

The Competency Based Approach and its Discontents in the Algerian Secondary Schools

Dr. Leila Bellour

Department of Foreign Languages

Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center of Mila

leila_bellour@hotmail.com

Abstract

The Competency Based Approach has been applied in the Algerian schools to meet the demands of economy and to be abreast of the wave of globalization. The implementation of this approach is meant to improve the quality of the educational system and to enhance students' level of achievement. However, teachers of English have expressed an increasing dissatisfaction with students' level in this subject matter under the reign of the new approach. This paper evinces the challenges that the competency based approach (CBA) is facing and its failure in the English class. It shows the reasons and the obstacles that make this approach unsuccessful and difficult to implement in the Algerian context. As a tool of research, I have used the questionnaire which was administered to teachers of English from diverse Algerian secondary schools. I also had casual discussions and interviews with some secondary school teachers.

Keywords: Competency Based Approach, Competency, Failure of the CBA, secondary education.

ألمخص

لقد تم تطبيق منهج المقاربة بالكفاءات في المدارس الجزائرية تلبية لمتطلبات الاقتصاد ومواكبة لموجة العولمة. ويهدف تطبيق هذا النهج إلى تحسين نوعية النظام التعليمي وتعزيز مستوى إنجاز الطلبة. إلا أن معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية قد أعربوا عن استياء متزايد من مستوى الطلاب في الإنجليزية تحت هذا المنهج الجديد. وتبين هذه الورقة

البحثية التحديات التي يواجهها النهج القائم على الكفاءة وفشله في أقسام الإنجليزية. كما يوضح الأسباب والعقبات التي تجعل هذا النهج غير ناجح ويصعب تنفيذه في السياق الجزائري. وكأداة للبحث فقد تم الاعتماد على استبيان لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية من مختلف المدارس الثانوية الجزائرية. كما أجريت مناقشات و حوارات مع بعض معلمي المدارس الثانوية

WORDS Keys: التعليم الثانوي، الكفاءة، فشل منهج الكفاءة، الكلمات المفتاحية: منهج المقارنة بالكفاءات، الكفاءة، فاعلية التدريس، طرق التدريس، طريقة حل المشكلات.

1-Introduction

The CBA was originally developed for industry in the US. Then, it has been incorporated in different levels of education. CBT (also CBLT) is the application of the CBA. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001),

Competency-Based Language Teaching is an application of the principles of Competency-Based Education in language teaching. Such an approach had been widely adopted by the end of the 1970s, particularly as the basis for the design of work-related and survival-oriented language teaching programs for adults (p.141).

So, the CBA was implemented for the sake of forming students and preparing them for the future professions. Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that "CBE... refers to an educational movement that advocates defining educational goals in terms of precise measurable descriptions of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors students should possess at the end of a course of study"(p.141). At the beginning, in the US, the CBA was adopted in education to teach language for non native speakers of English who immigrated to the US and who needed to learn the language to communicate and work. Rambe (2013) maintains that "In 1986, CBLT was used as approach in teaching refugees in the US who wished to receive federal assistance for achieving language useful in daily life and work related settings"(p.43).

The implementation of the CBA in Algeria was necessary because the country should be abreast with the most recent approaches to teaching. In fact, there are other reasons why the Ministry of Education decided to apply the CBA in the Algerian schools. First, the CBA is very important in the age of globalization which makes different countries and different cultures interconnected. Learning English becomes more important than before, because it is the lingua franca in a globalized world. Though French is still the dominant foreign language, English should be accorded a high prestige, because it might be needed to interact with other humans especially that we are now living in a "global village." Second, one of the main aims set up by the Ministry of Higher education is to prepare students for the future life. Therefore, schools are required to help students develop competencies in order to prepare them to become successful professionals who will serve the society's needs and the country's economic growth. Third, because of the short comings of the previous approaches, authorities have made the current reforms to enhance students' level and to improve the quality of education

Despite the new reforms, it seems that the winds of change in the educational system are not blowing favorably. The majority of teachers complain about the overall poor

performance of their students. And they always avow, with a sign, that there is a mismatch between theory and practice. Thus, it becomes our pressing concern to investigate the reasons which have led to the failure of the CBA in the Algerian context and to suggest some solutions to improve students' level which is below the acceptable standard.

2-Principles of the CBA

Central to the CBA is the term "competency." According to Richards and Rodgers (2001),

Competencies consist of a description of the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors required for effective performance of a real-world task or activity. These activities may be related to any domain of life, though have typically been linked to the field of work and to social survival in a new environment. For example, areas for which competencies have been developed in a vocationally oriented ESL curriculum for immigrants and refugees include Task Performance, Safety, General Word-Related, Work Schedules, Time Sheets, Paychecks, Social Language, Job Application, Job Interview(p.144).

Some of the competencies required for a job training course, for instance, include the following:

- The student will be able to:
- Identify different kinds of jobs using simple help-wanted ads
- Describe personal work experience and skills
- Demonstrate ability to fill out a simple job application with assistance
- Produce required forms of identification for employment
- Identify social security, income tax deductions and tax forms
- Demonstrate understanding of employment expectations, rules, regulations and safety
- Demonstrate understanding of basic instruction and ask for clarification on the job
- Demonstrate appropriate treatment of co-workers (politeness and respect" (Richards, 2006, p.39)

Under the reign of the CBA, teachers have to teach a bundle of competencies. Students should be informed right from the beginning of each unit about the competency which they are going to learn. This enables them, later, to judge whether they have succeeded or not. Theoretically, teachers should start by assessing learners' needs which help them select the competencies to be taught. However, this is not applicable in the Algerian context in which needs are not considered at all. In fact, competencies are not selected according to students' needs. They are rather imposed or prescribed. Since learners' needs and preferences are imposed from above, there is a lack of learner centeredness. Likewise, when teachers are asked to teach competencies, which are not of their own choice, they may not be motivated to

teach them in an effective way. Teachers' views are always disregarded in any educational reform.

