The significance of school guidance and counselling to enhance English language learning in Algeria

ABDELLATIF Nawel

Maître-Assistante chargée de cours

Département des langues étrangères – Anglais –

Faculté des lettres et sciences sociales

Université Ferhat Abbas SETIF

Abstract

As a society, we have failed to adequately support and nurture our adolescent learners. In many instances, the paucity of social and emotional skill, coupled with a lack of parental involvement in the educational process, has created a generation of students unable to function successfully in school or social environment. This paper investigates the significance of school guidance and counselling in helping our adolescent learners achieve better results in learning English as a foreign language. Consequently, it aims at building a clear cooperative vision and at asking legitimate questions about how a transformation of the school counsellor's role can support educators, adolescent students and families work together. Ultimately, it aims at urging the Algerian conceptualization of a new guidance and counselling policy which is of educational and, hence, national paramount value.

ملخص

نعيش اليوم في عالم أحدث فيه العلم تطورات كبيرة في كـل المجالات سابقت نمو الشباب في مجتمعنــا و أدت إلى انطــواء و سوء فهم للعالم الإجتماعي. من جهة أخــرى، تعــد مرحلــة المراهقة مرحلة حساسة في حياة الطالب يحددها البعض بالهيجان و التوتر و البحث عن الذات. في خضــم هــذه التطــورات السريعة, تأتي المدرسة بدورها الفعال و المساهم في تكوين الفرد اجتماعيا و نفسيا و دراسيا. إن الموضوع الرئيسي الذي تــدور حوله هذه الورقة هو دراسة أهمية التوجيه و الإرشاد في مساعدة التلاميذ المراهقين على تحصيل نتائج أفضل في دراسة الإنجليزيـة كلغة أجنبية. من هنا, حاولنا أن نبين أهمية العلاقة الثلاثية بــين الأسرة و المتعلم و المستشار، حتى نسهم في اعادة تنظيم لسياسة التوجيه و الإرشاد في الجزائر كونها قضية تربوية, و من ثم قضية وطنيــة تحــدد القيــم المســتقبلية للفــرد و المجتمــع.

1. Statement of the problem

The dramatic changes that characterize puberty present the adolescent with serious psychological challenges. A person aged twelve for instance, would have developed a certain sense of self as well as of self-capacity. In adolescence, however, this knowledge is challenged (Encyclopedia Britannica, copyright 1994 – 1999).

Thus, not all the assumptions adolescents held in earlier stages may still be relevant to the new individuals they find themselves to be. They are

entailed to ask the crucial psychological question:"who am I?", for a coherent sense of their individuality is necessary to productively function in society.

At precisely the time they feel unsure about who they are, society begins to ask them related questions. For instance, adolescents are expected to make the first steps toward career objectives. They are, then, asked what roles they will play as adults – that is, what socially prescribed set of behaviours they will choose to adopt. A key aspect of this dilemma is that of finding a role, which is generally taken to be the outward expression of identity (Encyclopedia Britannica, copyright 1994 – 1999). The emotional upheaval provoked by this mandate is called the identity crisis and, in order to resolve it, it is necessary to synthesize psychological developments and societal directives.

On the other hand, and under the framework of the whole school environment, some adolescents form pictures of a stereotypical student: a quiet person who hides his or her learning ability. This 'norm' among Algerian adolescents displays itself in the English language classroom in that students become extremely shy and worried about making mistakes, or about having a negative reflective picture of their self.

During classes, the teacher expects students to be part of the group, even though they have strong opinions and want to oppose others' ideas. In most cases, it is considered better not to display such contrary attitudes in public, but rather to cooperate with ones classmates. Consequently, their views tend to conform to the opinion of the group. In addition, parents want their children to study hard. This situation contributes to the internal struggle students experience when torn between being active or passive in their learning environment.

To relieve this 'traditional shyness' in the Algerian adolescent for him to learn English more effectively, the introduction of special counselling and guidance programmes in our Secondary schools can provide a more efficient and practical learning environment. Hence, to facilitate this approach, the present paper is meant to enhance the significance of school counselling and guidance in helping the adolescent learners achieve better results in learning English as a foreign language. Another aspect of this enquiry is to study the implications the counsellor can bring to the whole Algerian system of education.

