

Constraints Facing the Implementation of Competency Based Approach in Teaching English in Algerian Context

د. نادية غونان – د. حنان رباحي

جامعة سعيدة – جامعة معسكر

hanane.rabahi@gmail.com – nadoushben@ymail.com

Abstract:

In order to improve the learning and teaching process, Algeria has adopted a new educational reform which is characterised by the use of the Competency Based Approach. This reform involves teaching languages through understanding their cultural constraints. To achieve this goal is not an easy task since it requires teaching cultural differences without influencing the learner's identity. In this vein, the rationale of the current research paper is to provide an inkle eye on the new policy of the Algerian educational system and the implementation of the Competency Based Approach, with a focus on third year secondary school and the strategies provided for teaching English language. Ultimately, another concern of this research work is to uncover some pedagogical problems facing the teaching/ learning process and restraining the improvement of EFL learning and teaching. To fulfil this claim, the present research paper provides an in-depth look at the approach and its outcomes on English Foreign Language Learning through approaching a systematic analysis based on a questionnaire, an interview and classroom observation. To this end, the findings proved that students encounter many difficulties to understand scientific texts inserted in their textbooks. They also demonstrated that learners meet many problems in communication during classroom interaction.

Keywords: Algerian educational system, competency based approach, EFL learners, teaching/learning process, English language

الملخص :

انتهجت الجزائر منهجا تعليميا جديدا من اجل تحسين عملية التدريس و التعلم، ويتميز هذا الاخير باعتماد النهج القائم على المقاربة بالكفاءات بحيث يشمل تدريس اللغات عن طريق فهم القيود الثقافية. غير انه ليس من الهين تحقيق هذا الهدف لأنه يتطلب تعليم الاختلافات الثقافية دون التأثير على هوية المتعلم. وعليه فان الهدف الاساسي من هذه الورقة البحثية الحالية هو تقديم نظرة واضحة عن السياسة الجديدة المنتهجة في نظام التعليم الجزائري وتطبيق نظام المقاربة بالكفاءات مع التركيز على السنة الثالثة من التعليم الثانوي والاستراتيجيات المقدمة لتدريس اللغة الانجليزية. ومن اهتمامات هذه الورقة البحثية كذلك هو الكشف عن بعض المشاكل التربوية التي تواجه التدريس و التعلم وتعيق تحسين

تعليم وتعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تقدم هذه الورقة البحثية نظرة متعمقة حول المنهج ونتائجه على تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية من خلال تحليل منهجي قائم على استبيان، مقابلة وملاحظة الصف. ولتحقيق هذه الغاية، اثبتت النتائج ان الطلاب يواجهون الكثير من الصعوبات في فهم النصوص العلمية المدرجة في كتبهم المدرسية. وظهرت هذه النتائج كذلك انهم يواجهون العديد من المشاكل في التواصل اثناء التفاعل في الفصول الدراسية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظام التعليم الجزائري، المقاربة بالكفاءات، طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية، عملية التدريس و التعلم، اللغة الانجليزية

INTRODUCTION

It is acknowledged that English is the most widely used language in the world as a result of advances in technology and globalisation. This means that it has a paramount and an indispensable place as an international language. Hence, due to the primordial status that English has taken, it has become the most prevailing language of the twentieth century. In this vein, Kennedy (3) (1983) highlights that: "The growth of business and increased occupational mobility is resulting in a need for English as a common medium of communication" (p. 01). Besides, the eminent role of English has taken the lion-share and has turned the whole world into an ever-shrinking global community. This leads to an increased necessity to introduce English to education either as a second or third language for most countries. In this regard, Harmer (2) (1991) points out that: "Many students study English because they have to; English is part of the school curriculum, because a decision has been taken by someone in authority that it should be so" (p. 02). Succinctly expressed, English language, as a lingua franca, holds a sway in all domains over world (Harmer, 1991, p. 1).

