowledge gained help in developing lesson plans?
  b. How can the Master's program promote sustainable professional development?
  c. Is there a relationship between the Master's program and the enhancement of technology use proficiency?

To conduct a thorough study, this research also investigates the issues faced by EFL teachers during their enrollment. That helps weigh the arguments regarding whether the program truly supports teachers. Therefore, this study poses the following question:

2- Do EFL teachers face learning challenges while enrolled in a Master's degree program?

2. Literature Review

The literature review is divided into two main parts. The first part provides a historical overview of the implementation of the Master's degree in Algeria. At the end of the section, a brief account of the Algerian ENS (École Normale Supérieure)[i] system is presented, which is a higher education institution that operates under a different system than the University. This facilitates a comparison of the performance of the ENS participant and the university graduate participants. The second section streamlines the in-service teacher training program and lesson planning policies, which serve as the reference points for comparing the Master's curricula with the needs of national education institutions.

2.1 Master's Degree in Algeria

The Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) adopted the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system in 2004/2005 in an attempt to reform Higher Education and ensure high-quality learning by creating an initiative for students with scientific and professional qualities (Mami, 2013; Miliani, 2017). The system was also adopted to make Algerian universities more comprehensive and open to the world (Benouar, 2013) while reducing the length of study (MESRS, 2011). Rezig explains that "The LMD designed three main grades: The license[ii], granted after three years of study. Master's degree conferred after two years of study. The doctorate is conferred after the completion of research for at least three years and defending a thesis" (2011, p.1328).

In 2014, the MESRS issued an ordinance concerning the conditions of university studies inscription with a view to obtaining a Master's Degree. according to article

number 3 of the ordinance number 363 (MESRS, 2014), students who want to enroll in a Master's Degree program must meet certain conditions. These conditions may differ from one university to another according to the available pedagogical seats. For instance, some universities depend on students' ranking. Article number 4 (MESRS, 2014) states that the new graduate students in the LMD system who have not missed or failed any academic term in their course of study have the priority to enroll. They represent 80% of the total number of enrolled students. The remaining 20% is for external candidates from different national or international universities in addition to students who did not finish their studies after their licence graduation sometime in the past. Most of the teachers who seek to finish their university studies fall under the second category because the issued ordinance n◦ 06-03 in 2006 on the general status of the civil service restricts them. According to article number 208 of the second chapter:

> The employer may benefit, subject to prior justification, from authorized absences without loss of pay in the following cases: To pursue studies related to their activities, limited to a maximum of four (4) hours per week, compatible with service requirements, or to participate in exams or competitions for the duration of the tests. (Journal of the Official Gazette, 2006, Chap. 2, Art. 208)

Students decide to enroll in a Master's Degree program in Algeria for different reasons. They consider a licence degree as a preparatory step to acquire the basis of a definite field while enrollment in a Master's Degree program leads to a greater understanding of a particular field (Sebbah, 2016) for the goal of Master's degree programs with a dissertation is to improve students' research skills. That is, it sustainably helps them to develop the skills they need to use research methods and techniques, develop hypotheses for pressing issues, and acquire the tools they need to follow scientific procedures when it comes time to test their hypotheses (Vural & Başaran, 2021). The Master's program allows them to get a scholarship or job in the future (Guemide, 2022).

On the other hand, some Master's Degree candidates who already have an occupation decide to enroll for different objectives such as seeking personal and professional development or for salary increase. Having a Master's certificate opens opportunities for them. According to the annual measure of school teachers' mobility (The Official Bulletin of the Ministry of National Education, 2006), Algerian middle school teachers with Master's Degrees have different privileges. A Master's Degree certificate adds two extra marks to teachers' ranking rate for mobility. Also, it allows them to sit for secondary school contests to increase their salary and reduce working time.

ENS is a public institution that operates under the supervision of the MESRS, and it has legal personality and financial independence; among the first established ENS institutions is the ENS of Bouzareah, founded in 1984 (École Normale Supérieure de Bouzareah, n.d.; MESRS, n.d.). One of the school's objectives is to ensure qualified professionals in the national education sector by training teachers on national syllabi and textbooks (École Normale Supérieure de Sétif, n.d.). The difference between a university and an ENS is that the latter prerequisites a higher baccalaureate[iii] grade, national competition, and limited pedagogical seats; however, it is directly linked to the demands of the market (MESRS, n.d.).