Lesson objectives, in CBLT, should be in the form of competency statements. In this regard, Tuxworth states: "Competency statements describe outcomes expected from the performance of professionally related functions, or those knowledges, skills, and attitudes thought to be essential to the performance of these functions"(2005, p.12).The lesson objectives are also called 'behavioral objectives' or 'performance objectives.' Monjan and Gassner maintain that

The hallmark of competency based education is a commitment to the definition of all educational goals in terms of explicit behavioral descriptions of what a person is able to do once an educational activity has been mastered. These behavioral descriptions are called Performance Objectives (1979, p.4).

The teacher should examine if these objectives reflect the needs of his students. Ideally, in the CBA, the teacher must take into account students' different needs and background. Also, any course should start by identifying learners' proficiency level in English. Moreover, teachers need to know their learners' learning pace and their social and professional goals. On these bases, students are grouped. Unfortunately, this is not applied in the Algerian context where students are taught as if they are a homogeneous group. Teaching the same competencies to students, who have different needs, is unlikely to yield satisfactory results. Richards (2006) states:

CBI is often used in programs that focus on learners with very specific language needs. In such cases, rather than seeking to teach general English, the focus is on the specific language skills need to function in a specific context. This is similar then to an ESP approach. The starting point in course planning is therefore an identification of the tasks the learner will need to carry out within a specific setting (e.g. such as in the role of factory worker, restaurant employee, or nurse) and the language demands of those tasks. The competencies needed for successful task performance are then identified and used as the basis for course planning (p.39).

In fact, teaching homogeneous groups of pupils, which is important in the CBA, is practically impossible in the Algerian schools. What makes things worse is the fact that little attention is paid to individual differences due to the problem of large classes.

Auerbach (1986, p.414-415) identifies eight features involved in the implementation of CBI programs in language teaching:

1. A focus on successful functioning in society. The goal is to enable students to become autonomous individuals capable of coping with the demands of the world.
2. A focus on life skills. Rather than teaching language in isolation, CBLT teaches language as a function of communication about concrete tasks. Students are taught just those language forms/ skills required by the situations in which they will function. These forms are normally determined by needs analysis.

3. Task or performance-oriented instruction. What counts is what students can do as a result of instruction. The emphasis is on overt behaviors rather than on knowledge or the ability to talk about language and skills.

4. Modularized instruction. Language learning is broken down into meaningful chunks. Objectives

are broken into narrowly focused sub-objectives so that both teachers and students can get a clear sense of progress.

5. Outcomes are made explicit. Outcomes are public knowledge, known and agreed upon by both learner and teacher. They are specified in terms of behavioral objectives so that students know what behaviors are expected of them.

6. Continuous and ongoing assessment. Students are pre-tested to determine what skills they lack and post-tested after instruction on that skill. If they do not achieve the desired level of mastery, they continue to work on the objective and are retested.

7. Demonstrated mastery of performance objectives. Rather than the traditional paper-and-pencil tests, assessment is based on the ability to demonstrate pre-specified behaviors.

8. Individualized, student-centered instruction. In content, level, and pace, objectives are defined in terms of individual needs; prior learning and achievement are taken into account in developing curricula. Instruction is not time-based; students progress at their own rates and concentrate on just those areas in which they lack competence.”

Similarly, Nkwetisama and Cameroon (2013) summarize the main features of the CBA in the following points:

1. The competencies are stated in specific and measurable behavioral terms
2. The contents are based on the learners’ goals, i.e. outcomes or competencies
3. The learners continue learning until mastery is demonstrated
4. The approach makes use of an unlimited variety of instructional techniques and group work
5. It centres on what the learner needs to learn, which is the application of basic skills in life skill language context such as listening, speaking, reading or writing
6. The approach makes extensive use of texts, media, and real life materials adapted to targeted competencies
7. It provides learners with immediate feedback on assessment performance
8. The instruction or teaching is paced to the needs of the learners
9. It gets learners to demonstrate mastery of the specific competency statements or objectives Mapping of some competency objectives or statements (p.520).

The CBA gives a great importance to students’ performance. It focuses on the outcomes rather than on the input as it is the case in some traditional methods of teaching. Central to the CBA is what students will be able to do. In this approach, the outcome should be observed and measured. Luisa and Canado (2013) state that competency based language teaching is “closely linked to the notion of observable and measurable learning outcomes, or statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of learning”(p.4). Students have to act out the knowledge they have received. In other words, the student does not just imbibe the knowledge, but he/she also puts it into practice. The CBA is concerned with mainly with the output and the outcomes rather than with the teaching process. As Richards (2006) points out, the CBA “shifts attention away

from methodology or classroom processes, to learning outcomes. In a sense one can say that with this approach it doesn't matter what methodology is employed as long as it delivers the learning outcomes.”(p.39).

The lessons, in the CBA, revolve around real life skills. Students are taught competencies that are used in different situations in daily life. At the end of a course, they will be able to use different competencies across a variety of settings. Luisa and Canado (2013) states that the “ultimate aim of the competency-based model is thus to form flexible and adaptable professionals who can apply competencies to the varied, unforeseeable, and complex situations they will encounter throughout their personal, social, and professional lives [...] and who can thus become active and useful citizens in our democratic society”(p.3).