Apropos its status quo in Algerian context, Algeria endeavours to implement and improve the status of English and its use as a fundamental means of interaction, even though the language of instruction and research is either Standard Arabic or French. This does not mean that Algeria does not give fundamental importance to other languages. Alternatively, it has put the implementation of foreign languages mainly English in the educational system from middle school until university level at the centre of its concern through applying a special planning.

In this way, the Ministry of Algerian Education has conducted certain authentic reforms and many changes have taken place in favour of teaching English. Accordingly, these changes have pushed the wheel of research even further to fetch for a suitable approach for teaching such as Communicative Language Teaching. The use of CLT has become old-fashioned, although it has helped in grounding a good knowledge for the learners' communicative competence. Henceforth, Algerian Educational System has adopted the Competency Based Approach (CBA) to the new curriculum as many countries in the world in 2003 as a response to the new changes. Notwithstanding the fact that this approach has been successfully integrated in the new curriculum, some Algerian teachers fail to implement it appropriately.

To this end, the choice of embarking upon this research work sprang from the fact that teaching through Competency Based Approach is suffering from many constraints due to a set of pedagogical problems which may account for the ineffectiveness of teaching. Thereby, this research aims at identifying the teachers' difficulties and challenges faced when taking the CBA approach. It also implies to take into account the teaching situation in Algerian

secondary schools through CBA and the teachers' attitudes towards the techniques adopted to promote their teaching performance in order to overcome the constraints they face. Herewith, this research work argues for a rational and consistent way that helps teachers in applying CBA, so that it can help them for their quest to achieve a better quality in language teaching and learning. From the foregoing discussion, our research enquiries fall on the ensuing research questions which are presented as follows:

1. How do secondary English teachers implement CBA in teaching English?
2. What are the core hindrances that hinder them in its implementation?
3. Can secondary school English teachers confront these constraints and promote proficiency in language learning?

Taking into consideration the above questions, the following hypotheses can be put forward:

1. If secondary school English teachers knew very well how to implement the Competence Based Approach, they would be able to confront the constraints facing them in promoting their pupils' proficiency.
2. Many teachers do not know how to apply CBA, although they have training sessions by inspectors and through seminars and study days.
3. Yes, secondary school English teachers may confront pedagogical constraints and promote proficiency in language learning if the ministry of national education will introduce an effective planning by experts who take into account the teaching/learning situations of both teachers and their pupils not just conducting a long syllabus.

PROBLEMS FACING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CBA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ALGERIA

It is necessary to briefly consider the fact that the Competency Based Approach is designed to prepare learners and integrate them in their society. It teaches them how to solve the problems that they encounter in real life situations through applying what they learnt. The eminent goal is to prepare an individual who can take an essential part in improving his society.

It could be also argued that the use of CBA in language teaching helps the learner in developing his communicative competence. It involves acquiring knowledge in various fields and trying to apply them in evaluating, improving and criticising research. It is not only limited to obtaining strategies, but encouraging them to employ this knowledge in real situations (1) (Benadla, 2013, p. 160). Benadla (2013) further pinpoints that the implementation of CBA for foreign language teaching has given fruitful and palpable results "in terms of the learners' level, i.e. a second year middle school learners' linguistic level is remarkably better than a former ninth year fundamental school learner' ability to use English" (p. 160).

Making a foray into looking below the CBA per se, may permit one to dig deeper on the core hindrances facing its implementation in ELT in Algeria. Hence, ELT is suffering from many shortcomings, although CBA has improved the situation of English in Algerian middle and secondary schools in the last few decades. They are still some constraints that are due the implementation of CBA itself. To obtain a good understanding of this claim, Issaou et al. (2008) go on to utter the oft-quoted lines that: "Many problems have been identified during CBC implementation" (4) (in Sunal & Mutua, p. 50). They (2008) go to great lengths to demonstrate that "Research confirms that a number of constraints might prevent CBC from developing basic competencies and life skills in school" (in Sunal & Mutua, p. 50). In their view, countries like Algeria fail to implement it due to the "lack of teaching and learning resources, difficult and abstract academic concepts, poor subject matter planning and time management, large class sizes, lack of financial resources, teacher attitudes, examination

systems, and poorly-developed classroom assessment strategies” (in Sunal & Mutua, p. 50-51).

