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Student-Centered Teaching Practices: Focus on The Project-Based Model to Teaching in the Algerian High-School Contexts

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Abstract

During the last few decades, many teaching philosophies and approaches began to surface and take shape in education. The principles and assumptions underlying these philosophies gained prominence, and started to be adopted and implemented in educational programs and curricula at different learning stages (secondary and tertiary education). The overall aim of these changes is to find better ways (models, approaches) to improve students' learning. Today, in the Algerian educational context, there is an increase demand for more efficient and beneficial teaching approaches. Call for change to take place in teaching has always been raised. Accordingly, there has been a shift of focus in teaching and a tendency on the part of many researchers and educators to advance more innovative, beneficial and student-centered models and approaches to be adopted and implemented in educational programs. Project-Based Teaching is one of these suggested and advocated teaching models. It addresses important concerns and goals in education, and it is characterized by being student-centered. A radical change in the role of teachers and students in the teaching/learning process takes place. The adoption/implementation of such a teaching model is supported by research and is claimed to help develop the students' intrinsic interest in the subject matter, emphasize learning not recall, promote group-work and help students become active, self-directed and independent learners. The main aim of the present paper is to give a compendium of the theory that demonstrates the importance of Project-Based Teaching alongside the different types of learning that can be incorporated in project work (experiential-learning and active-learning). The discussion is also based upon a questionnaire which has been administered to high-school teachers of English, Science, History and Technology in Mohamed Larbi Tlilani high-school (Constantine) in order to explore the efficiency of that model in practice.

Keywords: Active learning, experiential-learning, learning improvement, project-based teaching, student-centered teaching.

Introduction

Previously, teachers used to plan courses by taking full responsibility for the content to teach and the way it should be organized into lessons. The emphasis on what teachers often do led to the feeling that students are largely neglected since they were perceived as passive learners. Discontent about the students' learning results and complaint about the fact that they cannot apply what they learn in addition to their inability to learn on their own led to major changes and reforms in the teaching contexts. There has been a change of emphasis in teaching; the center of focus moved from the teacher to the student, who started to gain more attention in the learning process. The former approach to teaching is referred to as the traditional or the teacher-centered approach to teaching, and the latter is referred to as the learner-centered approach to teaching. Several student-centered models of teaching have been advanced and implemented in the Algerian educational context (Secondary and/or Tertiary), and the project-based model is one of these models.

- **Learner-Centered Approaches to Teaching**

A good way to improve teaching and learning is to adopt more student-centered approaches to teaching. Special focus is given to the introduction of certain interactive learning tasks and projects in the curriculum. This change in the teaching practices came as a response to the ongoing challenges that teachers face and experience with their students. The intention behind that is to make learning more interesting, relevant, meaningful and more practical in nature (Barraket, 2005, p. 65). Learner-centered teaching is not confined to the use of one single model of teaching. Rather, it emphasizes a variety of models whereby most of them share something in common: the role of the teacher shifts from **information provider** to **learning facilitator.** In the learner-centered teaching, focus is placed on what students are learning, how they are learning, how their learning is assessed, and how they can use/apply that learning in real life tasks and contexts. Weimer (2008) provides the following statement to explain what is meant by a student-centered teaching,

> Being student-centered implies a focus on student needs. It is an orientation that gives rise to the idea of education as a product, with the student as the customer and the role of the faculty as one of serving and satisfying the customer. Faculty resist the student-as-customer metaphor for some good reasons. When the product is education, the customer cannot always be right, there is no money-back guarantee, and tuition dollars do not "buy" the desired grades. (p. xvi)

Furthermore, in the learner-centered teaching, focus is placed squarely on learning. That is to say, attention is given to what, how, and the conditions under which the student is learning, whether the student is retaining and applying what has been learnt, and how current learning positions the student for future learning. The student is the main focus of teaching and constitutes an important part of the equation in the learning process. The main aim behind adopting this model is to promote learning in the first place. Weimer (ibid.) points out that the expression "learning-centered" has been suggested to be used instead of "learner-centered", but she (*ibid.*) prefers to keep the latter to place focus on the learner. By using the expression "learner-centered", emphasis is kept fixed on the direct object of our teaching which is the student. Weimer (ibid.) points out that focus in teaching should not be in terms of theoretical knowledge that is transmitted to students; focus in teaching should be practically-oriented. She

states that "We do not want more and better learning at some abstract level; we need it specifically and concretely for the students we face in class" (2008, p. xvi). The adoption of a new teaching approach or model implies that some change has to take place in the teaching practices. According to Blumberg (2009, p. 18), five teaching practices have to be changed to achieve learner-centered teaching. Student-centered models adopt most, if not all, of them and that is what characterizes them from other existing models (traditional).