2.2. National Education

The performance of novice teachers in Algeria is subject to two factors; namely teachers' training and the country's lesson plan policy. The following sections provide an account of how the training takes place and the fundamental components of lesson planning to determine whether they align with the Master's degree program. ENS teachers are not involved in the training because "Unlike the Algerian universities, the

Algerian Teachers' Training Schools/Colleges provide future student-teachers with some kind of teaching training" (Boudersa, 2016).

Teacher Training. According to the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education (AMNE), The winners of the national competition for teachers' employment in Algeria undergo training for six separate weeks throughout their first in-service year (AMNE, 2015), the estimated 180 hours of training are divided as follows:

Table 1.

EFL teachers' training modules

Module	Number of hours	Coefficient
Educational psychology	40	2
Classroom management	10	1
Didactics	40	2
Pedagogical assessment	10	1
The Algerian educational system and curriculum	20	1
Pedagogy and training design	10	1
School legislation	20	1
Information and communications technology	30	1
Total	*180*	*10*

Teachers are trained in Arabic in most of the modules except for didactics (AMNE, 2015). During training, they are assessed through continuous assessment, and upon training completion, they sit for a final exam in addition to their submission of an end training report (AMNE, 2015).

On the effectiveness of the training, Kadri & Benmouhoub (n.d.) think that the training period is short and inefficient, in addition to being irrelevant to the higher education curriculum. Benzerroug (2019), in her research on EFL teachers' implementation of CBA in their classrooms, reports that "almost all of respondents state that CBA has to be perfected in the following years because of the difficulties they face in implementing it in their teaching, which is due to their insufficient training".

To compensate for the shortcomings of the training, Goura and Ziani (2021) think that "Differing from the period before the reforms, the ministry is paying a lot of attention to the ongoing professional teacher training through seminars, study days and conferences" (49), and yet Kadri & Benmouhoub (n.d.) report that teachers do not frequently attend the seminars, and the workshops lack a practical aspect.

Lesson plan. English lesson planning in Algeria has always followed the general policy of the country with respect to world changes (Messekher, 2014; Baghoussi & El Ouchdi, 2019; Goura & Ziani, 2021). AMNE issued three major reforms concerning how and when English should be implemented in 2005-2006, 2016-2017, and recently in 2022-2023 (Benzerroug, 2019; Goura & Ziani, 2021; Boukhlef, 2022).

The first reform that is almost not referred to in the literature was about the collaboration of AMNE with the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the second reform, called the second-generation program, was about reforming middle school English textbooks (Baghoussi & El Ouchdi, 2019). The recent reform aimed at teaching English starting at the third grade of the primary school level (Middle East Monitor, 2022). This study does not deal with the last reform because the selected participants teach only at middle and high schools.

The Algerian English Framework (AEF) was the Partnership Schools Program that "has been delivered in collaboration with the Algerian Ministry of National Education, and implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc. and World

Learning/School for International Training (WL/SIT) Graduate Institute. The program began in 2005 and continued through summer 2010" (The Algerian English Framework, 2010, p. 3). In the course of five years, the AEF developed a program for 7 grades; from first-year middle school (ms1) to third-year secondary school (se3). The program focused mainly on the three IIP competencies, interact, interpret, and produce. (The Algerian English Framework, 2010). Learning was teacher-centered, and communicative skills were ignored in addition to the absence of Information and Communicative Technology (ICT) use (British Council, 2021).

Samir Bounab (2017), a teacher trainer and president of the National Scientific and Cultural Association to promote English in Algeria, thinks that the 2nd generation program is a combination of the old system, core values, and cross-curricular competencies. According to the AMNE, "Like other disciplines, teaching-learning English helps the acquisition of values as well as cross-curricular competencies. These competencies are stated as: intellectual, methodological, communicative, personal and social" (2016). For example, second-year middle school pupils are required to acquire the values of national identity, national conscience, citizenship, and openness to the world through cross-curricular competencies (AMNE, 2016).

3. Methodology

To explore the effects of enrolling in a Master's degree program, the study used the multiple case study design (Stake, 2006), using a qualitative research approach (Mayring, 2021), to assess how EFL teachers' professional development affects their teaching practices through content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). The study is conducted along two axes and under four theme areas. The first axis addresses the challenges faced by EFL teachers in pursuing their studies classified under three main themes; (a) time, (b) location, and (c) education policy constraints. The second axis considers the benefits of studying for a Master's degree under two theme areas; (d) sustaining teachers' knowledge base and (e) assisting teaching through technology use.

