

## Summary

The starting point of this research was the unsatisfactory scores released at the end of each university year at Chlef department of English. In reality, we, teachers were not totally happy with the quality of English with which the graduates left. We were confronted to a truth: our students were reading and writing at a low level. That reality reflected a fact that was so basic that it was often overlooked in discussions of ways to improve the quality of reading and writing of our students.

The correction of students' exam papers of all grades and in different subjects showed that their writing lacked of coherence, originality and creativity. In fact, students' ideas were expressed through a set of unrelated sentences, patterns or groups of words stored from different modules. Students learned lecture notes by heart and tended to paraphrase the text studied without any personal comment or critical stand.

Inevitably, when asked to argue, to synthesise or to reflect on an event or an extract from a novel or a short story, students could not provide meaningful sentences but sentences which were often riddled with mistakes of different types. When asked to write an essay in literature, civilisation or linguistics, students reported facing a great difficulty in expressing their ideas and thoughts. The most formidable and crucial challenge appeared to be learning how to organize and develop their ideas in an academically persuasive manner; i.e., to organize their assertions into logical and cohesive arguments that would convince the reader.

Their papers often ended up lacking clear logical flow and unity. The only quasi-writing experience they had, was translating Arabic sentences into English. They did not know how to write a thesis statement, how to go about the rest of the process to explain their argument logically to the teachers. Interviewed students felt as if they were groping in the dark and needed specific and systematic guidance on how to scaffold their ideas.

This was the profile of the majority of students who graduated from the departments of English at Chlef University. In deed, the scores released at the end of each university year, and I mean the makeup exams of the September session might

be acceptable as far as test standard established individually by teachers were concerned, but they did not always reflect the students' proficiency, linguistic and pragmatic competency.

Hence, the first aim of this study was to identify the causes of such persistent difficulties that lied behind the flagrant weaknesses of our students. This study was a descriptive intervention-oriented research. It progressed in the form of a two-directional approach: at first stand, it described day to day classroom interactions in reading, writing, literature, civilisation and linguistics modules because these modules relied heavily on writing. This class observation provided good baseline data on the way things were in this particular setting. Subsequent to this descriptive phase, intervention designed to change things had been planned.

### **Steps of the study**

The first step of this period of classroom observation of second and third year students of English lasted one year (2005 till 2006) and it was twofold. The first was to describe the English Teachers' teaching methodologies so as to be able to find the link between teachers' classroom practices and a teaching method or methods, to discover a connection, if there was any, between these teachers' thoughts in action and the theoretical or philosophical principles these actions were based on.

The second was to collect data through students' and teachers' questionnaire and interview, reflect on this information, analyze responses, and identify problems that need solutions. We aimed to capture at least part of the day-to-day interaction of classroom processes and teacher knowledge, and to uncover teachers' thoughts and beliefs guiding their teaching actions.

These two descriptive research steps were important for identifying teacher and student characteristics such as attitudes, motivation, approaches to teaching and learning, difficulties encountered, and self-perceptions. In addition to this, these research investigations led to a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning situation that prevailed at the department of English at Chlef University.

Once the ground was cleared, the research stage involving intervention started. The type of this research intervention fell into the category of true experiment: second and third year students (the same students to whom the first questionnaire was given)

were assigned randomly to experimental or control groups and pretested to assure that both groups had the same characteristics to start with.

Then the experimental group was taught and learned reading and writing English through new techniques and classroom actions developed according to a constructivist view using literature and the new technologies, while the control group received the same courses but was taught in the traditional way i.e. teacher centred. After two semesters (November 2006-may2007), both experimental and control groups writing essays and projects were scrutinised and compared and statistical analyses were made of differences found between the two groups so that reliable conclusions could be drawn about the effect of the intervention.

For more relevance and reliability, external teachers from the experiment had been asked to examine and compare experiment groups exam papers and other students' ones. They had then to complete a questionnaire about whether there had been a noticeable change between the two categories and at what level did this change lie. In addition, students were again solicited to complete a post intervention questionnaire evaluating the benefits of the new teaching/learning environment they experimented along 13 weeks course.

The overall aim of this dissertation was to investigate the teaching and learning situation that prevailed at the department of English at Chlef University in order to unveil the reasons behind such a state. From this overall aim, a number of research questions emerged:

1. What are the different methods of teaching English as a foreign language?
2. What kind of teaching method do teachers follow at the department of English of Chlef University?
3. How are the different modules taught?
4. What teachers' beliefs about these methods?
5. Do teachers have a teaching philosophy?
6. Is there any coordination between teachers?
7. How is the teaching and learning situation at the department of English

8. How do teachers feel towards this situation?
9. How do students feel towards it?

### **Research methods/techniques**

In seeking to answer question 1 I reviewed a selection of literature about teaching methods (see Part I, chapter 1). In relation to question 2 and 3 I planned observation classes that were compiled, analysed and submitted to the observed teachers for further comments (see Part I, chapter 2). Through observation classes, we aimed to capture at least part of the day-to-day interaction of classroom processes and teacher knowledge, and to uncover teachers' thoughts and beliefs guiding their teaching actions.

In responding to question 4, 5 and 6 a teachers' questionnaire was used. It was anonymous and consisted of a mix of close- and open-ended questions. Question 7 and 8 were answered in teachers' interview where they were invited to express their feeling towards the teaching situation in their department, and their relationship with other colleagues and with students. Question 9 concerned students and I answered it through a two-part students' questionnaire (see Part I, chapter2).

These three descriptive research steps were important for identifying teacher and student characteristics such as attitudes, motivation, approaches to teaching and learning, difficulties encountered, and self-perceptions. In addition to this, these research investigations led to a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning situation that prevailed at the department of English at Chlef University.

This work was part of an ambitious approach to support Constructivist Project Technology Class (CPTC). However, the ideal conditions for learning were not always present in the course structure mainly due to the difficulty to have a regular access to Internet laboratory and to the heavy load of preparation that preceded all courses. Finally this research was more qualitative than quantitative and designed to build a theory, a learning pattern. The process of learning was explained to enable others to repeat the same procedure and verify its veracity