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Algerian students specialized in German civilization and the English language

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Abstract: *The aim of this research paper is to shed light on the students' preoccupations at the university level, mainly the ones who have enjoyed learning English as an elementary subject in high school and, find themselves acquainted to a specialty that tends to neglect the use of the English language in the university studies. After passing the Baccalaureate exam, the students were orientated to specialize in German studies These students announce to the teacher they wish they mastered the English language though they know that the time limited to their encounter is only one hour and a half per week. This situation in itself constitutes a challenge for the teacher and leads him /her to answer the following question: what curriculum could the teacher elaborate to enable the students reach their objective; speaking English fluently? In an attempt to answer the raised question, it is necessary to identify the students' profile, mainly the ones who have shifted from English as a third language -after French- to the fourth position after German.*
Key words: *Algerian students, cognates, curriculum, profile, timing.*
Résumé : *L'objectif de cette étude est de mettre en lumière les préoccupations des étudiants au niveau universitaire, principalement ceux qui ont pris le plaisir à apprendre l'anglais comme matière élémentaire au lycée et se sont familiarisés avec une spécialité qui tend à négliger l'utilisation de la langue anglaise dans les études universitaires. Après avoir réussi l'examen du baccalauréat, les étudiants ont été orientés vers une spécialisation en études allemandes. Ces étudiants annoncent au professeur qu'ils souhaitent maîtriser la langue Anglaise alors qu'ils savent que le temps limité à leur rencontre n'est que d'une heure et demie par semaine. Cette situation constitue en soi un défi pour l'enseignant et l'amène à répondre à la question suivante : Quel serait le programme que l'enseignant pourrait élaborer pour permettre aux étudiants d'atteindre leur objectif : parler l'Anglais couramment ? Pour tenter de répondre à la question posée, il est nécessaire d'identifier le profil des élèves, principalement ceux qui sont passés de l'anglais comme troisième langue -après le français- à la quatrième position après l'allemand.*
Mots clés *: Etudiants Algériens, mots apparentés, programme, apprendre l'Anglais, ordre des mots*.

1. Introduction

Teaching effectively as students wish to learn, has become a challenge for the teachers. Generation Y (youth) major concern is to communicate fluently in English whether they are specialized in energy, Arabic literature, medicine or any other specialty. They all want to chat in English, understand English songs, and understand the computing items that are necessary for manipulating the computer, downloading a game and understanding the given instructions to carry on an online procedure.

In Algeria, education is free and compulsory for all Algerian children. The child joins either the school or the kindergarten at the age of five for a one-year period. This additional year is considered as a preparatory level during which the medium is Arabic. It allows the kid a social, physical and behavioral maturity besides lessons on handwriting, recitations, and concentration on numerical readiness for the

primary school level. Algeria requires kids to attend this level until age six; the child starts officially the five years' period of the primary school. At this level the learners start learning French as a second language from the third year onwards. Later, the learner passes to Middle school where he starts to learn English as a second foreign language after French during four years.

After passing the national exam and getting a certificate of 'B.E.M' (Brevet de l'Enseignement Moyen): a middle school certificate, the learners pass to the high school where they are enrolled for tree year period of studies in different specialization streams. The specialty that attributes more timing and coefficient to English is the literary stream. During this year they are provided a common core curriculum. The students who get very good grades in English and French are directed to specialize in foreign languages: French, English, German and Spanish. It is worth reminding the reader that the English language comes at the position of the third language after French. More details are illustrated in the following figures: they give more information about the timing and coefficient of English focusing on the students who are specialized in German studies.

2. English for German-Language Students as a Case Study

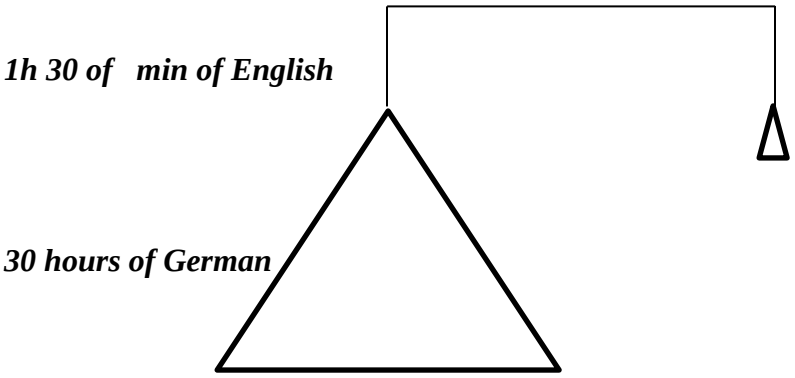
They start learning English in the middle school for three hours per week. Once in high school, at the end of the first year, the ones who get good grades in English, they are enrolled in language classes. Besides French, considered the second language after Arabic, they switch between two foreign languages: English and German and the timing allowed for each of them is four hours a week; that's to say they study them on equal footing, as it is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Timing of both English and German at high school