CBLT gives a great importance to communication. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001),

CBLT is also built around the notion of communicative competence and seeks to develop functional communication skills in learners. These skills are generally described in only the most general terms, however, rather than being linked to the performance of specific real-world tasks, CBLT thus shares some features with Communicative Language Teaching (p.143).

Language is considered as an effective means of communication and interaction. Each situation requires a particular kind of language to be used. In other words, people use different vocabulary and structures in different contexts. Thus, according to the CBA, language is taught for functional and situational purposes. At the end of a course, students are expected to use the English language effectively both orally and in the written form. In the same vein, Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that

CBLT is based on a functional and interactional perspective on the nature of language. It seeks to teach language in relation to the social contexts in which it is used. Language always occurs as a medium of interaction and communication between people for the achievement of specific goals and purposes. CBLT has for this reason most often been used as a framework for language teaching in situations where learners have specific needs and are in particular roles and where the language skills they need can be fairly accurately predicted or determined (p.143).

Specific life situations require certain kinds of language. Thus, teachers have to teach the different vocabulary and structures which they expect students to encounter in their real life.

Language functions should be the main focus in the CBA. It is not enough for students to know the language, but they should be able to use it. Auerbach (1986) maintains that the CBA “reflects the shift from viewing language learning as an end in itself to viewing it as a means for learners to achieve their own individual goals”(p.413). The aim of the CBA is not just to master the language but also to be able to use it in everyday social interaction and to solve daily life problems.

The CBA lays emphasis on assessment as it is the sole means which enables teachers to know their students' progress and their attainment of the objectives. Therefore, teachers are required to give a great amount of time to assess students' mastery of the competencies and provide feedback. Assessment should be tied to the underlying behavioral and performance objectives. Ideally, in a CBA, students do not pass until they demonstrate that they have mastered all the competencies. In other words, competencies must be concretized or performed. Tuxworth (2005) states that "Learner progress is determined by demonstrated competence"(p.12).

To maximize success in learning, competency-based education requires concentrating on measuring learning regardless of time limits. In fact, this is practically impossible because courses in Algeria at all educational levels are time-based. Reality is that inspectors will blame and penalize teachers if they do not complete the course in due time. Time constraints make it impossible for low level students to progress at their own pace. Regrettably, most of teachers work with the good students, and they ignore low level learners to develop their competency to the required standard. Thus, the majority of students fail to master the competencies.

The project work is very important in the CBA because it helps the teacher see and measure his/her students' achievement of the objectives. Students are supposed to present their projects to their teachers and their classmates. In the project, students demonstrate some observable behaviors which show that they have mastered the competency. Significantly, the project work help students collaborate and work in groups, and it enables them to be more autonomous. If the traditional role of the teacher is to provide students with a massive amount of knowledge, the CBA is supposed to put the learner at the center of the teaching learning process. Unfortunately, the English class is, with few exceptions, teacher-centered. Project works help students create an artificial environment to put the competencies into practice. Therefore, the CBA is a realization of Dewey's learning by doing.

Richards and Rodgers (2001, p146-147) summarize the main advantages of the CBA in the following points:

- 1-The competencies are specific and practical and can be seen to relate to the learner's needs and interests.
- 2-The learner can judge whether the competencies seem relevant and useful.
- 3-The competencies that will be taught and tested are specific and public-hence the learner knows exactly what needs to be learned.
- 4-Competencies can be mastered one at a time so the learner can see what has been learned and what still remains to be learned.

3-Criticism of the CBA

Despite its advantages, the CBA has many shortcomings in the Algerian context. It has also been subject to criticism by Western scholars and educationists.

The main reason for implementing this approach is professional; thus, students' motivation for learning is likely to be instrumental; that is, to get a job when they graduate. Nevertheless, knowing that when they graduate they will be jobless, students will lose interest

in these competencies and in studying in general. Learning should not be just for instrumental motivation, but it should be intrinsically driven.

Ideally, competencies are selected and courses are designed on the basis of students' needs. So, teachers are supposed to carry out needs analysis before they start teaching. They also need to know each student's qualities and capabilities. In the Algerian context, the textbook prescribes the competencies that should be learned. So, students are not given the chance to decide about the competencies which they want to learn. It is noteworthy that it is impossible to teach all the competencies required for all specific situations. Students may even fail to see the relevance of these competences to their real life. In fact, one cannot know which competency the students will need in the future. Furthermore, not all students are taught the exact competencies which they will use in their future profession. According to Richards and Rodgers, some competencies are difficult to develop. In their reference to Tollefson's criticism of the CBA, they state that "there are in fact no valid procedures available to develop competency lists for most programs. Many of the areas for which competencies are needed, such as 'adult living', 'survival', and 'functioning proficiency in the community', are impossible to operationalize"(2001, p.148).

Objectives in the CBA are behavioral. Thus, it is not sufficient for students to understand, but they have to perform. and this is impossible in our case because of the problem of large classes.

Auerbach (1986, p.417) criticizes the CBLT for the following reasons:

2-Focus on life skills: critics argue that CBAE is determinist in that it prescribes social roles for learners. Both the form and content of instruction prepare learners to fit into the status quo in particular ways.

3- Performance-based: Not only the content, but also the process of instruction in CBAE may contribute to socializing learners for subordinate roles. The focus on behavior and performance rather than on development of cognitive skills.

4- Pre-specified outcomes: The emphasis on observable outcomes in CBE limits the possibility for critical thinking...it has a reductionist insistence that outcomes be translated into observable behavior.

