Language Teachers' Beliefs about Curriculum Innovation: Perspectives from Algeria

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Abstract

Recent political and economic developments in Algeria have brought about reforms of the educational system. A new curriculum was introduced as part of these reforms. This paper reports on a qualitative study which explored the beliefs of French and English school teachers about curriculum innovation in Algeria. The findings indicate that the teachers held negative beliefs about the new curriculum because of an incompatibility of these beliefs with the innovation. It was found that the participants generally enacted a transmissionist ideology whereas the new curriculum was intended as socio-constructivist; that they viewed the Algerian school as a site of political power and ideological domination; that

they were wary of the new curriculum's intentions; and that they believed that they were not being recognised as professionals. The study concludes that the participants' beliefs had not been so challenged prior to the implementation of the innovation. Hence, it is suggested that training that fosters reflective practice need to be given priority. It is also recommended that both policy-makers and teachers should attempt to build a solid platform upon which dialogue should be promoted towards improving the educational situation in Algeria.

Keywords:
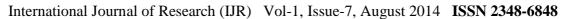Teachers' beliefs; curriculum innovation; teacher development; policy in education; Algeria

1. Introduction: context of curriculum innovation in Algeria

Following a period of political unrest in the 1990s, a process of peace and reconciliation was initiated in early 2000 in the hope of bringing back stability to the country. A series of political and economic reforms were consequently launched to meet the objectives

underlying the process of reconciliation. These reforms involved the sector of education, as the Algerian government saw it as an important element towards any political and economic prosperity (Toualbi-Thaalibi, 2006, Tawil, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2006). This initiative was paralleled by a series of meetings between Algerian and UNESCO officials, leading to an agreement signed on 2nd October 2003, in which the UNESCO accepted to fund these educational reforms (Tawil, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2006). The project, called the Programme of Support for the Reform of the Algerian Educational System (PARE), was followed by a series of meetings and conferences between Algerian and UNESCO officials in the period of 2003 and 2006 to assess the progress of these reforms and to put forward any future directions (Tawil, 2006).

The Algerian government appointed a National Commission for the Reform of Education (CNRE) in 2000, the task of which was to assess the then situation of the educational system and to provide some recommendations on the necessary reforms in line with the country's new philosophy of democracy, reconciliation and economic development (Ministry of Education, 2006). The CNRE gave their report back in 2001. The report confirmed the need to reform the educational system to meet the challenges of the 21st Century (Tawil, 2006). The main issue highlighted by the CNRE was a deterioration of the educational system reflected primarily in: a) a decline in the

number of students who pass their national examinations, b) an increase in the proportion of students who re-take their levels, and c) a considerable proportion of students who drop-out from school before the age of 16 (Tawil, 2006). Furthermore, the commission raised concerns over the professional quality of teachers (Tawil, 2006). Thus, the proposed curriculum reforms centred round three platforms:

- Platform 1: Reforming the school structure which involved: a) introducing a pre-school level for 5 year old pupils, b) restructuring the duration of primary school from 6 to 5 years, and middle school from 3 to 4 years, and c) restructuring the post-compulsory education in secondary school (lycée) into three streams: general, technical, and vocational.
- Platform 2: Reforming teacher training which involved: a) improving the knowledge and skills of teachers and inspectors, and b) coordinating and evaluating teacher training and development.
- Platform 3: Reforming teaching syllabuses and textbooks which involved: a) elaborating and introducing new teaching programmes for all school levels, b) providing and evaluating new teaching resources and materials, c) introducing new teaching methodologies to meet the programmes' objectives, and d) setting up systems for information and communication technology in schools.
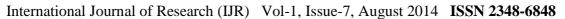
As a result of this, there was a re-definition of the aims and objectives of curriculum within a socio-constructivist philosophy of education.[1]

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[1] Socio-constructivism generally entails an emphasis on 'the importance of students thinking and construction of meaning through interaction with others about complex,