Research context and participants

The study took place during the academic year 2022-2023. The research sample included five participants with varying degrees and experiences; enrolled, non-enrolled, and a Master's graduate. The rationale behind the teachers' selection is presented in the following table:

Table 2.

Teachers' selection criteria

Criteria	Rationale
LMD Licence degree + a Master's enrolled teacher	Licence curriculum relevance + challenges/benefits of the enrolment.
Classic Licence degree + a Master's enrolled teacher	Classic Licence relevance + challenges/benefits of the enrolment.
ENS + a Master's enrolled teacher	ENS curriculum relevance + challenges/benefits of the enrolment.
Licence degree + non-enrolled teacher	Comparison with the enrolled teachers.
Master's graduate	Comparison with the enrolled/non enrolled teachers + challenges/benefits of the enrolment + sustainable development.

One Licence non-enrolled graduate, a Master's graduate, an ENS enrolled (Ecole Normale Supérieur) graduate, and two Licence enrolled teacher-students. A participant teaches at high school while four teach at middle school. The main focus of the research is on the enrolled teachers and the Master's graduate while the other cases aim to compare and contrast data to have an in-depth study. Choosing cases from different contexts adds to the credibility of the study for more robust results (Creswell, 2007). Cases' differences covered all the possibilities where the phenomenon of the study (absence/ presence of professional development) is central, the size of the sample then satisfies the theoretical replication strategy requirements while reaching saturation (Yin, 2014). Table 2 summarizes the teachers' basic information profile:

Table 3.

Participants' profile

Participants	P(A)	P(B)	P€	P(D)	P€
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	45	43	33	31	34
Qualification	Licence C	Licence C	Master	Licence LMD	ENS
Teaching at	High school	Middle school	Middle school	Middle school	Middle school
Experience	20	10	8	1	11
Master's enrollment	2nd-year Master	1st-year Master	Master graduate	Not enrolled	2nd-year Master

Note. C denotes Classic system studies.

3.1 Data collection

Data were collected from different sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the centrality of professional development for each case (Yin, 2014). The sources included mainly (a) an online semi-interview conducted in May 2023 to gather demographic information of the participants and establish the main themes of the study, b) teachers' lesson plans that aimed to provide the employed methods as well as the content design of lessons relative to the existing literature (The Algerian English Framework, 2010; Bounab, 2017; British Council Algeria, 2021) and (c) the licence and Master's curriculum development and harmonization of Djelfa University comparing them with the teachers' training program effectiveness mentioned in the literature (AMNE, 2015; Benzerroug, 2019; Goura & Ziani, 2020), and d) the Master's degree timetable to assess the weekly scheduling of university courses in the timetable. The timetables were collected from the official Facebook group of the Foreign Languages Department, English Division, and with the authorization of the chief of the department.

The interview with P(A) included one extra question on the licence classic system studies since we could not have access to such material either online (the literature) or on-site (university archive). The aim was to assess the transition from the old (classical) to the new (LMD) systems and the effectiveness of the former despite the introduction of the 2nd generation program.

4. Results

The first section of the results gives a narrative description of the teachers' profiles and interview answers. The second section focuses on the results of the other collected data.

4.1 Teachers' Interview

P(A). The first participant (A) was a 42 years old male who obtained a classic licence degree that enabled him to teach at high school for 20 years. He enrolled in a

Master's degree program despite the distance between where he lives and teaches and the university, around 125 km.

He is satisfied with his postgraduation studies as he thinks that enrolling in a Master's degree program improves teaching performance and professional development while he complains about some constraints like distance, time, and COVID-19 restrictions since he first enrolled in the academic year 2019-2020. Despite those circumstances, he arranged to schedule make-up sessions for his students when he was absent to study at the university.

When asked about his teaching performance, he said that he depends on both his skills and competencies and scientific knowledge in teaching. He thinks that being aware of the different fields of SLA helps him often in his class. He very likely recommends teachers to continue their studies because there is a difference between enrolled and non-enrolled teachers in matters of better classroom management, teaching, and teaching conduct. When asked why teachers need to be up-to-date in today's world, he said:

"Yes, the teacher needs to update his /her knowledge permanently to keep abreast of the changes in the domains of education and better utilize the recent methods of teaching and techniques and hence improve pupil's learning in line with his social needs in response to current challenges. The approaches to teaching have evolved based on human criteria and techno pedagogy that prioritize the wants and needs of the trainee over the social policy. Unlike the content-based syllabus, communication-based learning programs involve pupils' participation and enrollment."