It is common knowledge that stress is what also causes a lack of students' participation in English classes. There is, in fact, much of academic pressure placed on our adolescent learners. They are graded, ranked and tested throughout their school careers. They are, also, prepared

for examinations through practice exams over ten times a year, usually with interrogations and fast-reply questions (Official Education Papers, 827/Unit Specification Paper). This pressurized atmosphere is a constant reminder of English as one of their compulsory core subjects which must be passed to enter more specialized careers. The academic pressure on learners is, in Hamoud's (1996) view, "excessive", despite the Algerian educational procedures introduced for innovation, and as a remedy to the massive shortage of counselling in school.

Another problem this paper intends to elicit is the general perception of counsellors in our community. The social trends link guidance only with mentally handicapped people. This stigmatises counselling and does not encourage stressed students to seek help. If guidance and counselling were to become more socially acceptable in Algeria, it would certainly make an enormous impact on the lives of adolescents in reducing the psychological pressure of academic study at school, and in helping them lead more enjoyable and productive study lives. This was the case of even presently well-developed countries like Japan (FRSS Survey, 2002).

Also, Career counselling and guidance are important avenues by which many individuals learn to make rational choices that influence their entire working life. Consequently, all aspects of their individual perceptions are considered as integral parts of career decision making and planning. This is one reason why we have decided to investigate the Secondary school setting as an important aspect of an adolescent's life.

As a matter of fact, we will seek answers to the following questions that bare of considerable importance:

- What is the job a guidance counsellor is meant to do?
- Which place is that of guidance and counselling in the Algerian Secondary School?
- What is the role guidance counsellors should play to help adolescent learners overcome their psychological and social difficulties in self-administering an identity of their own?
- How can we manage to improve the performance of our students in their subject of interest?

And

- How can counsellors help the students achieve better results in learning English as a second foreign language?

Obviously, this does not stand as an exhaustive list of questions relevant to the adolescent in difficulties. However, if pressure could only be reduced through speaking to a school counsellor, students would be more

active in English language classes as well as in their personal lives. This will give them the confidence to share their views and opinions with other students at school, which already sounds as a positive start.

2. Hypotheses

To highlight the significance of counselling and guidance in Secondary schools, and to demonstrate the positive outcomes and benefits which result for students as a consequence of such programmes, we begin our study by setting the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: in claiming that English learning affects, and is affected by, career counselling, I suppose that an investigation may provide clues of how to use counselling services to help adolescent students achieve better results in learning English as a second foreign language.

Hypothesis 2: counsellors are important in Secondary schools to provide the students with the ability to integrate awareness about themselves, their potential careers and the post-secondary education into informed decisions about the future.

3. Background of the study

Education provides the foundation for the development of society. Since the 'Modernization' policy has been implemented in 1999, the Chief Executive (CE) has mentioned repeatedly, in his policy addresses, that education is a key issue pertaining to the future development of Algeria, and that our educational system should keep pace with time. He has also requested the Education Commission to conduct a thorough review of the teaching-learning process with the aim of enhancing the overall quality of education.

Many educators maintain that the educational system should go beyond imparting academic knowledge to our students. Rather, it should aim at the whole-person development of our children, including development, not only in knowledge, but also in personal character, skills, attitudes and physique. In addition to normal academic studies, our students need to learn how to become responsible and caring individuals. This ties in with the overall aims of education proposed by the Education Commission in 1999, and which are:

" ... to enable everyone to develop to their full and individual potential
in all areas covering ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics. It
aims at making each individual ready for continuous self-learning, thinking,
exploring, innovating and adapting to changes throughout life; filled with
self-confidence and team spirit. It, also, attempts to strive incessantly for
the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of the society, and to
contribute to the future well being of the nation and the world at large."

(My translation from an article of the Education Commission in the
Official Journal, February, 1999).

It is, therefore, clear that student-guidance work is of great weight in
enhancing the learner's whole-person development. On the one hand, it
emphasizes the social and emotional progress of all students, and
implements a student-centred activity of learning, on the other.