5- Student-centered instruction: in CBAE model, learners are screened for their interests and needs, and a curriculum is designed on the basis of this a priori needs assessment. One criticism is that the process of needs assessment itself takes control of learning out of the students' hands. Richards and Rodgers (2001), whose view colludes head on with that of Auerbach, state:

Because competencies are designed to enable learners to participate effectively in society... they typically represent value judgments about what such participation involves. Competencies for refugee settlement programs in the United States, for example, attempt to inculcate attitudes and values that will make refugees passive citizens who accept the status quo rather than challenge it (p.148).

The CBA, in this view, trains students to be mimic men and women and not to criticize others' views. For Auerbach, the CBA is not the appropriate approach to develop students' critical skills. She posits that

not only the content but the process of instruction in CBAE/ESL may contribute to socializing students for subordinate roles. The emphasis on behavior and performance rather than on the development of cognitive skills is consistent with the kinds of education which have traditionally been stressed for working-class students (1986, p.418).

The focus on overt behaviors might turn students into automatons. It neglects a pivotal concern of education, which is to develop students' critical skills. Learning by heart is still the norm in this educational system. It kills students' ability to think and make their cognitive abilities stagnant.. Critical thinking is not emphasized, and it is not assessed. In a similar vein, and in their criticism of the CBLT, Richards and Rodgers (2001) state: "CBLT is therefore seen as prescriptivist in that it prepares students to fit into the status quo and maintain class relationships. In addition, teaching typically focuses on behavior and performance rather than on the development of thinking skills"(148). So, the CBA imposes certain norms, behaviors, and values on students. It also inhibits critical thinking. In fact, the CBA originates in behaviorism, and it does not focus on causality and the mental processes of learning.

According to Preston (2017), CBA is not just a threat to learning but a real existential threat. He argues that it is "very good for business but not for humanity"(p.4). Education is more than developing competencies for vocational areas. Preston, who views the CBA as a theory of non-learning, posits that it is "is an educational philosophy with a view of the human as a digital being possessing no internality (mind, organs, spirit) which is distinct from any other educational philosophy"(2017, p.6). The CBA reduces and restricts the learners' abilities to labour power. It accelerates the "processes of the capitalization of humanity, the caging of human capacities in a digital frame...the transformation of humanity into a dystopian form of transhumanity"(Preston, 2017, p.6).

By applying the CBA, there is a risk of abandoning our culture for the Western one. According to Auerbach (1986, p.424),

few CBAE/ESL texts systematically elicit student contribution about their own culture, experience, or attitudes [...], thus ignoring one of the most important contributions of schema theory-that comprehension results from the interaction of prior knowledge and new information [...] The focus instead is on transmitting information about American ways of doing things in the form of lists, readings, or formulas for verbal interaction.

Students' own culture should be taken into consideration because the aim of the CBA is to help students live and work in real life settings. However, it is important for students to know about other cultures, because one of the main aims of the CBA is to foster intercultural communication.

4-Method

4-1-Participants

The sample of this study consists of 28 secondary school teachers from different Algerian secondary schools. The limited number of participants is due to the latter's unwillingness to collaborate for reasons that were beyond my understanding.

4-2-Research Tool

To investigate the subject of this study, a questionnaire was designed. Though the questionnaire was handed to many teachers, and it was posted in so many Facebook groups of Algerian secondary school teachers of English, only 28 teachers answered it. It was impossible to use the observation, which would have been a very good research instrument, because I conducted this research work during summer holidays.

4-3 Analysis of the Questionnaire

Section One: Background and general information

Q1: This question is meant to see if there are differences, in teaching practices and the success of the CBA, between teachers who have a BA degree, those who have an MA, and the graduates of the ENS, which is a school that prepares and trains students to be teachers. Though the choice of teachers was random, the majority enrolled in the ENS (20 teachers). 5 teachers have a BA degree, while 3 of them have an MA degree.

Q2: The overwhelming majority of our respondents (85,71%) said that their students are not motivated to study English, and they are not interested in it. While some teachers did not mention any reasons, others have given different justifications. One, for instance, said that the problem is in the Middle school and that "our pupils are undertaking a wrong depart." Other teachers think that the lack of interest and motivation are due to the boring syllabus and teachers. The syllabus might be boring because it is not based on learners' needs and interests. A teacher mentions that English, in our society, is seen as less important than French. For one of the respondents, the absence of interest and motivation is due to the boring topics, poor background, and crowded classes. In fact, students are generally interested in subject which have a high coefficient. Though the latter is 5 in the stream of languages, these students are not better than the others, because those who opt for languages stream are generally the underachieving learners.

Q3: The majority of teachers (78,57%) describe their students' level as low. They used different expressions like poor, primitive, levelless, weak, slow, and beginners. Few of them mentioned that the level, in general, is average.

Q4: Concerning this question, all the teachers (100%) opted for "Yes". This means that students are not truly concerned with improving their level in English. Most of them lack the intrinsic motivation for learning, and this is probably due to the fact that English, especially in the scientific streams, does not have a high coefficient in comparison to other subjects. So, if they get bad grades, they will pass thanks to the compensation system.

Q5: The majority of teachers (84, 61%) said that their classes are teacher-centered, which means that one of the main tenets of the CBA, which is learner-centeredness, is not applied in the Algerian English class. Auerbach (1986) believes that the CBA is rooted in a banking conception of education (p.417). Teachers are still using the archaic method of lecturing; lessons are still delivered through ex cathedra lecturing. Students are less talkative than the teacher because of their weak level, boredom, and demotivation. Also, there is little or no use

of ICT. Teachers still rely on heavily on the chalk and the board; they haven't updated their methods of teaching by using technological means.