METHODOLOGY

The study under scrutiny is an investigation which relies on a hash of quantitative and qualitative instruments mainly a questionnaire, a focus group interview and classroom observation.

- Quantitative: a semi structured questionnaire was distributed to 15 teachers from three secondary schools in Saida in order to get more insight on the use of CBA in all domains not only English Language Teaching (ELT). The rationale behind the use of a questionnaire is to identify the teachers' use of CBA and its influence on the teaching outcomes.
- Qualitative: a focus group interview was conducted with 10 teachers from the three secondary schools. The teachers were teaching the three levels (first, second and third classes of secondary school pupils). We attempted to conduct a classroom observation during that academic year but some teachers did not let us have an access during their courses. Thereby, we had it with five teachers.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

As it has already been mentioned before, the sample for this research work consists of 15 secondary school teachers in the academic year 2013-2014 since relying on just ten English teachers is not enough to conduct a questionnaire. Besides, we have selected 10 teachers for the interview since they have a relation with the subject being explored; hoping that this can provide us with the major problems that hinder the implementation of CBA in English Language Teaching and Learning in particular and prevent pupils from understanding texts in their textbook.

An essential point that the researcher should come across is that the reason behind selecting teachers only for this research is that they are regarded as field practitioners who have a direct relation with their pupils and can observe their needs and wants. The following table provides in-depth look about the questionnaire and its participants:

Secondary Schools	Number	Number of the Questionnaire Returned
Med Bel Kheir	07	07
Bouanani	05	05
Magharbi	03	03
Total	15	15

Table 1. Teachers' Participation in the Questionnaire

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS DISCUSSION

Questionnaire

After the questionnaire had been collected, all teachers from the three secondary schools gave back the answers. The questionnaire was answered anonymously and consisted of three essential sections. However, the researcher is going to take four paramount questions in relation to the research questions stated above.

First Question: What are the difficulties that your pupils encounter in learning English through implementing the CBA?

1. The inability to use their language knowledge in writing or speaking.
2. The lack of relating meaning with structure.
3. Poor communicative skills.

Difficulties	Med Bel Kheir	Bouanani	Magharbi	Total	Expressed in %
1	4	2	2	08	16%
2	1	1	/	2	4%
3	2	2	1	5	10%
Total	07	05	03	15	