The Educational Department has not long recognized the importance of
student guidance work in Secondary schools. However, it became
apparently active between the years 1982 and 1986, to provide a total of
five additional teachers to each school and to help improve the various
supportive services to students (Official Paper N° 827/ 1990). One of these
teaching posts was meant specially to strengthen counselling and career
guidance services in.

In 1993, the Education Commission, in its Report N°. 93/ أ .ت. م / 245,
recommended the implementation of the Whole School Approach (WSA)
to Guidance in schools to improve the quality of education. A summary of
the report may be translated as follows:

"The Whole School project to Guidance emphasizes the united effort of all
social personnel who, under the leadership of the school head, work together
to create a positive learning environment enriched with care, trust and
mutual respect. It stresses the importance of a caring and inviting
atmosphere for students to grow with enhanced self-esteem and to realize
their potentials. Consequently, the education ideal of the whole-person
development   in the students could be achieved."

(My translation from the Educational Commission Report N°. 245. The
Whole School Approach to Guidance, Algiers 24 / 12 / 92).

Following the implementation of the policy of "one guidance
counsellor for each Secondary school", it is time we review the objectives
set forth as to the significance of counselling and guidance. Indeed, our
adolescent students live in a period of rapid growth and change. They face
unique and diverse challenges, both personally and developmentally, that
impact academic achievement. Thus, our purpose from undertaking such a
research endeavour is to enhance the contribution guidance counsellors add

to school achievement, in general, and to learning English as a foreign language, in particular. Our work stresses the fact that a better moral, social and psychological pursuit leads the adolescent learner to hold different views of the world; a world where English language is the gateway to success and, thus, to career development and citizenship, as determined by language and civilization. This is what stands as an overall hypothesis.

4. Objectives of the study

The aims of the present research hold on the necessity to bring change to the counselling and guidance policy in our Secondary schools. At present time, our students are forced into a stressful study system in which real personal value is ignored. This phenomenon affects English language as a matter of course. For Literary Stream Classes, for example, English is taught as one of the compulsory subjects in which learners must take tough examinations, the outcomes of which are crucial for the adolescent's future success. Hamoud (1996) reports that these days, passing examinations is the only way to climb the Algerian social ladder. Thus, a main concern of the educational counsellor is, not only the orientation of adolescent students to different fields of language learning, but also, to focus on the long-term future use of language skills, and on the opportunities they can offer.

Our research is far from bringing a drastic revolution in the Algerian educational system. However, it proposes some immediate remedies that can go beyond a simple matter of discussion. Some policy implications might be proposed here. For example, the Ministry of Education needs to change the current study system with immediate effects. The adolescent students need fully revised counselling and guidance processes which deal more closely with the different and diverse problems of the period. Decision-makers must also consider the different study pressures on both male and female learners.

Unlike the Western system where the most complicated levels of study occur at post-secondary levels (Simmon, 1990), in Algeria, the tough work is done at the Secondary school level. Hamoud's (1996) work in educational perspectives in Algeria, suggests that the university is one of the most relaxed periods in an Algerian student's life. Indeed, many students try to stay away from classes as much as possible and enjoy themselves, seeing university as a prize for having worked so hard. That is why career guidance is a very important issue counsellors are to deal with. A well-balanced educational counselling and guidance programme that helps improve our adolescent learners' performance in English at a

Secondary school level is, consequently, the focal point of the present paper. However very important a subject it is, the significance of counselling and guidance remains of higher educational and, thus, national paramount concern.

5. Analysis of the students' scores

The current focus on the increasing failure to improve English learning, led to the rethinking of the educational system as a whole. The aim was to better understand the perception of adolescent youths towards the learning of English as a foreign language, their different choices about future career goals and, hence, towards the factors and individuals that influence their decision-making process.

The purpose of this case study, at Malika Gaid Secondary School, is to investigate the relationship between school culture, socialization, ability, gender and values, on one hand, and the relative degree of influence guidance counsellors have on adolescent students, on the other. This article will present the first step of the study aiming at providing a thorough report of the whole investigation in the forthcoming editions of this magazine.