- **The Function of Content**

The function of the teaching content in the learner-centered approach gives the student a strong knowledge basis, the ability to apply what has been learnt, and the ability to **learn more independently**. Students need an understanding of why they need to learn the content, and they need to be **actively engaged** in their learning of that content.

- **The Role of the Instructor**

The role of the teacher in the learner-centered approach is to help students to learn. Teachers should not just deliver information as it has been the case in the teacher-centered approach. They should rather create an environment for learning to take place, follow, guide and evaluate the students' learning as well. The teaching models and approaches that teachers use should also be appropriate for the learning goals and the instructional objectives.

- **The Responsibility for Learning**

The responsibility for learning in the learner-centered approach shifts from the teacher to the student. The teacher helps students to take responsibility for their own learning by creating situations that motivate them to learn, situations that are interesting to them in their learning. The teacher should also help students to acquire knowledge and skills that they will need in the future. When students assume responsibility for their own learning, they become self-directed learners who are responsible, independent and aware of their own abilities to learn.

- **The Purpose and Processes of Assessment**

The purpose of assessment in the learner-centered approach shifts from merely assigning grades at the end of each test/exam, which used to be the case in the Algerian secondary education, but which is, may be, still the case in higher education. Assessment of students' learning in the student-centered approach shifts from giving scores for the final product to providing constructive feedback in order to assist students in improving their learning. Learner-centered approach integrates assessment with feedback as a part of the learning process.

- **The Balance of Power**

In the learner-centered approach, the balance of power shifts also so that the teacher shares some decisions about the course with the students (*ibid.*). In classroom discussions, the teacher can notice the things that students are interested in, the things that they like, and the things that get them engaged; and on the basis of that s/he plans some tasks or projects, but which should be related to their learning.

- **Project-Based Model as a Form of Student-centered Teaching**

One way to increase the connection between students' interests, the curriculum and the real world is to provide students with more concrete opportunities to learn in a project-based-context. Two student-centered teaching models that characterized and still characterize

nowadays teaching programs all around the world are the task-based and the project-based models. These two models shift the emphasis from teachers teaching to students learning and doing. The tasks and the projects students get engaged in reflect the program's objectives and relate to real world problems, issues, situations and so on (Wiley, 2011, p. 91). Moreover, the tasks and the projects that students get involved in need to match their interests, and these interests are said to be relative to the curriculum. These two models to teaching are claimed to have a beneficial effect on students. They are said to motivate and help them to match their interests to the curriculum (*ibid*, p. 93).

Project-based instruction is of an exploratory nature. Generally speaking, there are many goals that can be achieved through such kind of instruction. One of these major goals is that projects seek to achieve a comprehensible output. That is to say, the teachers adopting thismodel give students more opportunities to learn and practice the issues at hand in different subjects. Another important goal is that project-based teaching provides students with the opportunity to "recycle known knowledge and skills" (Haines, 1989, p. 1). It provides them with an opportunity to integrate previously gained knowledge with current knowledge and to use them in performing actual and future tasks and projects in different contexts.

Task-based and project-based teaching are considered as innovative and beneficial models in secondary education or higher education in the Algerian context. These two types of teaching are perceived as being powerful and effective models because they are said to boost collaboration, independence and self-directed learning. Both models are based upon the assumption that learning is an active, integrated and a constructive process that is influenced by social and contextual factors. They are also characterized by the fact that they are student-centered. Teachers in this sense are seen as facilitators in the process of learning rather than information providers. Besides teaching and providing students with a sound and strong knowledge basis in a given subject matter, as teachers, we all aspire to develop the intrinsic interest of students with regard to what they learn and to link what they learn to their real-life (how they will use what they are learning). As such, task-based and project-based teaching came in order to emphasize learning rather than recall of information. They came to promote learners' collaboration via group-work, independence as well as self-direction and autonomy in learning.