Section Two: Teaching practices and Procedures

Q1: Most of the respondents (46,15%) admit that they find problems in lesson planning. In their explanation, most of these teachers complain that lesson planning is time and effort consuming. They struggle to find ideas and activities that motivate students and suit their needs and levels. For a teacher, preparing lessons is too difficult because it requires time and resources. Some teachers find it difficult to choose the type of activities that match the lesson's objectives. A respondent state the following problems related to lesson planning: "failure to achieve objectives-It needed teaching materials or equipment not available-Poor connection with preceding or subsequent lessons-Poor or reduced learning- Frustration (for both the teacher and the students)-A waste of time, effort, and money." In fact, lesson planning is very important for the success of any lesson and the achievement of the objectives. Successful lesson planning needs understanding of the CBA, awareness of students' needs and level, and hard work. Sometimes, teachers do not like to step out of their comfort zone and do their job properly. Among these respondents, who find problems in lesson planning, there is only one who is not a graduate of the ENS. His/her explanation is unreasonable, and it indicates that he/she is using a traditional teaching method.

Only 15, 38% of the respondents avow that they find problems in delivering the lesson. One of them explains that his/her pupils do not show any interest, and they do not make any cognitive efforts to let the lesson progress. In fact, this is the case of most Algerian pupils, and this is evident in teachers' responses to questions 2 and 5 (Section One). Another teacher said that the teaching materials are too difficult for the students. In these cases, teachers have to design their own lessons in accordance with their students' level. They shouldn't follow blindly the textbook content. One of the teachers stated that the problem is in "the lessons sequencing which is not all the time adequate and suitable for the students' needs or their level."

38, 46% of the sample said that they find problems in evaluating students. While two teachers explained that they do not evaluate their students at all because of time limits, another teacher said that he evaluates his students but not all of them because of time restraint. In fact, evaluation is a fundamental aspect of the CBA, and without it, teachers cannot make sure of the achievement of the lessons objectives, students' mastery of the competencies, and their progress. The absence of evaluation is a real problem that needs to be solved. One of the respondents finds himself in a dilemma whether to evaluate the written answers in tests or rather students' progress. A teacher, in my sample, admits that if he/she evaluates students in the right way, no one will pass except one or two. But as he/she said, teachers are obliged to obey some advice that "at the end every and each would pass though literally they may not be able to write properly their names despite being learners of at least three years."

Q2: Some teachers (21, 42%) said that their main aim while teaching is to complete the course in due time. This is because they are asked to do so; otherwise, they might have huge problems. The majority of teachers (78,57%) said that their main concern is to develop competencies regardless of time limits. This is probably their intention, but practically this might not be true, because their answers of some other questions reveal their obsession with time which makes them careless about assessment and students' mastery of the competencies.

Because they are required to complete the course in set time limits, many teachers pay more attention to administrative documents to protect themselves.

Q3- How do you create real life situations in your class?.

To create real life situations, which is important in the CBA, teachers use different ways like dialogues, problem solving situations, plays, showing documentaries and movies, realia, videos, inviting guest speakers, the dialogical method (Socrates way) While there is a teacher who did not answer the question, some other teachers provided unreasonable answers like asking students to use their imagination or to give them examples from real life and ask them to live and feel them. John Dewey has already called for relating learning to the students' life continuum. Students may not find learning interesting if it is remote from their practical life and not directly relevant to it. Competencies should go beyond the classroom walls. The role of the teacher, in this approach, is to put learners in authentic situations, and he/she should make sure that students have mastered all the competencies required to perform certain tasks outside the classroom.

Q4: Most of the teachers (57, 14%) opted for "yes", while a considerable number of the participants (42, 85%) avow that their lessons do not include practice and evaluation. These teachers' method of teaching is not just traditional, but it is deprived of the most important stages of teaching English.

Q5: All teachers (100%) said that they do not focus on the progress of each student. The main reasons they stated are time constraint, super-crowded classrooms, and the huge number of holiday's days. A teacher said that some students "do not have a will to improve their English, no matter what I do." Another teacher explained that lack of time and equipment make it impossible to do so. This teacher said: "I have been a teacher of 46 students per-class, even ink to explain and interact on board was a scarcity...So, to focus on true individual development that would be a piece of hell not cake." The CBA is impossible to apply in our context, because of the problem of large classes which makes it impossible for students to be evaluated continuously. It also makes it difficult for the teacher to follow the progress of each individual student. Teaching is a very tiring and demanding job, and unfortunately, many teachers become lazy and irresponsible. Regrettably, many teachers deal with students who have a great potential and perform better in exam. They ignore slow learners who need help to enhance their level. Thus, their competencies are unlikely to develop.

Q6: The overwhelming majority of the respondents (71,42%) said that they do not teach all the competencies necessary for any specific situation. Their answers are plausible because it is impossible to know all the future situations students will face in order to teach them the competencies that will be needed. Also, time is a major hindrance that makes it impossible to do so.

Q7: Most of the teachers (64,28%) deny that they move to the next competency only when students master the one that is taught. In their justifications, these teachers said that they should move on to cover the program. predetermined by the Ministry. The pressure of time pushes these teachers to care more about completing the course than on students' grasping of what is taught. Deadlines work against teachers. One of them avow that time makes us "care about quantity at the expense of quality." Another teacher said that he/she is not responsible for the future of someone who does not make the least effort to make progress. He/she added that he/she has to move on for the sake of hardworking students. In normal situations,

students with different levels cannot be grouped together, because those with a retarded progress might hinder the advancement of the others. Also, students' different needs should determine the way they are grouped.

