



Contents lists available at ASJP (Algerian Scientific Journal Platform)
Academic Review of social and human studies
 journal homepage: www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/552



English Language Teaching and Learning under the Competency-Based Approach Principles in the Algerian High School: Real Hindrances & Possible Solutions

تعليم وتعلم اللغة الانجليزية تحت نهج ومبادئ المقاربة بالكفاءات في المدرسة الثانوية الجزائرية: عوائق حقيقية وحلول ممكنة

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Article info:	Abstract
Article history:	For the sake of improving the quality of education in the country, the Ministry of National Education (MNE) in Algeria launched a new reform in 2003 which was characterised by the adoption of the Competency-based Approach (CBA). The latter necessitates new curricula, syllabi, textbooks, and new teaching materials that became ready-made for application by the season 2004/2005 under the euphoria of achieving marvellous results which the previous methods/approaches failed to arrive at. Yet, and after almost two decades, the educational environment is still facing serious/complicated obstacles and hurdles that prevent the true implementation of this approach, and therefore failure to realise the desired objectives became apparent in all levels. In this paper, we investigated the nature of some of these hindrances and obstacles that stand as roadblocks against reaching satisfactory results in the Algeria Secondary School, mainly in English language teaching and learning under Competency based Language Teaching principles or CBLT. The research tools including the questionnaire and classroom observation revealed complicated hurdles inside ELT classrooms what pushed to conclude with some suggestions to better the current situation that EFL teachers and learners are concretely witnessing.
<i>Received :13-02-2022</i>	
<i>Revised :31-03-2022</i>	
<i>Accepted : 17-04-2022</i>	
Key words:	
<i>CBA ; Secondary School</i>	
<i>Obstacles; enhance</i>	
<i>English; solutions</i>	
<i>Teachers; classroom.</i>	

الكلمات المفتاحية:	ملخص
المقاربة بالكفاءات، المدرسة الثانوية، العوائق تحسين، الانجليزية، حلول، الاساتذة، القسم.	<p>بغية تحسين جودة التعليم في البلاد، أطلقت وزارة التربية الوطنية في الجزائر إصلاحاً جديداً في عام 2003 تميز بتبني النهج القائم على المقاربة بالكفاءات. هذا الأخير يستلزم مناهج وبرامج وكتب مدرسية بالإضافة الى مواد تعليمية جديدة والتي أصبحت جاهزة للتطبيق بحلول الموسم الدراسي 2005/2004 في ظل نشوة تحقيق نتائج رائعة لم تصل إليها الأساليب / المناهج السابقة. ومع ذلك، وبعد ما يقرب من عقدين من الزمن، لا تزال البيئة التعليمية تواجه عقبات خطيرة / معقدة تحول دون التطبيق الفعلي لهذا النهج، وبالتالي أصبح الفشل في تحقيق الأهداف المرجوة واضحاً على جميع المستويات. في هذه الورقة البحثية، قمنا بإجراء تحقيق حول طبيعة بعض هذه العوائق والعقبات التي تقف بمثابة حواجز أمام الوصول إلى نتائج مرضية في المدرسة الثانوية الجزائرية ، خاصة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية وتعلمها بموجب مبادئ تدريس اللغة القائمة على بناء الكفاءة . أدوات البحث وجمع البيانات ابانت عن مشاكل معقدة داخل الفصل الدراسي وهو الشيء الذي جعلنا لتختتم بـ بعض الاقتراحات والحلول لتحسين الوضع الحالي الذي يشهده معلمو ومتعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية بشكل ملموس في فصول تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية.</p>

1. Introduction

Globally, the educational sphere is receiving an endless range of innovative and creative teaching/learning ideas in search for better practices, performances and more fruitful results. Whenever a new method or approach proves its usefulness and its capacity to serve this field and to greatly minimise the different issues/problems that earlier approaches and methods have not been adequately able of doing, countries worldwide work swiftly on its adoption to improve the quality of education system. This was the case in Algeria when the educational authorities in the early 2000s decided to launch a new education reform characterised by the adoption of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) to react upon the many weaknesses which were resulted from the Objective-Based Approach (OBA). On paper, this approach seemed promising as it has become a hot topic in education and is becoming increasingly popular in different parts of the world. Yet, two decades since that reform took place, teachers and learners in the Algerian school, chiefly Secondary Education are witnessing serious obstacles and hindrances that stand against attaining better success scores in all subjects as far as English language is concerned.