- **An Account of Project-Based Teaching**

The idea of integrating projects in the teaching/learning process is not a new one in education. The idea of 'learning by doing' has been suggested a long time ago by Dewy (1916), who advocated it as a good way for improving learning, retention and application. In the period whereby the constructivist theories of learning gained prominence (Vygotsky, 1978), project-based learning has also started to gain ground in education. The tendency of teachers in the different levels and phases of education moved towards preferring and adopting project-based learningnot only in first language contexts, but even in second and foreign language contexts (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Fried-Booth, 2002; Stoller, 2006).

In the discussion of the main premise underlying project-based language teaching, one central notion comes into play. That notion is that of "**authenticity**." Unlike any kind of previously existing teaching, authenticity in projects is of key importance. This authenticity can be displayed in different ways in the learning tasks and projects that students get involved in, such as purposeful project topics, purposeful contexts, outside-the-classroom collaborators, project output, project audience within the community, oral presentations, written reports and so

forth. Accordingly, project-based instruction has been defined as "an authentic instructional model or strategy in which students plan, implement, and evaluate projects that have real world applications beyond the classroom" (Railsback, 2002, p. 6). In project-based learning, focus is placed on learning activities that are interdisciplinary, long term and student centered (Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project, 1999). Project-based instructional activities are rooted in the constructivist approach. Constructivism has evolved from previous works of psychologists and educators like Vygotsky and Dewey. The assumption underlying constructivism is that learning is a result of mental construction and that one learns by constructing new ideas based on his/her previous knowledge (Karlin & Vianni, 2001). With projects, focus is, hence, put on the notion of authenticity both with regard to the tasks and the roles of teachers and students who are said to reflect the purposefulness and the authenticity of the target language use (Beckett & Miller, 2006; Beckett & Slater, 2005; Stoller, 2006).

> Project learning is a collaborative approach to teaching and learning in which learners are placed in situations where they use authentic language to accomplish particular objectives. As part of the process, learners plan, work on complex tasks, and assess their performance and progress. As project is designed around issues, questions, or needs identified by the learners. (AEEP/REEP, 1997, p. 6)

Despite the fact that there is a general understanding of what project learning is, there is no general consent vis-à-vis the form, the time-span, and the coverage of an educational project, especially in secondary education in the Algerian context. The Buck Institute for Education (BIE) (2003), which represents a research and development organization that focusses on problem- and project-based instruction, confirms that point by pointing out that there is a no-one-single definition of project-based learning that can be accepted. They (2003) state that project based learning is:

> [A] systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks. (p. 4)

Though not clearly stated, but it can be inferred that project work is a an effort and time-consuming work on the part of both teachers and students. It needs due attention and follow up to achieve the intended goals and objectives of education.

According to BIE (*ibid.*), an outstanding project must necessarily have the following characteristics:

- Recognize students' inherent drive to learn;
- Engage the students through the curriculum;
- Lead students to in-depth exploration of authentic and important topics;
- Use tools and skills as part of the learning process;
- Generate multiple output that requires research, problem-solving, feedback and reflection;
- Incorporate performance-based assessment, and
- Involve collaboration.

In the same line of thought, according to Stoller (1997), project work has some characteristics that can be summarized as follows:

- It focuses on content learning through language learning
- It is student-centered
- Teachers play the role of language guiders and facilitators
- It is cooperative, not competitive: students work individually or in groups to complete a project
- It leads to the authentic integration of skills
- The culmination will be a final product
- It is motivating, stimulating and challenging
- Students can build confidence, self-esteem as well as autonomy.

Given the fact that they both share the same acronyms, much confusion is usually made between project-based learning (PBL) and problem-based learning (PBL). There lies a difference, however, between the two and this difference lies in how much autonomy is allowed or given to students. In project-based learning students are given greater autonomy.