Q8: Though there is a unified syllabus, in the Algerian secondary schools, teachers gave contradictory answers regarding the question of whether the competencies that are taught will be useful in real, life situations and job-related settings. It is possible to think that these teachers are thinking about different cultural settings while they responded to this question. Reality is that English is not deployed in practical situations. It is useful only to get in touch with other humans. The CBA is probably more appropriate for non-native speakers of English who are living in the English speaking world and who need to study English for specific purposes.

Q9: Most of the teachers (78,57%) find the textbook unsuitable for students' level. In a casual conversation with some teachers, they explained that students' level is very low, and it is impossible to rely on the textbook which is designed for students of higher level.

Q10: There is only one teacher who said that he/she is "a slave of the textbook because [he] is a rookie." Some of the teachers said that they design their own activities to meet students' needs, level, style,...etc. Other teachers said that they sometimes rely on the textbook, but at times, they design their own activities. The fact that some teachers find that the textbook activities irrelevant to students' needs is due to the fact that the book is written without consideration of needs analysis. Concerning the level, the textbook is suitable for students, but the problem is in students whose level is English is low. Designing activities is not an easy matter, and if it is not well done, it might not be useful for assessing the students' mastery of the competencies that are taught.

Q11: While some teachers (28, 57%) said that they noticed a development in their students' critical thinking, the majority (71,42%) answered in the negative. In other words, they did not remark any enhancement in their students' critical thinking. This is possibly due to the fact that students' level, in general, is low. So, most of them do not even master the competencies. Also, teaching is done in a rush because of the length of the program.

Section Three: Assessment

Q1: Most of the teachers (64,28%) said that they ask their students to do project works at the end of each unit.; however, some teachers' answer (35,71%) was in the negative. This is probably because of the lack of awareness of the importance of the project work which allows students to show their mastery of the competencies that are taught. Irresponsibility might also be a possible explanation. But lack of time is probably the main reason for not asking students to do projects. A teacher said that he/she "used to ask them for that...now no. I do not since I am forced to finish in due time and the project work, if properly done, is time consuming/will affect the sessions to come. Moreover, class number is barricade, students crowded timetable may make the PW a task that push learners' interest in the subject off."

Q2: The majority of students (78,57%) admit that not all their students do the project works. This is because of the lack of interest in studying English and in doing research. In addition to that, some students' low level does not allow them to do these projects.

Q3: Most of the respondents (64,28%) said that they correct all their students' projects. However, some of them (35,71%) said that they do not. This is perhaps due to the

huge number of students which makes the task time and effort consuming. Whatever the reason, these teachers are not applying one of the main tenets of the CBA.

Q4: The overwhelming majority of teachers (82,14%) said that few students make research and do their own work. But most of the students, according to them, copy and paste. Teachers mention that students copy from the internet or their classmates. There is one teacher who said that his/her students do them by themselves because he/she is a tough teacher and he/she insists on them right from the beginning not to rely on anyone else in doing project works. In fact, the teacher's personality has a great impact on students' behavior. For instance, if the students find that the teacher is not interested in their research, they will copy and paste. The fact that students cheat and commit plagiarism means that most of them have not mastered the competencies that are taught. In the CBA, it is not sufficient for students to do project works, but they have to present them to their teacher and their classmates.

Q5: For the majority of teachers (71,42%), few students master the competency that is taught in each unit. Only 21,42% of my respondents said that most of them master it. However, 7,1% said that they have no idea.

Q6: The majority of teachers (85,71%) admit that they ask questions the like of true-false, fill in the gaps, and multiple choice questions. These kinds of questions, which call for the reproduction of the content, are opposed to the CBA which goes beyond these very simple comprehension questions. These questions, which become very common, even at the university, are targeted mainly to low level students to help them pass because they failed to develop the required competencies.

Q7: The overwhelming majority of teachers (92,85%) said that their exams are in the written form. This makes it difficult for teachers to assess all the competencies, because these competencies must be displayed overtly. Exams, which are given in the written form, cannot help teachers assess students' attainment of the competencies. Teachers' efforts won't come to fruition if their teaching practices lose sight of the main performance objectives. Exams are still designed in the traditional form of paper-and pencil test; portfolios and role plays are hardly used. Assessing students in the right way demands a great deal of efforts which would disrupt teachers' comfort. It is also time consuming, especially if we take into account the problem of large classes. This way of assessment does not enable teachers to know whether students have succeeded or failed to attain the competency.

Q8: A considerable number of teachers (42,85%) admit that they face some pressure to add extra marks for low level students. While some teachers did not make any comments, others gave different explanations. A teacher, for instance, said that many colleagues' daughters and sons are in the ground. This problem of cronyism is rife even in academia among educated people. This unethical practice has damaged our educational system. One of the teachers said that his/her director "used to justifying that at least one third of the students should get the average mark." One of the respondents said that he/she is "still fighting to stop that; the majority of teachers see it axiomatically ok to...if you stand against, you are the black egg." Though it is immoral, some teachers give extra marks for fear of being interrogated. A teacher said that parents beg teachers to give extra points so that their children get through. In fact, mothers, in particular, always weep oceans of tears to touch teachers' hearts.

Q9: The majority of teachers (64,28%) admit that most of the students pass the resit exam, while some of them (35,71%) said that they fail.