The equitable number of hours of teaching both foreign languages make a balance in timing that leads to a homogeneous language acquisition. It enables the learners to find out the foreign language that best responds to their needs, mental capacity, and the will for learning it more than the other one. Once at university, the ones who become specialized in English, and who were probably good or average at German, will never study German at all. The ones for whom German is the field of specialty, and who were probably good or average at English, will study the latter for one hour and thirty minutes a week if they choose it; that's to say some choose to study French instead of English so, they will never meet English at all in their university studies. The following diagram shows the new timing volume that does not help them switch back and forth between the two languages easily.

Figure *2.* Timing of both English and German at the university



To cope with this new situation, students of first and second year, specialized in German language, prefer to learn about German civilization in English during the one hour and a half per week. On the other hand, students of third year and Master degree prefer to learn about British lifestyle and civilization during the English session. Does this sudden disequilibrium in timing volume cause a crack or a blockade in learners' ability in the acquisition of foreign languages? What makes them want to learn about German civilization in English, in the first and second year, and to study about British civilization when they move to the further years of university studies? Is it a phase of stuttering in front of the iceberg or an exposure of a wish to join the two thread edges and knit up again what has been unknitted? The reader might think that the writer is using subjectivity and sketchy words to express one's wonders but one needs to remember that is a situation between the teacher- the facilitator - and the learners. Subjectivity urges to impose itself because it deals with a real-life situation during which the students sort out their inner thoughts mixed with subjective and nervous emotions; a situation during which subjectivity reigns over objectivity.

In an attempt to move to the objective phase of analyzing the situation academically the teacher opts for face-to-face communication during which listening becomes a prominent skill. When asked about this new situation, they speak out or rather shout complaining that they didn't know that they would face such a sharp decision; learning everything in German and neglecting English. They announce to the teacher that they wished they had been able to communicate fluently in English. The students' reaction make the teacher ask more questions like: What can the instructor do to help the students be proficient in English? Can fluency in a foreign language be acquired by the use of the dictionaries and technological tools only? Do we teach minimum entry standards in the English language or, do we teach fluency? If it were the latter, they would not complain about their disability in speaking English fluently. The students need to be fluent and to interact within the everyday context as it is mentioned in the following quotation.

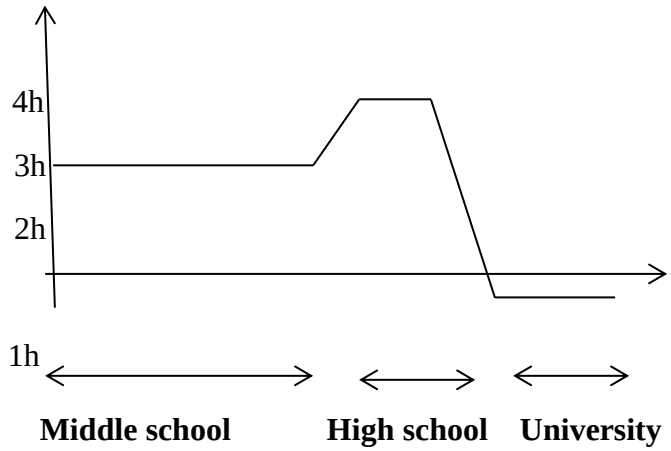
> As general accounts, dictionary definitions should cover not only fluency in everyday native speech but also fluency in a foreign language. Yet when it comes to foreign speech, it is difficult to imagine that fluency could be restricted to rhetorical aspects: both fluency and the adjective fluent are commonly used to qualify the production of foreign speakers in interactional everyday context. (Guillot: 1999, p. 17)

The interactive communication with the learners reveals that they are proud of being able to speak an international language – though not fluently as they wished- and to speak German, a language of a powerful country that is famous for its world known genuine products. They are also proud of being able to speak French which is a social prestige in Algeria, mentioning the other foreign languages since the world consists of so many different languages and dialects, mainly the Chinese language; China is becoming the new world power. Evoking different languages while speaking does not not imply that they are confused or anxious. On the contrary, they are conscious that they are exposed to multi-cultural backgrounds due to urgent circumstances, and to which they are ready to cope with.