In foreign language education, for instance, socio-constructivism is reflected in two syllabuses drafted in 2005 by the Ministry of Education respectively for the teaching of English (Ministry of Education, 2005a) and for French (Ministry of Education, 2005b), both of which state that the teaching of foreign languages in Algeria is a means towards the construction of knowledge in science and technology, as well as towards intercultural communication (Ministry of Education, 2005a/b). They define learning as the process of '…the interaction of what we know with what others know which would lead to create new knowledge that the individual would re-invest and use in the social world. (Ministry of Education, 2005a: 9 - translated from French). They state that the learner's role is to '...engage in a process of construction of knowledge' (ibid: 9 - translated from French) and that the teacher's role is to be '…a mediator between knowledge and the learner...she/he must create an environment that enhances learning and the development of the learner' (ibid: 9 - translated from French). Furthermore, new textbooks and teaching materials were designed to meet the objectives of reforms, and teacher development programmes were initiated to enable teachers to adapt to the new curriculum (Toualbi-Thaalibi, 2006, Tawil, 2006).

The government seemed to be optimistic towards these reforms, although an initial evaluation of the project revealed that teachers, parents and students were not so enthusiastic towards these reforms (Toualbi-Thaalibi, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2006). However, these studies did not make explicit the reasons and the factors behind this lack of enthusiasm. The present study aimed to find some possible

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authentic problems' (Anderson et al., 1991: 1). Students, in this approach, interact with teachers and community through negotiation of knowledge based on critical reflection towards using knowledge in their social context and community (Kemmis et al., 1983; Calderhead, 1996).

answers to this educational phenomenon from the point of view of teachers. It attempted to explore a sample of French and English teachers' beliefs about curriculum reforms. In particular, it aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

1) What are a sample of English and French teachers' beliefs about curriculum innovation?
2) What issues of policy and power underpin these beliefs?
3) What conclusions can we draw for teachers' beliefs in Algeria?
4) What implications does this study have on teacher education and development?

2. Theoretical framework

This study is premised in the area of research which suggests that a better understanding of teachers' practices can be achieved by an understanding of the beliefs underlying those practices (Pajares, 1992; Ballone and Czerniak, 2001; Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Nespor, 1987). The underlying assumption is that teachers' classroom decisions do not happen at random, but are guided by systems of beliefs which 'greatly impact on their instructional decisions in the classroom' (Farrell and Lim, 2005: 1). Hence, recent years have witnessed a growing body of research in the area of teachers' beliefs (Fives and Buehl, 2005), although at the same time, it is argued that still little is known about teachers' beliefs and that no consensus was reached as to the exact nature of this construct (Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Rueda and Garcia, 1994). The reason for this, as it is argued, is the fact that beliefs are complex and abstract in nature, which makes them difficult to research (Pajares, 1992). However, there is a general consensus that teachers' beliefs derive partly from the teachers' personal and professional experience (Anderson, 1998; Farrell and Lim, 2005; Richards and Lockhart, 1994) and from their

school experience as learners (Farrell and Lim, 2005; Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990). In this respect, the literature indicates that teachers' beliefs generally fall under three main categories: (a) personal beliefs, which are teachers' beliefs about themselves and how they should be, and which derive from personal experience as a learner (Raths, 2001, Richards and Lockhart, 1994); (b) beliefs about teaching, learning and curriculum, which stem from different sources, mainly the teachers' personal experience as learners and their professional experience as teachers (Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Calderhead, 1996); and (c) epistemological beliefs, which are closely interrelated with beliefs about learning and teaching (Chan 2003; Tutty and White, 2005; Fives and Buehl, 2005) and represent beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is acquired (Flores, 2001). It is argued that such a categorisation of teachers' beliefs can give researchers some insights about teachers' practices, but also about teachers' lives and work (Flores, 2001; Filisetti and Fives, 2003; Woods et al., 2003).