Q10: The overwhelming majority of the respondents (85,71%) said that they are against the makeup exam. Some teachers explained that students have enough opportunities to pass (3 tests and 3 exams). Thus, If the student is good, he/she can pass without the makeup exam. A teacher said that it destroys the student, and another one said that it allows for laziness. One of the teachers said that only students who work all year long deserve to succeed. Another teacher believes that those who sit for the make up exam and succeed are the ones who fail later on. A teacher said that these students are so poor and need help to pass; so, most of the teachers do not even correct their papers; they provide them with the needed marks to pass. For that teacher, the problem is not in the exam itself. It is much more the problem of corrupt teachers. One of the teachers said that the makeup exam is is “an investment in students’ weaknesses.” He/she adds that “if to build a great society whine not for the students’ success but sweat to make them that.” One of the respondents avowed that it is just on papers most of the time, not really testing. Another teacher admitted that most teachers do not evaluate their students objectively.

If students fail, they are not supposed to sit for a make up exam, but they need extra lessons to master all the required competencies. Aurebach (1986) states that in the CBLT, “if they face difficulties in performing those required skills, they continue to work on them and are re-tested accordingly”(415). A teacher I interviewed said that retake exams are meant to reduce repetition in the secondary school. Without makeup exams, repetition in schools would have been catastrophic.

There is a lack of seriousness and a policy of satisfying students to the maximum. For instance, in 2007, the Minister decided an exceptional second session of baccalaureate exam for pupils who arrive late to school though the rules were very strict in these matters. These students, who came late, should have been punished so that the others will learn punctuality from them.

Q11: The overwhelming majority of teachers (85,71%) admit that most students pass the year without mastering the required competencies. This is mainly due to the fact that assessment is not objective.

Q12: The whole sample of my study (100%) admit that the standards of assessment in the secondary school have deteriorated. Some of the reasons are already demonstrated in teachers’ responses to questions 8, 9, 10, and 11 (Section three). Hence, the success of students does not vindicate their good level or their mastery of the competencies. In a casual discussion, a teacher says that the increasing number of students in high schools is purposefully done in order to reduce the number of drop outs who might turn into criminals when they go to street. So, school functions as a good shelter for those would be criminals. This explains why the majority of students pass though they have a low level.

Many teachers, with whom I had a casual discussion, express their dissatisfaction with the way of marking tests. They find themselves obliged to give marks for well written and organized copybooks and other marks for discipline to ensure the smooth moving of the lesson. This way of evaluation is not objective, and it has nothing to do with the principles of the CBA. Misbehavior becomes a very serious problem in our schools because of the loss of moral values in our society, and the school is no more interested in forming ethical subjects. To avoid misbehavior, teachers resort to threatening students using marks. Another reason for

taking discipline and tidiness into account in the evaluation is also, according to some teachers I know, meant to help students get better grades. In a casual talk with a teacher, she said that “competencies are evaluated and marked through test, exam and oral expression. The mark of evaluation is freely and subjectively determined by the teacher. And it is the same case for the mark of oral expression, because our classes are teacher-centered.” The teacher said that this is to maximize success rate. She adds: “Imagine that teachers of math whose students didn’t have the average in exam 2 were investigated by the inspectors and were asked to join the investigation to justify students’ bad results. For this reason, they give good marks in the evaluation to avoid such complications.”. Seemingly, teachers’ way of evaluation is not objective and honest, because the main criterion of evaluation, in the CBA, is students’ mastery of the competencies. As for the problem of misbehavior, schools should take firm measures against it. They should also teach civilization, mannerism, and etiquettes. In fact, discipline is not only the responsibility of the school; it is mainly the responsibility of the family.

Q13: All the respondents (100%), without exception, agree that in our schools quantities count more than qualities.

Section Four: Teachers’ Overall Attitudes Towards the CBA

Q1: Half of the sample (50%) said that their inspector often organizes seminars on the CBA, whereas half of them (50%) responded negatively. In fact, some teachers are irregular in their attendance of seminars.

Q2: Most of the teachers (64,28%) said that they do not understand the CBA. Hence, though they think that they work hard, their teaching is ineffective.

Q3: Most of the teachers (71,42%) believe that the CBA is not the most appropriate approach to improve students’ level in English. Some teachers think that the CBA needs specific requirements like the technological materials and suitable classrooms. A teacher believes that the approach is unsuitable in our context for the following reasons: “-Traditional and unmotivated students may not benefit as much as adult students,-It takes an objectivist approach to learning,-It focuses on immediate employer needs and is less focused on preparing learners with the flexibility needed for a more uncertain future. It lacks interest.” Some teachers complain about the length of the program, and another teacher said that Algerian students are not yet ready for it. For this teacher, the CBA “is not suitable at all, needs some equipment to be present. It needs some well-built students not the ones built in a cheated way here. It needs qualified teachers not the ones who work for the god damned wage. It needs a society not a group of people as ours.”

One of the respondents finds the materials of the textbook silly and shallow, and they do not match with real English life. Some teachers avow that they need some training because they do not understand the CBA at all. Some teachers complain about the overloaded syllabus and the overcrowded classes, and there are others who accuse teachers of being irresponsible; they no more care about the nobility of their job. A teacher said that it does not apply to real life situations. Some of the respondents prefer the use of an eclectic method. Reality is that students’ level is very low; they get the baccalaureate without even having the average in languages. The approach has little chance to succeed because of students’ laziness. They also lack honesty, the reason why baccalaureate exams were leaked in social media in 2016. Another major problem is the sorrowful fact that a lot of novice teachers of the new

generation are not competent. They do not even know how to prepare lessons or evaluate students.