The following diagram deals with the timing allowed for teaching English as a foreign language for foreign languages' learners whom we call in Algeria LVE (Langues Vivantes Etrangères)

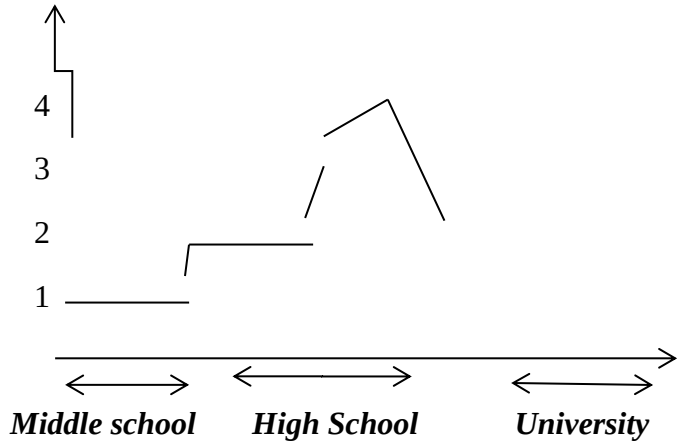
- In middle school, they study English as a third language after Arabic and French for three hours a week and a coefficient of 1.
- In high school, besides Arabic and French, learners enrolled in language classes, study English and German for four hours for each and a coefficient of 4 for each too.
- In the university, the students oriented to study German, they do it for thirty hours a week, and English only for one hour and a half with a coefficient of 1.

Figure 3. Timing of English at Middle, High School and University



The coefficient – a number attributed to the subject reflecting its importance in the year scoring scale - attributed to English in the three different levels of schooling in Algeria differs from one stage to another. In middle school, it is attributed (01) where learners start learning English for the first time. At high school first year level, the coefficient moves upwards to (02). Meanwhile, learners long for learning it because it is the language of modern technology; that is to say it has become the language of everyday life met on computers' usage, mobiles, songs, I phones and I pads. If the learners are sent to foreign language class, the coefficient of English becomes of a more significant importance since it moves upward again to (04). At the university level, if these students of foreign languages are oriented (sometimes against their will) to specialize in German civilization, the coefficient of English degrades to (01). This can be seen clearly in the following diagram.

Figure 4. Coefficient of English at Middle, High School and University



The learners who are specialized in German studies speak English disfluently and meet difficulties in thinking in English only. They always confuse between German vocabulary items and English ones since the two languages share many cognates. They also face serious problem when asked to supply the correct punctuation in a bare paragraph, mainly in capital letters since in German, nouns can take capital letters even in the middle of the sentence. In English, proper nouns always begin with a capital letter. Common nouns; however, begin only with a capital letter when they are the first word of a sentence or a question. Whereas in German, they are very easy to recognize since all nouns, proper and common, are capitalized, regardless of where they are in a sentence. When facing this 'challenge' the teacher wonders seriously if it was adequate to give them an exercise in which they were supposed to supply the correct capitalization when training them to write correctly in English.

Learning a new foreign language makes the learner benefit from previous knowledge of other languages. It allows him / her to get a superior divergent thinking ability. It is unavailable to find a linguistic terminology that refers to an equilibrium in teaching foreign languages that would help the learner to acquire a deep and

knowledgeable assimilation of both languages. An equilibrium in teaching that would also lead to mental willingness to acquire notions easily and, that would make both the presence of mental capacity and learning stimulus in harmony. It would give result to a self-confident learner whose mind is forged with solid arguments rather than floating ideas in a smashed mind incapable of reasoning and changing things. A smashed mind or rather a robotized mind moving from one mold to another one without creating and changing things. Real life situations could shed light on difficulties from which the learner suffers such as, the ability to respond and to speak the language at ease; to express oneself fluently, literately, easily and confidentially. If the learner does not overcome such difficulties, all the efforts that are attributed to the teaching task will result in a failure, anxiety and confusion. Attempts to suggest solutions are required urgently.

3. Suggested Solutions and Assistance for the Dilemma

To assist the students' dilemma, the teacher decides to opt for two solutions: Adapting the annual syllabus to the students' needs and interest, and applying communicative approach as a prompt and an innovative teaching methodology. The proficiency of the teacher impacts the career success that the students achieve. The teacher needs to be flexible and to cope with any circumstances and in any institution. "*The professional judgment of the teacher is now sought in designing language courses to meet the particular needs of each school or faculty institutions of higher education*. "(Fatt: 1991; p. 48) The prominent need of the students who are specialized in German studies is to shift easily from the latter to the English language which they want to master and use effectively.