When asked the classic system studies, he said that, unlike the LMD system, the Licence degree was conferred after four years of study divided as follows:

First year: oral expression, reading comprehension, grammar, listening comprehension, phonetics, written expression, linguistics, cultural studies, and Arabic linguistics (in Arabic).

Second year: modern Arab literature (in Arabic), American literature, civilization, linguistics, phonetics, grammar, and written expression.

Third year: Algerian literature (in Arabic), American civilization, British civilization, American literature, British literature, psycho-pedagogy, linguistics, didactics.

Fourth year: the student chooses five modules out of seven.

P(B). The second participant (B), a 43-year-old female, is a 10 years middle school teacher despite having a classic Licence degree. She is enrolled in a Master's degree program and the distance between her house/school is within a short driving distance from the university.

She thinks that the program improves her teaching performance and she is satisfied with it. Nevertheless, she faces some obstacles like time constraints, stress and work overload, and balancing work and study. Same as teacher A, she used to be absent from school and then managed to schedule make-up sessions.

She relied on both skills and competence as well as scientific knowledge to teach and she thinks that being aware of the different fields of SLA helps her often in class. She very likely recommends enrolment in the program as it helps in higher students' engagement, better teaching methods, and better lesson planning.

For her, teachers need to be up-to-date in today's world "because nowadays everything has changed and become fast, especially with technology. Teachers have to develop and update with the present time ".

P(C). The third participant (C) was a 33-year-old female who had already had a Master's degree at the time of conducting the study. She had an experience of 8 years in

teaching at a middle school. She said that the university was within a short driving distance from her house when she used to study. She was satisfied with the Master's degree program which she somewhat likely recommends for it improves teaching performance despite facing problems related to balancing work and study, time constraints, and stress and work overload. Unlike the other participants, she justified her absence from work by taking an unpaid leave of absence.

Inside the classroom, she depends on both her skills and competencies and scientific knowledge. She thinks that enrolling in a Master's degree does somewhat improve teaching performance. She thinks that it helps in better teaching methods, better classroom management, and better lesson planning.

She agrees that teachers "Must be up to date due to the evolution and development of technology in education and science in general, and in teaching fields specifically.".

P(D). Participant (D) was a 31-year-old female whose qualification was an LMD Licence degree. She was the least experienced teacher of all participants with two years of experience. She was not enrolled in a Master's degree. The university is quite far from her house and job, around 136 km. She thinks that pursuing a Master's degree improves job opportunities. From the challenges she thinks may face her if enrolled are the distance between university and school, stress and work overload, and time constraints.

She only depends on her skills and competencies inside the classroom and she is not sure whether enrolling would improve her performance. She somewhat likely recommends enrolling in a Master's degree program.

However, she is with the idea that teachers need to be up-to-date in today's world "Because teachers have to encourage their students to try to use only English in their lessons, this is the important one".

P(E). The fifth Participant (E) is a female teacher with an ENS Diploma (3+4). She teaches at a middle school and has 12 years of experience. She is a second-year Master's teacher-student. The university is within walking distance from her house. She thinks that the program enhances teachers' performance. She faces attendance issues and lack of support from the university, stress and work overload, and time constraints. To continue studying at university, she has to leave work and arrange make-up sessions later.

Nevertheless, she is satisfied with the enrollment which she very likely recommends because it helps in grasping the teaching methods and developing lesson plans. In the classroom, she relies on both her skills and competencies and her scientific knowledge.

She thinks that teaching needs to be up to date "Because the teacher plays a very important role in building society, which is an indispensable role".

3.2 Timetables

The aim of collecting the licence program's development and harmonization was to compare its modules with those of the Master's program without the need to emphasize time constraints, the following table summarizes the findings:

Table 4.

LMD system's English Licence modules

L1	oral writing reading	literature civilization	linguistics	methodology	foreign language	grammar	phonetics	social and human sciences	
L2	oral writing reading	literature civilization	linguistics	methodology	foreign language	grammar	phonology	translation	
L3	oral writing	literature civilization	linguistics	methodology	foreign language	ESP didactics	cognitive psychology	translation	T I C E

Note. Columns may include more than one module. These modules belong to the same unit in the LMD program design.