Furthermore, the literature generally argues that educational innovations would not succeed if the objectives of these innovations are incompatible with the beliefs of its users (Rueda and Garcia, 1994; Anderson et al., 1991). Matese et al. (2002) posit that teachers see 'innovation through the lens of their existing knowledge and beliefs' (p. 3). Ballone and Czerniak (2001) point out that 'the teacher is the critical change agent in paving the way to educational reform and that teacher beliefs are precursors to change' (p. 7). Schmidt and Kennedy (1990) posit that introducing any curricular innovations 'is not likely to significantly alter teaching practices if teachers either do not understand or do not agree with the goals and strategies implicit in these new devices' (p. 2). Hence, Richards et al. (2001) pout out that any change in curriculum should be paralleled with an attempt to change

teachers' beliefs. They warn that curriculum innovations usually fail when there is a mismatch between the ideologies underlying the innovation and the teachers' beliefs. In this respect, it is argued that professional preparation and development programmes can play an important role in challenging and re-shaping teachers' beliefs according to the objectives of the innovation (Pajares, 1992).

3. Research methodology

This study forms part of a larger doctoral thesis, the latter which attempted to explore the beliefs of foreign language teachers about curriculum reforms. The study was positioned in the qualitative framework, defined as the one that 'produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification…[and] can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 10-11). It aimed at investigating teachers from an "emic" perspective (Schwandt, 1998; Ellis, 2006; Mori, 2000), which involves 'understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (Schwandt, 1998: 221); in contrast to an "etic" perspective, which views reality in a more objectivist stance and researches individuals from an outsider's point of view (Schwandt, 1998). More specifically, the study embraced a "constructivist paradigm" (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 1998), which can be briefly defined as the paradigm where the 'world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors' (Schwandt, 1998: 221). This paradigm was used in studies about teachers' beliefs such as in Gahin and Myhill (2001) and Valdiviezo (2006).

The sample of participants comprised twenty teachers who taught either French or English as foreign languages at different school levels in Algeria. The sampling of participants depended on their professional circumstances and the socio-political context surrounding the study, and as such adopted a "purposive convenience" sampling strategy (Flick, 1998; Punch, 1998; Kumar, 1996) 'where advantage is taken of cases, events, situations or informants, which are close at hand' (Punch, 1998: 193). Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight teachers, and group interviews were held with four groups of teachers. Semi-structured interviews were used in research on teachers' beliefs, such as in studies by Gahin and Myhill (2001), Brownlee (2003), Rueda and Garcia (1994), and Matese et al. (2002). Group interviews were also used in research on teachers' beliefs in studies by Da Silva (2005), Standen (2002) and Murphy (2000). All interviews were conducted at the participants' homes or place of work, and were all audio-taped. In this process, the participants were all allocated a pseudonym for confidentiality reasons. Table 1 below provides an overview of participants' profiles and the methods of data collection.

The study used "grounded theory" as a procedure for data analysis and followed the procedure as discussed in Strauss and Corbin (1998), Boulton and Hammersley (1996), Punch (1998), and Flick (1998). The procedure generally entailed three consecutive stages: (a) open coding, where data were translated into categories (Punch, 1998; Boulton and Hammersley, 1996). This was achieved in light of the theoretical framework, which was very useful to help identify teachers' beliefs and to classify them for instance into personal beliefs, beliefs about teaching, learning and curriculum, and epistemological beliefs (Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Fives and Buehl, 2005). (b) Theoretical (or axial) coding, which entailed the process of

"comparison and contrast" of categories from open coding, towards a further level of abstraction until core categories emerged (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Punch, 1998). These core categories profiled the participants' beliefs, and thus helped answer the first research question "*what are a sample of English and French teachers' beliefs about curriculum innovation in Algeria?*", which are presented in the findings section below. (c) Selective coding, which involved a more in-depth and abstract analysis of the data towards 'finding a higher-order concept, a central

conceptual category at the second level of abstraction' (Punch, 1998: 218), and ultimately developing "theory" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Hence, higher-order categories were identified and were eventually used in providing interpretations to the findings in the light of existing theory on teachers' beliefs, foreign language teaching, and education in general. The aim from that was to provide possible answers to the second question "*what issues of policy and power underpin these beliefs?*" which are presented in the discussion section below.