Central to the thread of discussion is also the confusion that is usually made between task-based language teaching (TBLT) and project-based language teaching (PBLT). Similar to project-based language teaching, task-based language teaching is also said to promote learning and acquisition; it is fostered through cognitively challenging and meaningful use of language. Language learning tasks are goal-oriented and focus is placed on meaning with clearly defined learning outcomes. Compared to projects, which take longer time to be achieved outside the classroom, tasks are mini-activities that are accomplished inside classroom. Bygate *et al*. (2011, p. 11) state that, "a task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning to attain an objective." Long (1985, p. 89) points out that the notion of "task" exists within the educational world alongside a more mundane concept of task as " the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between." Teachers may, hence, confuse between what constitutes a task or a project in language teaching. One thing that should be always be born in mind, however, is the fact that a task in the TBLT is pedagogically focused, contextualized, and has a clear focus (Ellis, 2003).

Project based learning is based upon the idea that language learning reflects an approach which connects content and target language to students' lives (Dooly & Masats, 2010). Additionally, Stoller (2006) points out that project-based language learning allows students to set and evaluate their own language learning goals and content learning goals besides other related skills and learning strategies. Doing this will not only be beneficial for learning, but it will also ensures language learners' motivation and confidence in the process of learning. Moreover, it will make assessment more transparent and integrated in the overall learning process (AAEP/REEP, 1997).

It is a real challenge for teachers to keep their students involved, engaged and motivated in their classrooms. Despite the fact that there is no general consent on a "one-size-fits-all" approach, it is usually claimed that there are certain teaching practices which encourage learning and engagement more than others. The idea that these practices are centrally based on is that teaching should move away from rote learning and memorization; it should provoke learning that is more challenging to involve students in more complex, but meaningful, work. Teaching should have an interdisciplinary rather than a departmentalized focus; it should encourage cooperative learning (Lumsden, 1994).

In the Algerian educational context, some teachers used to incorporate projects in their classrooms and in their lesson plans even before the introduction and the implementation of project-based model in the curriculum. Occasionally, they used to require from their learners to prepare a mini-research about an educational issue relative to the subject at hand. With the introduction of the educational reforms in 2004, project-based instruction received much attention and projects gained more importance in the process of learning. Project-based teaching is different from other types of teaching in the sense that it is a holistic instructional strategy rather than an add-on. This approach to teaching is beneficial and more meaningful. In today's teaching, teachers group students together with different learning styles, learning abilities and levels together. "Project based instruction builds on students' individual strengths, and allows them to explore their interests in the framework of a defined curriculum." (Railsback, 2002, p. 3).

- **Elements of Authentic Projects**

Projects are said to be authentic when they have in common the following defining features:

- Student-centered, student-directed
- A definite beginning, middle, and end
- Content meaningful to students; directly observable in their environment
- Real world problems
- First hand investigation
- Sensitivity to local culture and culturally appropriate
- Specific goals related to curriculum and school
- A tangible product that can be shared with the intended audience
- Connections among academic, life, and work skills
- Opportunity for feedback and assessment from expert sources
- Opportunity for reflective thinking and student self-assessment
- Authentic assessment (portfolios, journals, etc.) (*ibid*, p.7)

- **Benefits of Project Based Instruction**

Using project-based instruction in teaching is claimed to have many benefits for students. The approach motivates learners to learn by giving them more chances to choose topics that they find interesting and relevant to them in their lives (Katz & Chard, 1989). According to Brewster & Fager (2000), twenty years of research indicate that engagement and motivation lead to high achievement. Since students come to classroom with a wide range of abilities and learning styles, teachers are always seeking to find better ways to respond to the needs of these learners. One way to do this is to use project-based instruction because it provides learners with a good deal of learning opportunities inside and outside classrooms.

In the 1960's and the early 1970's, active learning has been greatly emphasized. Active engagement in projects has also been emphasized as a type of learning by doing. Some of the other most important benefits of project-based instruction can be summarized in the following points:

- Preparing students for work place
- Increasing motivation
- Connecting learning at school with reality
- Providing collaborative opportunities to construct knowledge

- Increasing social and communication skills
- Increasing problem-solving skills
- Enabling students to make and see connections between disciplines
- Providing opportunities to contribute to their school or community
- Increasing self-esteem
- Allowing students to use their individual learning strengths and diverse approaches to learning
- Providing a practical, real-world way to learn to use technology (*ibid*, p. 10).