However, shifting from one foreign language to another is not as easy as we might think. The teacher inserts the students' suggestion in the syllabus design: their favorite German topics -which they study with their teachers of German civilization- are dealt with as English themes. While reading the texts, the students evoke the existence of cognates between the two Germanic languages: English and German. The cognates can serve as a medium that enables the students to figure out what the words mean. A mere definition of the term 'cognates' would identify them as a set of words that share similar spelling and meaning. The cognates derive from the same syntactic and phonological system. They are siblings and sometimes contribute to the easy consolidation and acquisition of either language. The following quotes state it clearly. They contend: Sometimes words are easy to learn because they are the same or very similar in both English and German. These words are easy to recognize in German, but you will have to concentrate on the differences in spelling and pronunciation:

House	Haus
To swim	Schwimmen
Green	grun (Zorach & al: 2001, p.2)

There are many words, called cognates, that have the same meaning and approximately the same spelling in English and German

House	Haus
Student	Student
Intelligent	Intelligent
Garden	Garten

Occasionally knowing one German word will help you learn another." (Ibid, p. 5) Although the cognates have the same meaning, a concentration on both their spelling and mainly pronunciation is required. Considering them as a tool that helps the reader in the acquisition of the English language makes us ask more questions such as: If cognates were of such a great help, why do students specialized in German language complain about their weakness in the English language? These questionable situations urge to succumb on the role assigned to the teacher to remedy. Some linguists say that the total burden lays on the teacher since he/she has to find out techniques and methods that pave the way to the easy acquisition of foreign languages. Here is one of them who says:

> As educators, we are in the privileged position to recognize that the learning process never ends. Just as science is always questioning itself, professional educators continue to examine, test, deconstruct, and reconstruct strategies to become better at the important job we are entrusted with." (Holec, & al.: 1996, p.4)

The role of the educator is of an utmost importance, and he/she should cope with modern teaching strategies and tools. There should be a designed and a coherent syllabus for implementing its results, especially for multilingual students.

Nowadays, students prefer the I phone and the I pad rather than the printed lessons. That is to say they rely much more on listening than on reading. Under this head, Milne states:

> The quality of your speaking in a second or a foreign language will be determined by the quality of your listening. This will no doubt be a surprise to many people, as most language teaching does not appear to not take this on board. Instead, many learners and teachers think that studying the grammar and the vocabulary will give the learners their desired results. There is a lot more to successful language learning than that. (Milne: 2005, p. 10)

Speaking effectively a foreign language is not limited to instructional learning. Self-learning, self-assessment and participating in syllabus design can motivate the learners. These attributes help to create an active and engaged community of learners. Furthermore, they are encouraged to use various types of media to connect

the selected English texts and class discussions with the field of their specialty. In a word, when suggesting their chosen topics to deal with in the designed syllabus, they influence class direction and develop their ability of language acquisition through the communication skill. A practicing environment is created during which the learners are involved to meet their needs, as it is explained in the following quote:

> In this sense, some of the previous studies worth mentioning are for example those of Dunn (1988), who insists on the importance of teaching the students by using methods that adapt to their conceptual preferences. Or Cabrero (2006), who also points out how the applied teaching strategies will take effect on the teaching quality. (Franzoni & Assar: 2009, p. 6)

Achieving communicative competency has become a key objective to adjust to a new learning environment and to get along with the learners' perspectives. Performing the syllabus as a living and a negotiated document enables the learners to explore their educational identities. It is a teaching methodology that conforms to their preferences and allows them to have a more active role in establishing a rational and a discursive environment of the class.

4. Conclusion

One can say after reading this article that the school has done its duty towards the learner as a citizen, it has made him able to communicate in different languages, and once in university, he has to rely on himself / herself if he / she wants to speak English fluently. If he wants to move from the state of a beginner to the advanced level, he / she can get benefit of the quick services and online lessons. The student knows that the English language is pervasive in German media and popular culture, so he has to continue learning English. Hence, one should ask oneself, what are the risks of the recommendations to slow down or rather to limit tightly learning English on students' fluency? Is there a risk that German student will reverse the word order of English since the German has SOV (Subject, Object, Verb) word order whereas English has a SVO word order? Is bilingual education ineffective since the bilinguals mix their languages? Will online learning redefine quality education? We have to mention that students do have brilliant ideas but, they need motivation to get those ideas out, so one should shift from the victim analysis to the educational problem solving.

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