Table 2. Difficulties Encountering Pupils in Learning English through CBA

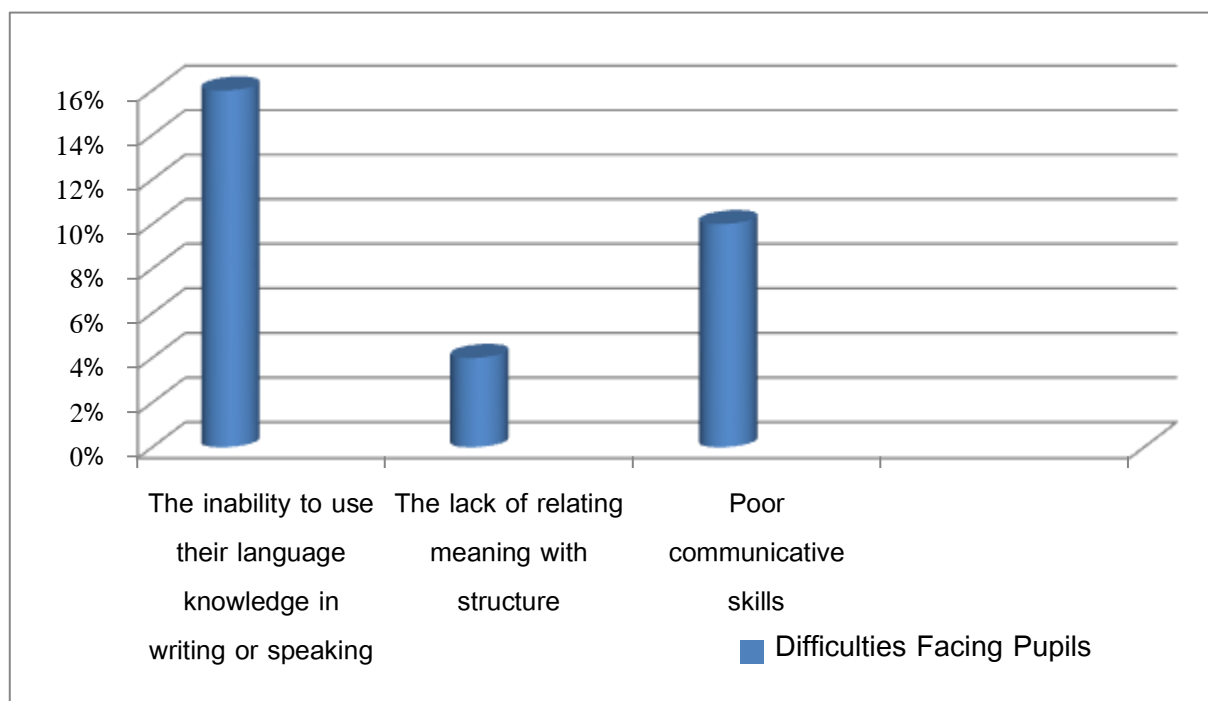


Figure 1. Difficulties Encountering Pupils in Learning English through CBA

As it is shown in the above table and figure, about 16% of the informants believed that ELT suffers from many problems after the implementation of CBA. They declared that the inability to use their language knowledge in writing or speaking is the central constraint that pupils suffer from. They added that their learners encounter problem at the level of their linguistic background (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation ... etc). They added that their pupils are weak in understanding texts in their textbooks mainly scientific texts due the lack of a linguistic knowledge. In contrast, some teachers disagreed on this view. About 10% of them observed that their pupils are suffering from weaknesses at the level of the four linguistic skills, although all efforts are made to develop the learners' linguistic competence and develop their performance to speak and write English effectively, accurately and fluently.

Question Two: How do you find the new syllabus after the implementation of CBA approach?

1. Hard for the pupils.
2. Suitable
3. Interesting.

Teachers' Attitudes	Med Kheir	Bel	Bouanani	Magharbi	Total	Expressed in %
Hard for the pupils	06		05	01	12	80%
Suitable	01	/	/	02	03	20%
Interesting	/	/	/	/	/	/
Total	07		05	03	15	

Table 3. Teachers' Attitudes towards the New Syllabus after the Implementation of CBA