It is a three-month study using one piloted questionnaire, a parent meeting and two interviews. The first and second phases of this investigation, regarding students' and parents' perceptions, had been conducted and collected. The nature of the preliminary data presented in the students' questionnaire, and the interpretation of the different results of the students' scores are the sum up of this article.

6. Organization of the students' grades

Following the aim of having a sample which could be representative of the population, data was collected by means of examining files from the school's grades of students who were enrolled for the year 2003 – 2004. The students were first-year literary stream classes, and the scores were representative of the first term grades in the English subject. As a first step of the inquiry, I had to make a retrospective analysis where the students' scores were selected for the sampling variables. Other specific details when choosing a sample were age, gender and length of time spent on learning English. The procedure of selection is explained here below.

7. Organization of data

In the selection of a representative sample, 159 files were studied among which thirty students were selected according to their age, gender and personal differences. All the students responded to the same open-ended question: "Do you find difficulty in learning English, and why?". After that, the representative group was given a likert-type scale questionnaire which came out with two groups: the first group was kept for

the second stage of the experiment. It was meant to test the validity of the results obtained. The second was the experimental group. (A detailed study of the questionnaire will be discussed in the coming editions). The different scores obtained by the experimental group were graded out of twenty and are displayed as follows:

Table .1.

Achievement test scores in English for the experimental group of students

10.33/20	04.33/20	05.00/20	07.33/20
11.33/20	05.67/20	04.00/20	07.33/20
03.67/20	15.00/20	12.67/20	10.67/20
07.33/20	08.67/20	03.67/20	

In their present form, the scores would not give much understanding about the performance of the experimental group, and hence, they need to be arranged in descending order. Such an organization is generally referred to as an "ordered array".

After arranging them in a descending order, we see that the highest score is 15.00 and the lowest score is 03.67. We also observe that several scores occur more than others. In order to make them easier to work with, the next step is to classify them by means of "Simple Frequency Distribution". (Table. 2)

| Table. 2.	
Simple Frequency Distribution of the experimental group's grades	
Score (X)	**Frequency (F)**
15.00	1
03.67	1
03.68	1
03.69	1
03.70	1
03.71	1
03.72	3
03.73	1
05.00	1
03.74	1
04.00	1
03.75	2
n = 15	

The Simple Frequency Distribution of the following scores is formed by taking each score in the descending order and placing the number of times it occurs in the frequency column. The scores are, then, organized through a graphical representation such that to compare the different grades and, hence, the different levels displayed by the students of the experimental group.

8. Graphical representation of data

In order to represent the group's frequency distribution of the different grades obtained by the students in table. 2, we will make use of the histogram. The latter enables us to compare the different grades of the students in learning English and to establish measures to enhance their performance.

**_Figure .1_. The histogram of the frequency distribution
of the experimental group's grades**
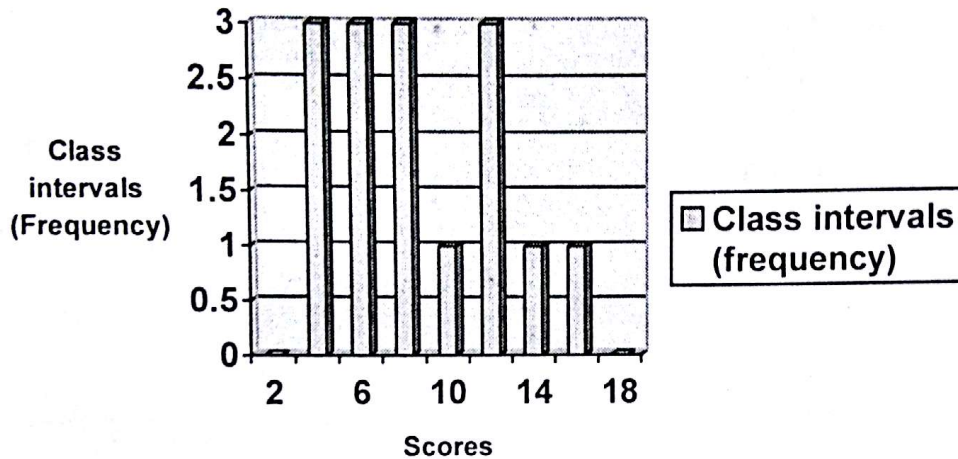
In the histogram presented in figure .1, the midpoints of the class intervals are under the vertical bars, which represent, by their heights, the frequency for each class interval.