- **Project-Based Teaching and Experiential Learning**

Learning by experience is considered as one of the most fundamental means of learning. In simple words, experiential learning indicates the ability to think and to reflect individually or collectivelyon experience in programmed and/or incidental learning. To use Beard & Wilson's (2002) words,

> Experiential learning is, in essence, the underpinning process to all forms of learning since it represents the transformation of most new and significant experiences and incorporates them within a broader conceptual framework. (p.16)

Stein *et al. (*2004) also emphasizes the importance of experiential learning by stating that,

> a uniquely valuable source for learning—especially in the realm of human behaviour on the individual and group level—lies in the experience of everyday life and the conceptualization and reflection on it. It implies that academic or book learning—on its own—cannot be a substitution for learning from experience and may only play a supplementary role by recording or otherwise elaborating on some of the learning phenomena derived from experience. (p. 20)

In a similar vein, Silberman (2007) states that experiential learning refers to,

> (a) the involvement of learners in concrete activities that enable them to experience what they are learning about and (b) the opportunity to reflect on those activities. Experiential learning can be based on both real work/life experiences (e.g. **working on a current project**) and structured experiences that stimulate or approximate real work/life. (p. 8)

All in all, as it has been pointed out earlier in this paper, a good way to teach something is to act it out. Accordingly, projects that are included in Algerian secondary educationare a form of acting what has been learnt out, they are a form of applying and doing. Descriptions and theoretical explanation of some concepts are useful, but they are not always greatly understood by students, especially if they are later on asked to apply what they have covered in the course in real life situations. To use Silberman's (2007, p. 8) words again, "acquiring skills require more than monkey see, monkey do". Experiential activities are important in order to succeed in building a level of awareness and to be able to apply what has been learnt in other different, but related, contexts. There are many forms of experiential learning such as: on-the-job assignments,

field experience, action learning projects, and so forth. Other different teaching models are available at the disposal of teachers to teach the different subjects in a more practical way including: problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, project-based learningand so forth. It is our belief that if the teaching practices and the curriculum are to be oriented toward student-centered teaching in a sound way with all conditions being present, this may lead to better learning, understanding and positive performance on the part of students (Barraket, 2005, p. 64).

- **Project-Based Teaching and Active Learning**

Students can learn better by doing as an active involvement in the process of learning which may lead to success. Teaching the knowledge and skills in the English subject, for instance, using real life situations will be useful in providing students with good learning experience. Learning by doing is a good way to understand, retain knowledge and apply it later on in different contexts as well.

Unsuccessful teaching and learning of English in the Algerian secondary education is claimed to have been so, as it has been pointed out earlier in this paper, because teaching has been characterized by being teacher-centered. Focus has been on delivering information at the expense of placing much focus on the student as an active agent in the process of learning, the process of learning and the communicative needs they want to achieve. Given these facts, teachers' teaching orientations have been directed towards adopting more student-centered approaches to teaching any subject, and this is the case with the adoption and the implementation of projects in secondary school education in Algeria. Decision to adopt the student-centered approach to teaching aims to increase interaction among students through group discussions, collective, andindividual research projectsrelated to their real life situations. Within this scope, Khumalo & Ndaba (2005) state that,

> The use of practical real life examples that are relevant to the local situation where students have some expertise and experience is recommended. In research application rather than sheer exposition by lecturers and absorption is what makes effective learning. (p. 248)

Such kind of learning that involves students in direct and real-life tasks and projects to achieve some communicative goals allows students to start asking important questions, think, and reflect in a process of exploration, analysis, discovery and understanding, which is at the heart of many student-centered teaching models and project-based model in the first place. In this case, students will develop an ability to appreciate the process of reasoning and understanding. Hence, through getting them down to work in a given task or project, for instance, teachers provide the students with an excellent opportunity to gauge their grasp of theoretical knowledge (ibid.).