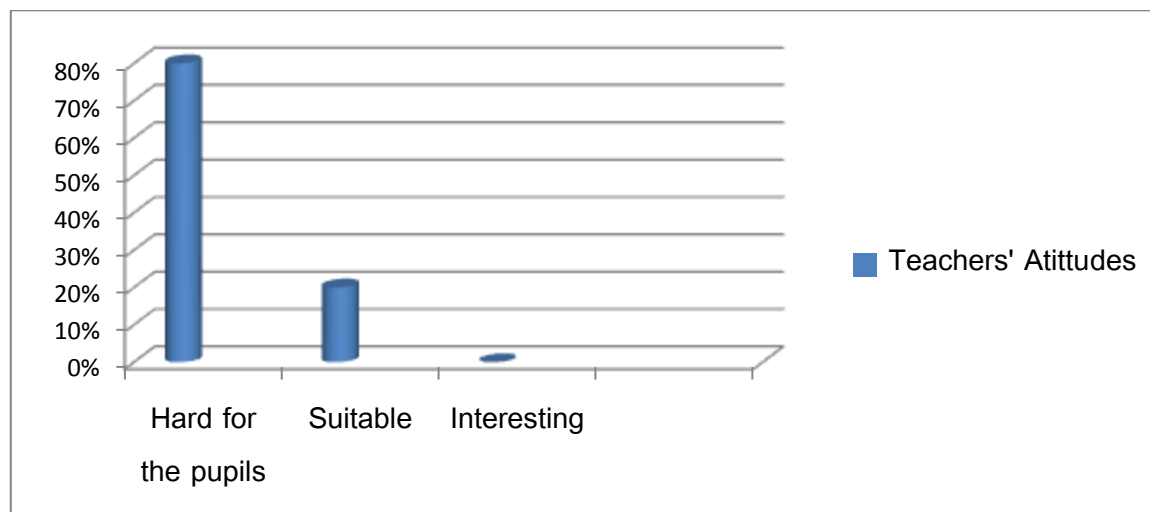


Figure 2. Teachers' Attitudes towards the New Syllabus after the Implementation of CBA

This question had attracted the teachers' attention since most of the comments revolve around the length and the complication of the syllabus. In here, about 80% of the informants thought that the syllabus for English language teaching is hard for the pupils at the three levels, 20% of them viewed that it is suitable since it focuses on teaching the four linguistic skills and promoting language proficiency. As a matter of fact, most of the teachers shared the point that the ministry has to think again about the new syllabus and its shortcomings.

Question Three: How do you find the CBA? Do you apply it in ELT?

1. Very complicated
2. Suitable
3. Useless

Teachers' Attitudes	Med Bel Kheir	Bouanani	Magharbi	Total	Expressed in %
Very complicated	02	03	01	06	40%
Suitable	05	02	/	07	46.66%
Useless	/	/	02	02	13.33%
Total	07	05	03	15	

Table 4. Teachers' Attitudes towards the CBA and its Application in ELT

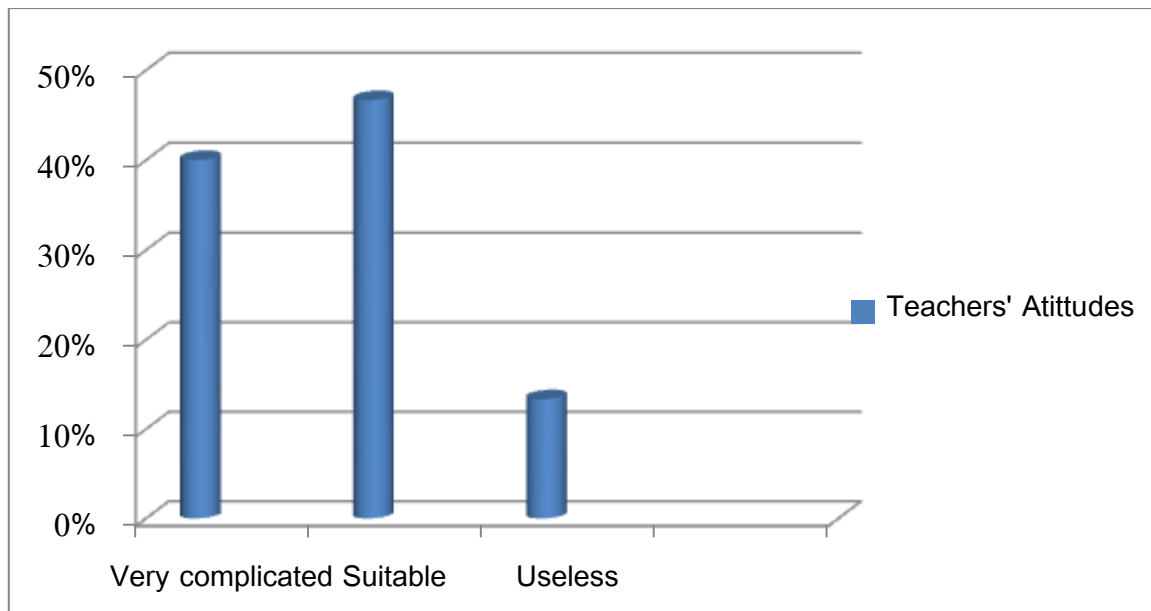


Figure 4. Teachers' Attitudes towards the CBA and its Application in ELT

Although the approach has been criticised by many teachers due to several constraints, it has been praised. Thus far, this questions aims at testing the teachers' attitudes towards the CBA. About 46.66% of the participants believed that the approach is useful and they apply it in classroom, while 40% of them viewed that it is complicated and cannot be applied in Algerian context due to many reasons. Hence, they admitted that they cannot perfectly apply this approach.