Table 1 Participants and data collection methods

Method of data collection	Participant name (pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Curriculum Subject	School level	Years of teaching	Data Ref. in text
Individual interviews	Jamila	41	Female	French	Primary	20	jamila/int
	Mohamed	46	Male	French	Primary	26	mohamed/int
	Salima	47	Female	French	Middle	22	salima/int
	Karim	37	Male	French	Middle	15	karim/int
	Zohra	35	Female	English	Middle	12	zohra/int
	Nabila	33	Female	English	Middle	13	nabila/int
	Omar	49	Male	English	Secondary	26	omar/int
	Hakim	47	Male	Inspector of English	Middle	22	hakim/int
Group interviews	Bassim	38	Male	English	Middle	16	pem/eng/gr/int
	Salim	42	Male			20	
	Dalila	46	Female	French	Middle	20	pem/fr/gr/int
	Wassila	48	Female			30	
	Latifa	53	Female			34	
	Ahlam	36	Female	French	Secondary	14	pes/fr/gr/int
	Tariq	44	Male			16	
	Amin	48	Male			22	
	Malika	37	Female	English	Secondary	17	pes/eng/gr/int
	Samia	33	Female			14	
	Nabil	45	Male			21	
	Rafik	39	Male			16	

Finally, issues of ethics and trustworthiness were addressed throughout the study in order to establish confidence and consistency of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Flick, 1998). In particular, the study referred extensively to "*Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational

Research" (British Educational Research Association - BERA, 2004) and "*Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics*" (British Association for Applied Linguistics, 1994), but also used the strategies discussed in Lincoln and Guba

(1985), Flick (1998), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Boulton and Hammersley (1996).

4. Results

4.1. Beliefs about the new curriculum

The participants generally believed that the new curriculum was heavy and difficult for Algerian students because it did not take into account their social background, and hence its contents would not be accessible. Hakim, for instance, explained: *The new curriculum...is not appropriate for [the students'] social background...it is beyond their level...far beyond...* [hakim/int]

Moreover, the participants claimed that the new curriculum was handed down by the Ministry without prior notice or training. They believed that this came in line with a top-down policy present in the educational system. They claimed that the new curriculum was not made in Algeria, but that *'the rumours [said that it]...was parachuted from other countries...from Canada'* [pes/eng/gr/int], *'France'* [Mohamed/int] or *'America, but that Algeria is not America'* [nabila/int]. They also believed that there was a lack of clear understanding of the objectives and methods of the new curriculum, and that they did not have any guidance or support from their Ministry.

4.2. Beliefs about the current teaching situation

The participants believed that teaching in Algeria had deteriorated due to the new heavy curriculum, a drastic lack of resources and textbooks, overcrowded classes, unmotivated students, and teachers' personal and socio-professional problems. In particular, those with longer experience believed that teaching was not as enjoyable as it used to be. They believed that teaching as a profession had become

difficult in Algeria and that teachers had developed a lack of motivation towards it. This was due according to them to an existing top-down culture in Algeria, reflected in the educational system. They believed that *'a top-down system would not lead to progress'* [zohra/int]. Omar for example explained that teachers were implementing orders, and that they did not have any power to implement appropriate change.

4.3. Beliefs about students' learning

The participants believed that *'students' standards [had] fallen'* [pes/eng/gr/int] in their language classes mostly due to a heavily-loaded curriculum, which was decided at the top and which did not usually reflect students' social environment and did not meet their needs. This, according to them, led to the *'...students' loss of motivation'* [karim/int] in the sense that they had become *'...passive and over-reliant on the teacher'* [karim/int].

4.4. Beliefs about school

Overall, the participants described the Algerian school as being *'...like in the street'* [Mohamed/int]. One participant, Nabila, believed that the actual role of school in Algeria had become to *'make children sleep...as if [they] are giving sleeping tablets'* [nabila/int], whereas she felt that the actual role of school and education should ideally be to open students' eyes towards the world. Another participant, Omar, believed that the Algerian school in reality had been influenced by a corrupt political system, and that school had become a means of indoctrination, rather than emancipation and intellectual freedom. This indoctrination, according to Omar *'...is present in the textbooks that [teachers] use in the classroom, in the new curriculum and in the educational system'* [omar/int].