The present paper, then, comes to look at a number of facets with regard to how CBA, particularly Competency-based Approach to Language Teaching (CBLT) has been implemented in the Algerian Secondary School. It attempts to shed more light on how CBLT is conceptualised by English teachers in Secondary Education (SE) besides investigating some of the hidden obstacles characterizing the actual predicament that teachers run into whilst trying to put this approach into practice within ELT classrooms. The current study sought to explore SE English teachers' attitudes towards CBA; CBLT syllabus; and assessment. We will try at various junctures of the paper when dissecting the results of the research tool deployed to bring to the light of day some of the gateways that ought to be more amply explored for attaining a better application of the approach. The paper starts out by addressing a set of properties that the scholarly literature on offer has furnished over the years.

2. Competency-based Education (CBE)

CBE, which has its roots firmly attached to the behaviourist tradition, grew in the United States in the 1950s and became known in 1970s where it was initially adopted for the designation of vocational training programmes (Flowers, 1990); it was not meant to be deployed in the school settings. CBE's viable applicability began to generate praiseworthy outcomes, and the scope of its plausible expansion started to gradually widen and expand to reach all the U.S (Djalal Mansour, n.d.) besides other parts of the world. The approach spread to Europe in the 1980s and started to get employed in a range of Australian professional spheres to measure professional skills by the 1990s. Throughout its evolution, competency-based education has been recognised under diverse names including performance-based learning, criterion-referenced learning, and capabilities-driven instruction (Bowden, 2004).

Thanks to its unique characteristics, competency-based approach (CBA) seems to a great extent different from other approaches, and being aware of the multiple constituents of this approach is the key to arrive at a fuller picture of how it actually works. It is concerned with the development of processes of learning as well as competencies whose components are: know-how (*savoir*), know-how to do (*savoir-faire*), know-how to be (*savoir-être*). The concept of competency-based is a pillar of curriculum development and a driving force behind the process of change because it reinforces the idea of developing complex capacities that enable learners to think and act in various fields of activity, then CBA focuses on what learners can do rather than on what they know (Smith & Patterson, 1998). It is designed to prepare learners and integrate them in the society through teaching them to use/apply what they have already learnt in classrooms in solving the different problems that they encounter in real life situations.

Within CBA, there are no typical or ready-made syllabuses that suit all levels of learning. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014) CBA syllabus is based on a priori needs-analysis of the learners, which gives the impression that it is learners' needs, expectations,

and actual knowledge-to-skill competencies are the ones that determine the nature of lessons and tasks to be embodied into the syllabus and impose the lesson sequencing's type to adopt for any particular class of learners (Djalal, n.d.).

2.1 Competency-based language Teaching (CBLT)

This approach originated from CBE, it is the application of competency based approach principles to the realm of foreign and second language instruction (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p.151). It should be noted that the earliest applications of CBLT were particularly in adults' work-related and survival oriented- language teaching programmes for immigrants. By the 1990s, CBLT spread widely in the U.S in which most refugees, who sought to be recipients of federal financial help, were literally compelled to attend schools whose programmes were built upon the innovative ideas and roadmaps set up by advocates of this newly emerging approach (Auerbach, 1986; Grognet & Crandall, 1982).

Moreover, competency-based language teaching aims at equipping learners with the various sets of skills and competencies that they will need to appropriately function in society. Wong (2008) maintains that in CBLT language needs to be connected to social contexts rather than being taught in isolation in order to help learners demonstrate that they can use a language to communicate effectively. That is why it is said to be inextricably bound and commonly associated with communicative language teaching. In the case of English language, learners study it within situations and contexts that are varied and relevant where the language is introduced and practiced in different situations that are similar to situations which may well occur in real-life. The objective is to help learners develop language fluency and problem-solving abilities that they can use in new and challenging situations in and out school. Therefore, learners will see learning English as useful to their school life as well as their future career (Docking, 1994).