Q4: Concerning the most difficult aspect of the CBA to apply, teachers gave different answers. For some of them, all aspects of the CBA are very difficult to apply. For many teachers, the project work and learner-centeredness are the most difficult things to apply. For some teachers, it is not easy to relate learning to real life situations. Others find it difficult to evaluate students' mastery of the competencies and whether they can act in real life situations.

Q5: All of the respondents agree that the CBA has failed in the Algerian context, and the reasons have already been shown in the previous items of the questionnaire.

5-Recommendations

The CBA is not adequately and practically applied in the Algerian schools. Thus, the following are some suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

1-There is an urgent need for professional training. Continuous seminars will be very helpful for teachers to understand and apply the new method. Also, inspectors should go to schools and attend lessons to see if this approach is applied adequately.

2-Courses and syllabi can be modified to meet students' needs.

3-Students should be grouped according to their future needs.

4-Teachers should focus on developing critical thinking.

5-To make students work hard and to give English, as a subject matter, the value it deserves, the educational system should dispose of the compensation system and the make up exam.

6-Teachers should take part in designing the English textbooks.

7-The major aim of language learning should be to enable students to be communicatively competent in the language. The possibility of using a communicative or an eclectic approach should be considered.

8-Each classroom should consist of few students which make it easy for teachers to implement the CBA.

9-Classrooms should be provided with teaching aids and tools.

10-Standards of assessment must be reconsidered. Assessment should be more objective and concerned with forming qualified students of high caliber.

11-It is important to slim down the syllabus, which is too long, by skipping some lessons.

12-Civic education must be accorded a great importance in education. We need to form ethical subjects who have principles and ethical values. We are in dire need of true teachers who are responsible and honest.

13-Further studies are recommended to investigate this subject.

Conclusion

The CBA was implemented in the Algerian context to teach students how to communicate, to be integrated in a globalized world, and to perform different activities related to their professional life. The result of the questionnaire, designed for this study, clearly indicate that the CBA is not applied in the English class. In other words, CBLT is non-existent practically. The findings show that teachers do not adhere strictly to the principles of the CBA. Most of them are not teaching competencies but only content. Classes are teacher-centered, and standards of evaluation have deteriorated. Thus, students pass without mastering the required competencies and without even having the basics of English. Regrettably, the CBA is an utter failure because of a cluster of reasons. Lack of honesty, the loss of ethical values, crowded classes, lack of teaching aids and technological tools, in addition to many other reasons, make it too dreamy to accomplish the goals of the CBA. There is an urgent need to make further reforms, and the starting point is to change teachers' and students' mindsets.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear teachers,

You are kindly requested to complete the following questionnaire which is designed for a research work on the Competency Based Approach (CBA). The questionnaire is anonymous; your responses will be strictly shrouded in secrecy, and they will be used only for research purposes. Your frank and honest answers are very important for the success of this study. Thank you immensely for your collaboration.

Section One: Background and General Information

1-What is your degree?

BA (License) MA (Master) A graduate of the ENS

2-Do your students show interest and motivation for learning English? Yes No

If no, could you, please, guess what the reasons are?.....

3-How would you describe your students' level in general?.....

4-Students' main aim is to get the pass mark Yes No

5-Who dominates the classroom talk You Your students

Section Two: Teaching Practices and Procedures

1- When teaching, do you find problems in

a-Lesson planning b-delivering the lesson c-Evaluating students

Please, explain

.....

2-When teaching, is your main aim to

a-complete the course in due time

b- develop students' competencies regardless of time limits

3- How do you create real life situations in your class?.....

4-Do you always apply the CBA's last two stages of a lesson: practice and evaluation

Yes No

5-Do you continually assess the progress of each student throughout the process of mastering a competency? Yes No

If no, please, justify.....

6-Do you teach all the competencies necessary for any specific situation?

Yes No

7-Do you move to the next competency only when the students master the current one?

Yes No

If no, please, justify.....

8-Are the competencies you teach useful in real life situations and job-related settings?

Yes No

9-Are the textbook materials and the assessment tasks suitable for students' level?

Yes No

10-Do you use the textbook activities or do you design those of your own?.....

Please, explain in either case.....

11-Have you noticed any remarkable development in your students' critical thinking?

Yes No

Section Three: Assessment

1-Do you ask your students to do project works at the end of each unit?

If no, please, justify

.....

2-In case you give project works to the students, do they all accomplish them?

Yes No

3-If you ask students to do project works, do you always correct all of them? Yes No

If no, please, justify

.....
.....

4-If you are applying the pedagogy of the project work, are these research works really theirs, or are they copy and paste?.....

5-How many students master the competency that is taught in each unit?

All of them Most of them? Few of them No idea

6-Does the final test include one of the following types of activities:

True-false, fill-in-the blanks, and multiple choice questions Yes No

7-Is your examination just a paper-and pencil test ? Yes No

8-Does anyone push you to give extra marks to help low level students?

Yes No

You may explain.....

9-Do the majority of students who sit for the make-up exam succeed Yes No

10-Are you for or against the makeup exam? For Against

Please, justify.....

11-Most of students pass the year without mastering the required competencies.

Yes No

12-Standards of assessment in the secondary school have deteriorated Yes No

13-In our schools, quantities count more than qualities Yes No

Section Four: Teachers' Overall Attitudes Towards the CBA

1-Does your inspector often organize seminars on the CBA? Yes No

2-Do you really understand the CBA? Yes No

3-Do you think that the CBA is the most appropriate approach to enhance students' level in English? Yes No

Please,

justify.....

.

4-What is the most difficult aspect of the CBA to apply?.....

.....

.....

5-Do you find the CBA successful in the Algerian context? Yes No

Thank you infinitely for your patience and for your precious time