4.5. Beliefs about resources

All the participants believed that there was a drastic lack of resources, which according to them contributed to the deterioration of foreign language education in Algeria. They also believed that the '...*new curriculum...does not suit the current situation...with a classroom of 40 students...*' [pem/eng/gr/int]. One teacher, Nabila, believed that the ideal school was where '*there [were] less students in the classroom and also where there [was] a specially-designed language classroom*' [nabila/int].

4.6. Beliefs about parents

All the participants believed that parents should be involved in their children's educational process. They believed that education was not limited to the classroom but also extended to students' homes. They believed that parents' follow up was very important for the progress of their children. However, they believed that in reality '...*a few parents...[were] interested in their children's progress, but most of them [did] not care...the most important for them [was] that their children go to school*' [Mohamed/int].

4.7. Beliefs about administration

All the participants claimed that there was a continuous conflict in Algeria between, on the one hand, an autocratic and bureaucratic administration, and on the other hand, the teachers. They believed that they worked in a culture of oppression and that this had led to '*injustice*' [hakim/int]. They noted that teachers lived '*...in constant fear from the administration*' [jamila/int]. They believed that this state of affairs was the main cause behind the deterioration of teaching in Algeria. They also believed that the top-down system had led teachers to have personal and socio-professional problems, which, according to them, had impacted negatively on their performance. They noted that some teachers

had given up teaching, while others had chosen to resort to strikes to voice their concerns. The participants also explained that the Ministry had never consulted them before innovations were decided or implemented.
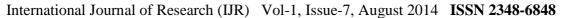
4.8. Beliefs about role and professional development

The participants believed that the '*role of the teacher in the first instance is to transmit the message...knowledge*' [salima/int]. They also believed that the role of the teacher was '*...to educate and to bring up children as if they...[were their] own...so that they become good citizens*' [Mohamed/int].

The participants also believed that teachers should seek to update their knowledge continuously. They believed that '...*learning has no limits... [and that the teacher has] to constantly...update [their] knowledge...*' [omar/int]. In this respect, they believed that INSETs would help them improve their teaching and '*...contribute to the development of curriculum*' [zohra/int]. Nevertheless, They claim that '*INSETs are all bla bla...[and that they] don't learn anything*' [jamila/int].

5. Discussion

The findings generally indicate that the teachers had some negative beliefs about the new curriculum. In other words, the participants seemed to be at odd with everything surrounding the innovation. Similar beliefs were reported in studies by Uusimaki and Nason (2004), who investigated the causes of teachers' negative beliefs and found that these beliefs 'could be attributed to their...school experiences' (p.369). Another study by Walker et al. (2004) assessed the negative beliefs of their respondents and concluded that these beliefs 'emerge when unprepared and unsupported teachers encounter challenges...when there is a lack of support

from administrators...[and] when teachers are not provided with the training and support they need to be effective, and feel effective' (p. 153). Feelings like these were also reported in studies by MacDonald et al. (2001) and Gahin and Myhill (2001) and it was concluded that these feelings were a consequence of the failure of training and development courses to challenge teachers' beliefs.

Furthermore, the study argues tentatively that there was an incompatibility of the participants' beliefs with the principles underlying the innovation. It was discussed above that curriculum innovations generally challenge teachers' beliefs (Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Ballone and Czerniak, 2001), and it was argued that educational innovations would not generally succeed if the objectives of these innovations were incompatible with the beliefs of teachers (Rueda and Garcia, 1994; Matese et al., 2002; Ballone and Czerniak, 2001). In other words, it was argued that any attempt to introduce curriculum reforms without full consideration of teachers' views and beliefs would lead to a failure of the innovation (Anderson et al., 1991; Richards et al., 2001). Teachers, it was suggested, must understand and agree with the principles and objectives underlying the innovation (Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Richards et al., 2001; Ballone and Czerniak, 2001). Studies such as in Al-Mekhlafi (2004), Karavas-Doukas (1996) and Gahin and Myhill (2001) have documented the issue of incompatibility of teachers' beliefs with educational innovations and they all concluded that this mismatch occurred because policy-makers did not take into account the teachers' beliefs when implementing innovations.