EFL students study 11 modules in their first and second LMD years, while they study 12 modules in their third year. In the L1/L2 years, the emphasis is on mastering the language through the four skills. They study ICT only in their L3 year, where they start also to become familiar with English for Specific Purposes (ESP), didactics, and cognitive psychology.

The aim of collecting the Master's program harmonization and development and the timetables is to compare the modules with the teachers' training and to assess the time constraints that the enrolled teachers face.

Table 5.

Didactics first-year Master's program timetable

	8.30-10	10-11.5	12.30-14.00	14.00-15.30
Monday	Writing	Applied linguistics	Sociolinguistics	
Wednesday	Didactics	Discourse analysis	Translation	Foreign language
Thursday	Second language acquisition	Methodology	Teaching literary texts	

First-year Master students study 10 modules throughout the first and second semesters. Didactics, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), applied linguistics, and teaching literary texts are the modules directly related to EFL teaching. There is no module related to ICT. According to the Master's degree curriculum harmonization, didactics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and applied linguistics are considered fundamental modules.

Table 6.

Didactics second-year Master's program timetable

	8.30-10	10-11.5	12.30-14.00	14.00-15.30
Monday	Educational psychology	Communication practices	Language teaching methods	
Wednesday	Interculturality and didactics	Dissertation writing	Methodology	TICE
Thursday	Socio-didactics	English for specific purposes	Foreign language	

Second-year Master students study for only one semester, lasting 12 weeks, and they spend the rest of the second semester preparing their Master's dissertations. For this semester, the ICT module is introduced. Most of the modules are directly related to EFL teaching. According to the Master's degree curriculum harmonization, educational psychology, socio-didactics, language teaching approaches and methods, and ESP are considered fundamental modules.

Table 7. *Participants' lessons' plan results*

Stating a clear Objective	Stating an objective for each stage	Time management	Stating cross-curricular competencies	Stating core values	Production tasks	Teaching methods	ICT use
X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X
✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

The researchers collected the lesson plans from the teachers via email. The teachers studied at the same university as the authors; therefore, they were very willing to respond to the request. Except for P(A), all of the lesson plans were handwritten on lesson plan templates or on blank papers they had designed. The templates included spaces for each theme stated in Table. 7. However, not all of the teachers filled in those spaces, as some themes were simply not introduced by the teachers who designed their lessons.

What is most noticeable is that all of the participants overlooked the use of ICT in their teaching. P(A) used more than one teaching method, inductive and deductive methods, without focusing on the other themes. P(C), a Master's graduate, and P(E), a 2nd year mater student, included all of the themes except for ICT whereas P(B), a 1st year Master student with 10 years teaching experience, P(D), a Licence graduate with just a year teaching experience, designed their lesson plans the same way. Both teachers had the intention to include some of the overlooked themes, but they did not execute them appropriately. For example, P(B) mentioned how she manages time for only the first 20 minutes.

5. Discussion

In The present study investigated the effects of EFL teachers' enrollment in a Master's degree program. The results showed that there are a) a gap between the national and higher education ministries and b) a possible benefit from the Master's program curriculum pertaining to teachers' professional development. These results align with the findings of Kadri (n.d.) mentioned in the literature.

5.1 The Gap Between National and Postgraduate Education

EFL Algerian teachers who seek professional development through enrolment in a didactics Master's degree program face major problems resulting from an apparent lack of cooperation between the ministries of national and higher education. This results in classroom underachievement other than enhancement. Technically speaking, time and location are the two major problems facing enrolled EFL teachers. Second, the University curriculum does not work as an agent for national education.

Time and Location Constraints. The Master's studies require 15 hours of study a week, and as mentioned in the literature (Journal of the Official Gazette, 2006), teachers are allowed to attend only 4 hours a week as they have to teach from 18 to 22 hours weekly (Journal of the Official Gazette, 2008). Teachers are compelled then to skip university/ workplace classes or opt for an unpaid leave of absence. All around, teachers' distraction will affect their teaching performance.