9. Analysis of the histogram

One striking point about the scores obtained by the experimental group is the observable difference between the different levels of students in learning English. Only one student among fifteen obtained good grades (15/20), consequently, he represents the less prevailing frequency. On the other hand, the distribution of the scores between (02.00 - 08.00) and between (10.00 - 12.00) is the highest. An explanation may be that average and below average students form the majority of the population. However, considering the fact that sampling procedures were systematic and critical, this consideration is unlikely to be considered. In order to see the shift in scores between the different students, a frequency polygon is drawn here below:

Figure. 2. The frequency polygon for the distribution
of the experimental group's scores
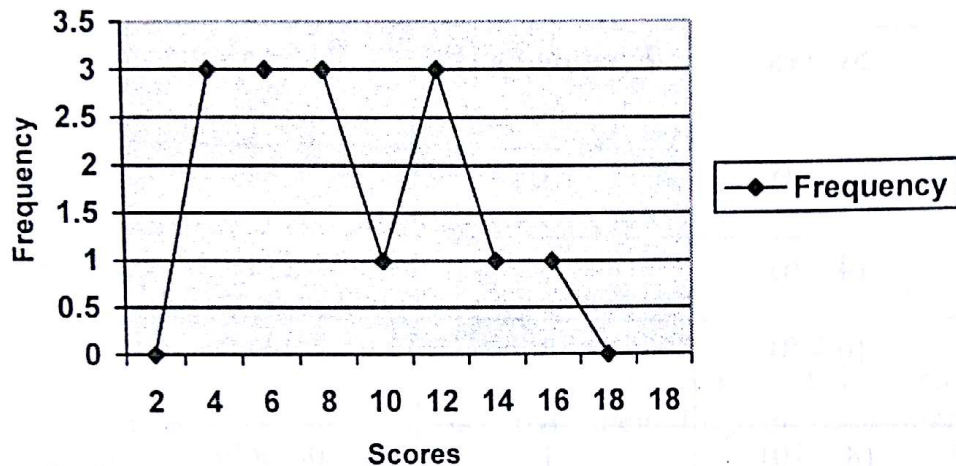
In figure 2, the scores are stratified by frequency. In each scale, the average index score, or the percentage of the grades grouped by frequency form a group of variables according to their level in learning English. The only explanation that might be provided here, is that there is a lack of assimilation of input from the part of the students. Again, this entails us to ask a further intriguing question: "what are the reasons behind the absence of students' feedback?" To find answers to such a statement, a questionnaire was designed in that order. A comprehensive discussion of the different responses will be provided in the coming edition. For now, let us analyse the results obtained by the polygon representation.

10. Analysis of the polygon

The instability of the curb shows that the experimental group meets the characteristics shared by the population. In figure. 2, we note that the lowest scores form sixty per cent (60%) of the whole sample which confirms our hypothesis: the students' feedback in English is irrelevant. Only fourteen per cent (14%) of the students obtained high scores (12 – 16), and those with an average level are of twenty six per cent (26%). The results were obtained by multiplying the frequency (F) by hundred and divide the result by 'n', provided (n= total number).

$$\% = \frac{(F) \times 100}{\text{-----------------------}}$$

Table 3 displays the different results obtained.

Table. 3.

Percentage of the degree of occurrence
displayed by the experimental group

Scores	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
(2 – 4)	3	20%
(4 – 6)	3	20%
(6 – 8)	3	20%
(8 – 10)	1	06.66%
(10 – 12)	3	20%
(12 – 14)	1	06.66%
(14 – 16)	1	06.66%

The results demonstrate that adolescent learners in Secondary schools have a problem in learning English as a second foreign language. To find out the causes of their failure, a questionnaire was given to the experimental group to complete and submit accordingly.