The participants in this study did not see themselves part of the problem; rather, they believed that the source of the problem was external. Their beliefs pointed exclusively to socio-political and institutional factors, which

according to them represented barriers to the proper implementation of the new curriculum. Raths (2001) explains that teachers often assume that the sources of problems they encounter in their classrooms are external. This is because the teachers usually believe that they have the required qualities of a good teacher (Pajares, 1993) and that the sources of deterioration of education lie in external factors, such as in parents and students, but mostly in their educational leadership (Raths, 2001). The following discussed themes were identified as factors that underlie the phenomenon of incompatibility of teachers' beliefs with the new curriculum in Algeria.

5.1. Unclear principles of curriculum

The incompatibility of participants' beliefs with the new curriculum can be seen in the orientation they had about learning and teaching, which in turn may have influenced their perceptions of curriculum. The literature suggests that a mismatch generally occurs if teachers' beliefs about the contents of the new curriculum are incongruent with the principles underlying the innovation Richards et al (2001). The findings in this study indicate that the participants' beliefs were incompatible with the new curriculum because their beliefs projected a "transmissionist" ideology, whereas the ideology underpinning the new curriculum was intended as "socio-constructivist". Research on teachers' beliefs indicates that teachers generally hold different beliefs about curriculum. Calderhead (1996), Kemmis et al. (1983) and Anderson et al. (1991) for instance maintain that teachers' beliefs about teaching, learning and curriculum can be put under two categories: a) teaching as knowledge transmission, where the teacher is the absolute holder of knowledge and his/her role is to transmit this knowledge to learners, the learners' role is to seek knowledge from the teacher, and curriculum is seen as prescribed and a top-down process of downloading

knowledge according to pre-determined sets of rules; and b) teaching as social negotiation of knowledge, or socio-constructivist teaching, where the teacher guides learners towards developing a socially-constructed knowledge, the learners negotiate their learning process, and curriculum is based on enhancing the development of social relationships guided by the principles of negotiation of learning. Similar conclusions with this study were reported in Richards et al (2001) on teachers' beliefs about EFL learning and teaching, who found that many of their respondents held transmissionist beliefs about language learning while their curriculum was communicative. Richards et al. explained that their respondents believed in direct grammar teaching and teacher-centred methodology, although they claimed they were following the communicative approach. Richards et al. concluded that the respondents' beliefs were incompatible with the principles directing communicative language teaching. A further issue the data indicate is that the participants claimed that they did not have any clear guidelines on the objectives and methodology of the new curriculum, nor did they have any guidance or support. Hence, the study argues that in the absence of clear guidelines and appropriate training, there was a possibility that the participants interpreted the objectives of the new curriculum within their transmissionist paradigm, which could have led to more confusion.

5.2. Politically-dominated and socially distant schools

Another issue identified from the data was the participants' beliefs about the school. The participants criticised the Algerian school for being a place for political indoctrination rather than emancipation. They also explained that there was a drastic shortage of resources and that classes were overcrowded. Brint (1998) explains that schools in most developing

countries have generally inherited a traditional system from their former colonial powers, which consequently led to their decline and their inefficiency in meeting their societies' needs and demands. A further issue that seems to add to the decline of the Algerian school, according to the participants, is the absence of communication between schools and parents. The participants seemed to believe that curriculum innovation in Algeria would not succeed without an active participation of parents. Indeed, the literature suggests that parents' involvement in the education of their children is essential. It is in fact argued that parents' involvement increases students' performance and achievement, and benefits children at all stages of their educational pathway (Tableman, 2004; Zhang and Carrasquillo, 1995; Pennell and West, 2007; Kreider, 2002; Taylor et al., 2004). From a policy perspective it is also argued that parents' involvement in schools can also give 'parents the opportunity to take part in decision-making' (Cotton and Wikelund, 2001: 1), which could potentially create a balance of power and reduce governments' control on schools (Cotton and Wikelund, 2001). In the absence of the above factors, the participants felt the new curriculum was inappropriate to the current context.