According to Wolters et al. (2000), active learning is:

> a form of learning in which the learner uses opportunities to decide about aspects of the learning process… it refers to the extent to which the learner is challenged to use his or her mental abilities while learning. This active learning on the one hand has to do with decisions about learning and on the other hand making an active use of thinking. (p. 21)

One of the major points that should be given due concern in classes where teaching is characterized by being student-centered and adopting project-based model to teaching (Active learning, Experiential Learning), is the fact that after each unit of teaching, the teacher should make a follow up when assigning some practical tasks/projects to be accomplished over a period of time outside classroom. This will serve as a demonstration of students' understanding of the points covered in the whole unit. Moreover, the spotlight should always be placed on the student as a central agent in learning; he should be always seen an active participant in the learning process.

- **Purpose of the Paper**

The purpose of the present paper is to discuss the important role and the value of project work in strengthening knowledge aqcuisition and skills' development of Algerian high school students in the subjects of Science, History, Technology and English in the Algerian high school context. Its aim is to discuss project teaching as an innovative model in the student-centered approach which has beneficial effects on students' learning. This teaching model is supported by research and has received welcome among a good deal of researchers and teachers as a useful model to be integrated and implemented in the curriculum to improve learning (achievement). On the basis of that, this paper represents an investigation of whether or not projects do really bring beneficial improvement in the learning of high school students and in boosting their understanding, and hence their achievement.

- **Methodology**

The present research paper involves a discussion of the project-based model to teaching and its implementation in curriculum. Discussion of project work is twofolds. First, the project model is theoretically discussed in light of research which supports its adoption and application in teaching programs as an efficient model alongside some of its related types of learning, namely, experiential learning and active learning. Second, the importance and usefulness of project work is practically discussed in light of a questionnaire which has been administered to teachers at Tlilani Mohamed Larbi high school-Bousouf (Constantine-Algeria). The teachers involved in the questionnaire are 20 high school teachers who teach different subjects: Science, History, Technology and English. The main aim behind the administration of this questionnaire is to get more informed about the importance of project work in the teaching/learning process and to explore its efficiency in teaching on the basis of teachers' personal experience in using it over many years now since its implementation in the Algerian high school curriculum.

- **The Analysis of the Questionnaire**

As it has been mentioned earlier in this paper, there has been an educational reform in the Algerian system of education which started to be implemented since 2004 onward. The curriculum in secondary education is characterized by the adoption of competency-based approach to teaching. Since the world is increasingly witnessing huge development and advance in the different fields of life (technology, science, economy, politics, and so on), it has become an urgent need for people to learn the English language as the main dominant language used for communication today. The intention behind such an educational reform has been to boost the Algerian young learners' level in English. The intention is to form competent and proficient learners and to prepare them for future jobs, future studies, and even for the country's own benefit. Accordingly, some competency-based teaching models have been adopted and

implemented in the curriculum of first, second and third year secondary education students in Algeria using the project-based model.

This study is based upon a questionnaire which has been administered to high school teachers in the Lycee Tlilani Mohamed Larbi-Bousouf (Constantine-Algeria). Its main purpose is to investigate the use of projects in teaching different subject matters, namely, English, science, technology, and history in the Algerian context. The questionnaire consists of twenty two questions and it has been administered to 20 teachers (5 teachers from each subject mentioned above). The aim of the questionnaire is to see, from teachers' own point and teaching practices, whether or not the projects do really bring any beneficial improvement in the learning of students and in boosting their understanding, hence their achievement (scores).

- **Teachers Experience in Teaching and Teaching Subjects**

The informants in the present research paper are 20 high school teachers who teach. English, Science, Technology, and History. Five teachers from each subject have been administered the questionnaire. The purpose behind that is to get more informed about the importance and the usefulness of the project-based model in the different subjects taught in the Algerian high schools. Most of the teachers (12/20) have a good deal of experience in teaching (20 years), which means that they have a good knowledge about the two educational systems and the curriculum that used to be in high school before and after the educational reforms which took place in 2004. The remaining teachers (8/20) have an average experience of 8 years in teaching, which means that they had started teaching just after the educational reforms took place.

- **Satisfaction with the Educational Reform and the Program**

When asked about their satisfaction with the educational reforms that took place in the Algerian educational system, all the informants (20/20) said that they are satisfied. The new curriculum has brought innovation in the teaching and the learning process of all subjects. The teachers are given more freedom in adding new things in their teaching, something which has not been the case before. Teachers used to follow the textbook and were deprived of adding things that might be helpful to their students, to help them learn and to engage them in the learning process.