Question Four: what are the difficulties that face you in planning the lesson?

1. Lack of a sample CBA lesson plan.
2. Lack of model lessons.

Teachers' Constraints	Med Bel Kheir	Bouanani	Magharbi	Total	Expressed in %
Lack of a sample CBA lesson plan	05	04	03	12	80%
Lack of model lessons	02	01	/	03	20%
Total	07	05	03	15	

Table 5. Teachers' Constraints in Planning a CBA Lesson

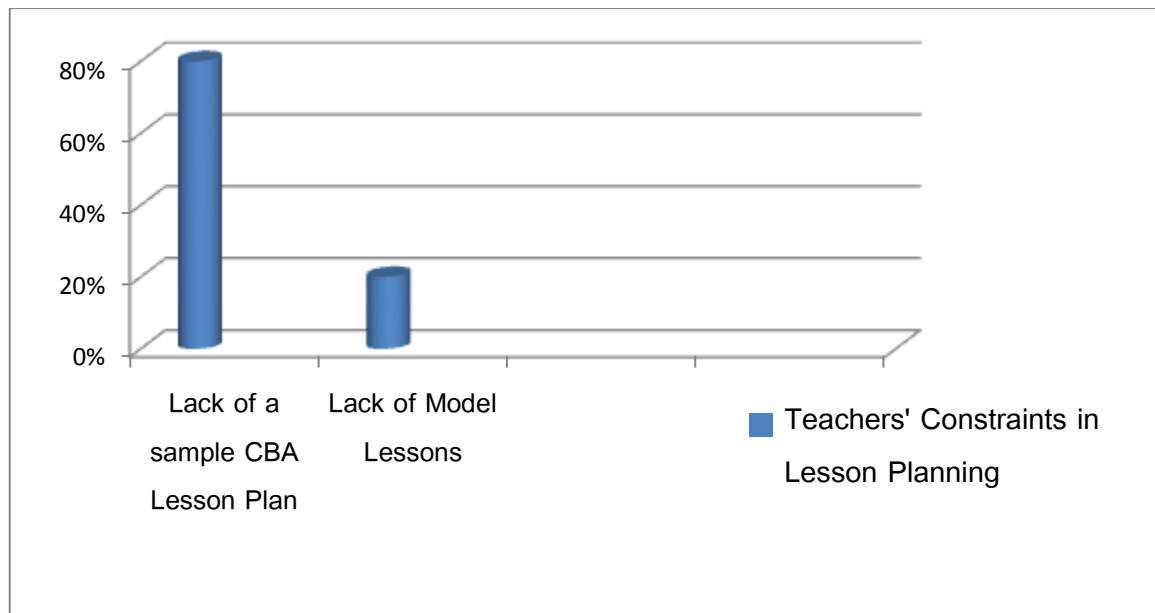


Figure 4. Teachers' Constraints in Planning a CBA Lesson

Planning a lesson is one of the tasks that require a careful attention and more importance as it entails from teachers to follow what is being instructed in the syllabus on one hand and the learners' needs and wants on another. Thereby, the question mentioned above is about the constraints hindering teachers in planning their English lessons. According to the responses, the majority of teachers argued that the central problem lies on the lack of a CBA lesson plan which helps them in planning their lessons for the three levels at secondary school. The figure demonstrates that 80% of the participants are suffering from the lack of a sample CBA lesson plan. This constraint affects their preparation for the lessons.