Djelfa province's surface is about 542.2 km^2 with 400 km length and 15 km width, and the University of Djelfa is located in the middle (University of Djelfa, n.d.). The distance between the university and the largest districts like Hasi Bahbah, Ouassara, El-Idrissia, and Messad is between 50-150 km (University of Djelfa, n.d.); that takes around an hour to 2-hour road trip. Teachers, if they decide to attend university classes, will need to leave early and get back home late. Without counting the time they should spend preparing their lessons, the stress of the road and lack of sleep will lower their academic and teaching performance.

Education Policy Constraints. There is a disconnect between the AMNE training program and the MESRS Master's program. The AMNE developed a program that it considers necessary for effective teaching performance, as mentioned in the literature, including classroom management, pedagogical assessment, the Algerian educational system and curriculum, and pedagogy and training design (AMNE, 2016). Conversely, the harmonization of Master's degree program does not include these practical modules but rather focuses on more general areas of study, such as SLA, interculturality and didactics, and discourse analysis.

There is also an absence of a link between the 2nd generation textbooks' reform and the Didactics Master's program modules. According to the interview conducted with P(A), the classic system encouraged the incorporation of CORE values in the classroom since there were modules related to the Algerian culture, namely Arabic linguistics, modern Arab literature, and Algerian literature. In contrast, the LMD system does not directly address the CORE values.

According to the literature (AMNE, 2015; AMNE, 2016, Bounab, 2017), teachers are bound to follow specific measures in designing their lessons based on their training and the textbooks; consequently, they are program executors and have little freedom to be creative. A plausible reason for this conclusion is related to the results of Table 5. Except for participant (A), all the other participants' results are close to each other although participant (D) is not even enrolled in a Master's program. Participant (A) reinforces the assumption. He teaches at high school where there is not yet a reform, and he follows a teacher-centered approach even though he is a second-year Master's student, and he managed to attend all university classes according to his profile.

Moreover, the reform puts much emphasis on the implementation of technology in teaching/learning (British Council, 2021). However, the first-year Master's program does not include any modules related to ICTs while the second-year program includes the ICTs module for 90 minutes a week and for one semester only which will not be enough to use in the classroom.

5.2 The Bridge Between National and Postgraduate Education

The data suggest that the Master's degree program develops the knowledge base of teachers through breadth modules, namely: writing, applied linguistics, discourse analysis, translation, foreign language, interculturality and didactics, and English for Specific Purposes. Some of the modules align with the cross-curricular competencies mentioned in the literature (AMNE, 2016). That is, the (a) methodological, (b) communicative, (c) personal, and (d) social competencies can be enhanced through (a) language teaching approaches and methods and teaching literary texts, (b) communication practices, (c) educational psychology, and (d) socio-didactics and sociolinguistics.

The program also enhances teachers' professional development by equipping them with the necessary tools to promote their research skills through the methodology and dissertation writing modules. In addition, the teachers need to write and defend a dissertation at the end of their second year.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results reveal that it is hard to track the effects of professional development on EFL teachers' teaching performance. If the enrolled teachers are trapped between fulfilling their duties as teachers or as student teachers, they are not fully benefiting from their enrolment, and therefore, it is a bit complicated to tell whether there was a kind of improvement in the first place. Theoretically speaking, the program seems to contribute to the development of the teachers' knowledge base and professional growth, and yet implementing such a program is challenging. Moreover, it lacks modules that the AMNE emphasizes as necessary for effective teaching performance.

The tools of this qualitative study, mainly the Master's harmonization and the training program, tried to provide a comprehensive view of the educational system in Algeria. However, the multiple case study does not generalize the results as the interview and lesson plans aimed to give an initial exploration of the interconnectedness between higher and national education ministries. Therefore, further studies should be conducted on the influence of each item in the Master's program harmonization on EFL teachers' teaching performance.

Based on the findings, two main recommendations can be made regarding the interplay of factors. First, Since Saturday is a weekday for the Algerian University while it is a weekend for national education (Echorouk Online, 2009), the department administration could schedule the Master's degree program fundamental modules on Saturdays and online sessions for the rest of the modules. This will also help them become familiar with the use of technology. Second, we propose establishing an organising body which links higher education with national education ministries.

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ⁱ This can roughly be translated as "Teachers' Training School".

ⁱⁱ The spelling of the word is a point of contention in the literature. The LMD system in Algeria was adopted from Europe, where it is referred to as "licence". In what follows, I will refer to it as such.

ⁱⁱⁱ "an exam in several subjects taken in the last year of school around the age of 18 in France and some other countries" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.).