The main focus of the program is no longer on the mere rote memorization of content. Today's program includes a variety of interesting lessons (more communicative), topics and interesting activities that help meet the needs of different learners who have different learning needs and different learning style. The teachers (14/20) said that the program now takes the students into consideration and aims to engage them in the process of learning as active participants.

- **The Inclusion of Projects in Learning and Their Importance**

All teachers (20/20) of different subjects said that they assign projects to their students because projects form an essential part in the curriculum and they receive the same importance as the one of tests and exams. The purpose behind giving projects to students to work on is to reinforce learning, and to help students apply the knowledge gained inside the classroom by applying it on their own in other different, but related, situations (20/20).

The projects that are assigned to students are not the ones of their own choice. They are suggested by the teachers but they are still related to the program of the curriculum. Students' freedom exhibits itself in the way they gather information, treat the topic, find solutions to problems, and apply the different skills to achieve certain goal. The textbook is divided into units; in turn, the units are divided into sequences. Each unit takes approximately two months and a half, maximum three months, to be covered. In each unit, student can be given a project to work on, with an average of one project per unit. According to all the teachers (20/20), that project is said to serve the content or the points which have been taught in that unit.

- **Students' Tendency Toward Project Work**

Project work is an adventure that students like to take. They feel that they are free to apply what they have learnt in their own way. Teachers (20/20) said that students do not find projects difficult to achieve especially that they are related to their curriculum. They also do not find much problems in the presence of clear instructions, guidance, help and follow-up from the teacher. It is a structured work that has a beginning, a middle and an end. In the process of doing the project, students usually ask questions and seek help from the teacher who is there to guide and facilitate learning for them. What is more important is that students feel motivated to work on their project and enjoy doing that very much (20/20).

- **The Assessment of Project**

There is a general consent among teachers (20/20) that projects are difficult to achieve and include in the curriculum. Given the facts that students work in a collaborative way (group-work), the result will always be that out of 5 students, for instance, 2 work seriously on the project while the others get the piece of pie ready-made for them to eat. This drawback has been raised in research about project work and has always been emphasized. Unlike previous teaching practices which used to exist before the educational reforms, today, the project work that students are asked to do is taken into consideration in the process of assessing students' learning and their improvement. The final mark is divided on four main parts: the Test, the Project-Work, Oral Expression, and the Exam.

Project work is given importance just like the importance given to an exam. But unlike the exam that is taken under certain conditions (individual work, time limitation, etc.), project work does not share those conditions. Consequently, teachers find it difficult to manage and evaluate. Since it is done by groups of students, the teacher can never make sure that all the students have been searching, collecting information, analyzing it, then applying what has been learnt in a given task. One drawback in the implementation of project work in secondary education is the fact that teachers are faced with many pressure to finish the program, while projects take a good deal of time and great deal of attention on the part of the teacher who will be responsible for assigning them, guiding, following, and then evaluating the final product. At the end of project work, students are not assessed on their performance (oral performance, presentation), most of the time, they get assessed only on a written product especially in the case of the English, French, Arabic, history subjects.

As it has been pointed out all over this paper, project based teaching is student- centered which necessitates that assessment should be authentic. Projects are a type of authentic assessment but if conducted in a wrong manner, the result will not be reliable. For projects to be authentically assessed, they should be evaluated on the basis of oral performance (performance-

based assessment) which seems to be missing in the actual teachers' (20/20) teaching practices in secondary education. When asked to explain the absence of performance assessment of the projects, the teachers (20/20) said that they ran short of time. Furthermore, they argue that the feedback that is given to students on their projects is allocatedjust a one session class discussion of the topics, with students participating and expressing themselves about what they have been working about.