INTERVIEW

As it has already been mentioned, the interview was held with 10 teachers from three secondary schools in Saida. Six of them had been working more than fifteen years, i.e. they recognised the difference between the previous approach and CBA, while others' work experience varies between two and seven years. The researcher has taken the most important questions being asked during the interview according to the research questions stated above:

First Question: What are the central constraints facing the implementation of CBA in English language learning?

All teachers, especially those who have a long experience in teaching, agreed on the point that the ministry has applied important reforms in improving the teaching/learning situation in the Algerian educational context; however, this approach suffers from many hindrances. They further highlighted that the central reasons revolve around over-crowded rooms, a very long and hard syllabus, lack of models for lesson planning, lack of teachers' training and a very complicated textbook.

Second Question: Do teachers need a training to write a sample CBA lesson plan or not?

Most of the teachers were in favour of planning seminars and study days to train them to apply the CBA approach through providing them with essential techniques and methods to enhance the teaching process. They also confirmed that they also need a special training on how to design lessons for the three levels.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Classroom observation is another research medium which was conducted throughout the whole year, in order to examine how third year secondary teachers apply CBA in their courses and classrooms. The results revealed some facts about the major hindrances affecting

the use of CBA. Thus far, the observation had checked two important criteria mainly how the course is planned and the difficulties facing teachers in implementing the CBA. Data analysis of classroom observation yielded the following findings:

- The lack of a sample CBA lesson plan that helps teachers to plan their courses.
- A very loaded and hard syllabus especially for third year students.
- Very loaded classrooms. More than forty pupils in one class, while the approach needs no more than sixteen learners.
- Hours for teaching English were reduced, i.e. teaching English for three hours per week is not enough.
- Teachers find themselves obliged to introduce activities, songs and poems to motivate their students. They do not take into account all the activities listed in the textbook. They face also problems in reading comprehension since the texts do not suit the pupils' level.
- Pupils are bored to study and motivation does not exist at all. Only 7 or 10 learners are motivated. They also show no interest in pair work or using the linguistic skills to develop their communicative competence and interact in classroom.

RECOMMENDATION AND DATA INTERPRETATION

In the light of what has been discussed through this current research paper, one should inform that the results of the questionnaire, the interview and classroom observation seem to be of paramount importance since they may serve as guidelines to evaluate the use of CBA in English Language Teaching at the level of secondary school. More importantly, the results revealed that pupils at secondary school do not develop a language proficiency that helps them to express themselves, i.e. they have developed neither a communicative competence, nor language skills in writing accurately or reading. The findings of the observation also confirmed that the pupils were unable to realise cohesion in writing since they did not master grammar rules or writing techniques. In the same context, the analysis implies that teachers lack effective techniques in teaching English mainly writing and reading. They do not know how to select the appropriate activities depending on their learners' needs and wants. Moreover, the results proved that teachers do not know how to apply the CBA, although they are trained through many programmes. Over-crowded classrooms, long syllabuses are other factors that hinder teachers; therefore, they find themselves rushing after preparing the lessons and evaluating students to give them their grades.

Simply put, to implement the CBA successfully teachers need to reconsider some points mainly they should be eclectic if the syllabus is too long. They should also select a wide range of academic materials that may enhance the learners' motivation and meet their needs. Teachers can plan effective courses if they choose their materials based on their learners' requirements.

CONCLUSION

It is of crucial importance to note that the findings of this research paper are just some recommendations and suggestions that may help teachers to overcome the hindrances facing the implementation of the Competency Based Approach for English Language Teaching. Henceforth, to enhance the effectiveness of this approach, educators have firstly to reconsider the status of English Language Teaching in Algeria. Then, they have also to think carefully about the weaknesses of the CBA and the obstacles hindering teachers in its implementation. It would be also of uttermost importance for teachers to have a continual training in order to overcome the pedagogical constraints, so that they can push the wheel of innovation even

further to achieve better academic achievements since changing the educational system and achieving fruitful results cannot be done overnight.

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