5.3. Ill-defined intentions for curriculum design

A further theme that the findings indicate is beliefs that curriculum design had to occur within an Algerian context. In fact, part of the participants' negative beliefs about the new curriculum was because they claimed it was not designed in Algeria and that it was inappropriate to the socio-cultural context of their students. They also claimed that they did not take part in the decision-making and the design of the new curriculum. The participants' beliefs seem to reflect an implicit awareness of any possible hegemonic power that an imported

curriculum might bring to the Algerian classroom, which might according to them violate their students' identity. Similar findings were documented by Albirini (2006), who studied the effect of technology as an innovation on teachers' beliefs in Syria. He found that importing an educational innovation into Arab countries without consideration of the culture of its users will result in an incompatibility between the innovation and the beliefs of its users, and will ultimately lead to resistance and conflict.

5.4. Undervalued teachers

Another key finding relates to the issue of teachers' professional legitimacy. The participants believed that they were not being recognised as professionals. One reason for this state of affairs is, according to them, the autocratic nature of leadership and management in Algeria. In fact, political and educational experts argue that the Algerian educational system is generally characterised by a top-down and bureaucratic culture inherited from the French colonial period (Bouakba, 2006; Brahimi, 1991). This state of affairs seems to have undermined teachers' work and created in them a feeling of being undervalued and helpless. Kelly (1999) warns that any practice of education cannot be effective if the means to maintain such a practice were based on obedience and authority. This is particularly important because of the "make or break" (Kelly, 1999) role teachers generally have.

Nevertheless, an interesting point is the fact that the participants have also resorted to an occasional act of political activism (Sachs, 2003), manifested in them using a political discourse that legitimises them as professionals, but at the same time that deligitimises their ministry. This discourse seems to form the basis for a struggle to gain "legitimate power" (Daft, 1994). Chilton and Schaffner (1997) discuss the issue of legitimisation and

deligitimisation in political discourse. According to them, strategies used for legitimisation are for instance, 'general ideological principles, charismatic leadership projection, boasting about performance, and positive self-presentation' (p. 213). On the other hand, strategies for deligitimisation include 'the use of ideas of difference and boundaries, and speech acts of blaming, accusing, [and] insulting' (p. 213). The participants' discourse for legitimisation included for instance expressing arguments about students' and parents' needs, boasting about their professionalism, expressing feelings of responsibility towards students and society, boasting about performance, and showing positive self-presentation; while their discourse for deligitimisation included for instance ideas of difference, and blames and accusations that the Ministry was oppressive and undemocratic and that it was behind the deterioration of education in Algeria.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions we can draw for the study is that teachers' beliefs were not greatly challenged prior to the implementation of curriculum innovation in Algeria. In this respect, the implications we can draw for teacher development in Algeria can be summarised in the priority to have training and development courses where teachers, as well as curriculum innovators and policy-makers, are provided with opportunities for reflection and critical evaluation of their systems of beliefs and practices (Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Ballone and Czerniak, 2001). It is generally argued that reflective practice can play a role in re-shaping teachers' beliefs (Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Richards at al., 2001; Ballone and Czerniak, 2001; Fives, 2003; Odgers, 2003; Spanneberg, 2001; Newstead, 1999; Rueda and Garcia, 1994). Some strategies that foster reflection could include discussions, where views and experiences are shared, problems are
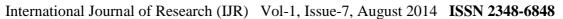
discussed and decisions are negotiated (Ballone and Czerniak, 2001; Rueda and Garcia, 1994; Valdiviezo, 2006). This could lead to the possible building of a "collaborative culture" (James, 1999) for curriculum development, where both the ministry officials and the teachers would build a solid platform for dialogue towards improving the educational situation in Algeria.

Finally, it is important to point out that one cannot take the participants' beliefs at face value; rather the study only attempts to provide possible interpretations to these beliefs as they are constructed in the participants' systems of truth; there may well be other interpretations.
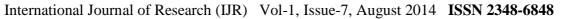
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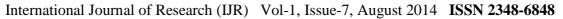
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