Conclusion

The present paper is an attempt to explore the importance and the efficiency of project-based teaching in the Algerian secondary education. It serves as a first step to get more informed about the current teaching and assessment practices that take place in high school. Given the observed low level that many Algerian secondary students have in foreign languages, and in English in particular, this investigation can shed light on some of the points that might be reasons for impeding learning and achieving good mastery of foreign languages. We can say that despite the fact that project- based teaching and project work might be beneficial in many ways, conditions should first be made appropriate for learning to take place and for improvement to be achieved. If projects are to be taken into account, authentic assessment should be used. Assessment should focus not only on written products, whereby many times it is a copy and paste process, but rather oral presentation or oral performance should also be given space in the assessment (performance assessment). Doing this would reflect a deeper view of what communicative-based teaching seeks to achieve: developing the students' ability to find information (reading), analyzing it (reasoning), writing about it (writing), then presenting it (oral presentation).

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Appendix

Dear teacher/colleague,

This questionnaire is addressed to high school teachers at Tlilani Mohamed Larbi High School-Bousouf (Constantine-Algeria). It is a part of a research investigation about the importance of project work and the implementation of the project-based model in secondary education school curricula. Would you please put (x) where applicable and/or supply the required information when necessary.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Section One: Teachers' Experience and Subjects Taught

1. Would you please choose the number of years of experience in teaching the subject:

5 years 10 years 15 years 20 years Other

2. What subjects do you teach in seconday school?

Science Technology History English

Section 02: Teachers' Opinion Concerning Educational Reforms and Project Work Importance

3. What is your opinion with regard to the reforms in secondary school education?

.....

.....

4. Do you think that the integration of projects in secondary school curriculum/program has brought any new to teaching/learning?

Yes No

Explain, please!

.....
.....
5. Do projects form an important part in the curriculum?
Yes No
Explain, please!
.....
.....
6. Do you assign project work to your students?
Yes No
If yes, how many project per unit?
None One Two Other
6. At what phase of unit do you assign projects?
Beginning of the unit Middle End
7. For what purposes do you assign projects to students?
Reinforce learning Apply knowledge In-depth topic exploration
Authentic topic exploration Test learning
8. On what basis do you assign project topics?
Students' choice Teacher's choice Program/Curriculum Other
9. What are the main points that projects develop in students?
Build confidence Self-esteem Develop student autonomy Other

Section 03: Students' Attitude and Tendency Towards Project Work and Teacher's Role

10. How do students find projects?
Engaging Interesting Motivating
Boring Stimulating Challenging Other
11. Do students find projects difficult?
Yes No
If students find/don't find projects diffcult, why do you think they do so?
Clear instructions guidance help follow up Other
.....
12. What skills do projects develop most in your students?
Researching Problem-solving Feedback and reflection Other
.....
13. What is your role in project conducting?
Guide/facilitator Information giver Evaluator/Feedback provider Other
.....
14. Do you check students' progress in conducting projects?
Yes No
If yes, how often?
Often Sometimes Rarely Never
15. Do students work individually or collectively to complete projects?
Individually (competitive) Collectively (Group collaboration/cooperative)
16. Do you set specific goals before assigning projects to students?
Yes No
If yes, on what basis do you set them? Specify, please!
.....
.....

Section 04: Project Work Applicability and Assessment

17. Do you think that working on projects help students learn better and enhance their achievement?
Yes No

Explain, please!

.....

.....

18. Are projects difficult to achieve/include in the curriculum?

Yes No

If yes/no, explain, please!

Time constraint Program overload Difficult to manage/evaluate

lack of authentic assessment of performance other

.....

19. Do you take projects into consideration in the assessment process?

Yes No

20. Does the mark of projects receive a good deal of importance in assessment?

Yes No

Explain how, please?

.....

.....

Section 05: Benefits of Project Based Intsruction and Teachers' Satisfaction with Its Implementation in the Curriculum

21. Choose from the list below the main benefits of project work in the learning process. Put (x) where necessary:

- Motivates students/Increase motivation
- Gives more learning opportunities
- Promotes achievement
- Active engagement
- Connect learning at school with reality
- Provide collaborative opportunities to construct knowledge
- Develop/Increase problem-solving skills
- Develop/Increase social and communication skills
- Increase self-esteem
- Allow students to use their individual learning stengths
- Develop research skills of learners
- Provide Students with practical and real-life way to learn

22. Are you satisfied with the implementation of project work in the curriculum?

Yes No

If no, explain why please!

.....

THANK YOU