11. Discussion

It would be a bold act to try to spin out of the work reported in this section a thread to condemn the Algerian students' performance in English. As I have said before, it is not merely a question of applying received theory to practice. Messy though it is, there is some agreement about the general perspective at the descriptive stratum, even if there is considerable disagreement at a more fundamental analytical stage.

Most experimenters would probably agree that adolescents are much more likely to be dependent upon direct contact with phenomena in their attempts at reasoning than are adults, and that the visual aspects of things are likely to exert much greater influence on their learning. If this is not

much removed from a commonsense truism, they may well be the way things are. However, the findings of investigations led by Peel (1960), and Inhelder and Piaget (1969) into the details of adolescents' attempts to grapple with problematic aspects of their environment are far from truisms. They reveal aspects of their thinking that differ markedly from that of adults in certain family consistent ways. Knowledge of these differences will serve to alert the teacher and the counsellor to the likely mismatch between their, and the students' way of thinking about the same things.

The complexities revealed through the present investigation of adolescents' use of the English language, in connection with their thinking and their activity, and the influence of all three on their learning, should be sufficient to assume that an urgent need for counsellors in Secondary schools is highly apprehended. Thus, it is important to make the point that a policy of counselling and guidance is necessary to give these adolescent students neat prescriptions on how to make use of language in the classroom, and on how to improve their English performance at a Secondary school level.

A key point that emerges from the scores' analysis is the importance of an experimenter's approach. The non-interventionist approach, typified by Piaget (1969), and which relies only on observing phenomena without due consideration of the changes an experiment provides, is likely to produce one type of result. On the contrary, different degrees of intervention ,such as counsellors and parents' interventions, exemplified by Hughes (1957) and Bryant (1974) will produce another. To some extent, the crucial factor seems to be that the problems presented to adolescents need to be set out in familiar terms. This will ensure that the disjuncture between their everyday activities and the learning of English is not unbridgeable. But it also seems that the difference between the type of concepts acquired with parents before schooling and those taught in formal instruction is important. Going to school involves more than extending the range of beliefs learned earlier, it also involves new methods of thinking. This analysis of the students' different grades, however, resulted in five different considerable points:

1)   Adolescent students have a perception of the world which is different from that of adults.

2)   Students need to follow guidance and counselling sessions in order to bridge the gap between their generation and that of their parents and teachers.

3)   Adolescence is a period of turmoil which needs special care.

4)   Parents play an important role in disenfranchising their children.

5)   English learning improvement is tied with a better school and career counselling.

It is most important not only to identify such problems, but also to help the students cope with them.

Conclusion :

There are undoubtedly many factors affecting a successful learning of English in the Algerian context which have not been covered, or even alluded to in this article. I have consciously not attempted to deal with all these factors. What I have tried to get to grips with here is how far counselling and guidance, when applied to adolescent learners in Secondary schools, can be employed to make sense of and, ultimately, improve the learning of English as a foreign language. In trying to present this approach with integrity, I am aware that it has been accomplished more successfully in some sections than in others. If, however, I have enabled the readers to critically reconstruct their practices on some small way, as a result of this endeavour, then, I would consider this journey to have been worthwhile.

Bibliography

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, Copyright, 1994 – 1999

2. Hamoud Mohamed Echeikh, (1996), *Counselling and Career Guidance*, O. N. P. S.

3. Hughes, A. G., and Hughes, E. H., (1957), *Learning and Teaching an introduction to psychology and education*, Longmans.

4. Official Educational Paper, Ministry of Education, (827, Unit Specification Paper), Algiers, 1990.

5. Ontario School Association: article from the common core of data (CCD). 2001 – 02 (FRSS Survey, 2002).

6. Peel, E. A., (1960), *The pupil's thinking*, Olbourne.

7. Piaget, J., and Inhelder, B., (1969), *The psychology of the child*, Routledge and Keagan Paul.

8. Simmon, S., (1990), *Growing up and going to school in Japan*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

9. The Education Commission Report, translation from the Official Journal (40 (3)), 1999.

10.   The Education Commission Report N°. 245. *The Whole School Approach to Guidance*, Algiers, 24/14/93. Trans. إجراءات تنظيمية لنشاطات مستشاري التوجيه في الثانويات