2.2 Roles within the CBLT Framework

In this approach, the idea of the teacher as the only source of knowledge-provider does not really exist, and learners should be assigned an active role within

ELT classrooms as autonomous individuals, not a container to be filled with information. Hannafin, Land & Oliver (1999) reckon that under the CBA, the increasing emphasis on learner-centred learning has moved the centre of gravity away from the teacher and closer to the learner.

a. Roles of the Teacher

In CBLT classrooms, the teacher's role is lessened to the minimum degree but it remains important; his role changes from one of being an information-giver to that of a **facilitator, motivator, and mediator** who wisely supports her/his learners to achieve the designed goals. CBA teachers, according to Richards & Rodgers (2014), are materials developers and materials resource assemblers, assessors, and coaches who guide learners towards the use of appropriate learning strategies/styles and to provide necessary guidance and assistance for this purpose. They provide the materials, the activities, and the practice opportunities to their learners (Paul, 2008) as the quality and authenticity of these materials are central to the success of the class.

b. Roles of the Learner

The role of the learners in CBLT classrooms should differ from those traditional teaching/learning methods. Learners will no longer be able to rely only on the teacher and the classroom as the sole sources of information, they need to become apprentices where their roles will be to **integrate, produce, and extend knowledge** (Jones et al., 1994). Learners are meant to take charge of their own learning and work towards realising independence as well as autonomous learning. Yet, successful classroom interaction depends on learners' participation in which they are required to look for ways to motivate themselves and find strategies to apply information to their own lives and to integrate it into the classroom (Marcellino, 2005). Thus, primary roles assumed for learner appear as follow in reference to the work of Richards and Rodgers (2014, p. 159):

- Monitor their learning in reference to the target competencies;

- Develop a range of learning strategies;
- Effectively transfer knowledge and skills to new situations.

3. Methodology

To answer the research questions raised in this paper and glean an overall teacher-furnished assessment of the extent to which CBLT is fruitfully applied in and adequately suitable to the various needs and expectations of Algerian secondary schools learners, we have opted for using one teacher's questionnaire and classroom observation. The questionnaire composition has been varied in such a way that we could gauge a wide array of facets pertaining to some defining facts of CBLT application. Classroom observation gave the researcher the opportunity to scrutinize what was really happening inside ELT classes which helped us to disclose the following:

- What attitudes do SE English teachers have towards CBA?
- Does the current teaching/learning environment encourage CBLT implementation?
- To what extent are CBLT syllabuses and assessments helping teachers and learners achieve fruitful results in English language?

3.1 Population and Sampling

In this study, 30 EFL teachers from different High Schools in Algeria were targeted in which the questionnaire was either directly handed to them or sent via email. In fact the number of participants was much bigger but only 30 informants who fully answered and re-sent the questionnaire. In addition, a number of classroom observation sessions took place in two Secondary Schools in the Wilaya of Chlef, namely Bennaoua Mabrouka (EL Marsa) and Salhi Abdelkader (Echorfa) to closely examine some of the daily hindrances and hurdles that both teachers and learners are facing in CBLT classrooms. Dörnyei (2007) believes that "Observation is fundamentally different from questioning because it provides direct information rather self-report accounts." (p. 178). To closely scrutinise what is happening inside

ELT classrooms, observation seems an appropriate technique to collect data related to teacher-learner practices and interactions.

3.2 Data Analysis

After gathering data through implementing the previously mentioned tools/methods, we move the analyses of the different findings.

a. The questionnaire

We aimed at collecting data in connection with the objective of this piece of research that concerns the effects of CBLT's implementation so as to have an idea about the nature of some of the hindrances/obstacles that prevent teacher as well as learners from attaining good results in English.

Question 1: How long have you been teaching English?

Teaching experience in years	Number of teachers	Percentage (%)	
5 and less	4	13.33%	
6 to 9	12	40.00%	86.66%
10 to 15	7	23.33%	
16 to 20	4	13.33%	
More than 20	3	10.00%	
Total	30	99.99%	

Table 1: Teachers' professional experience

As shown in the table above, 26 out of 30 (86.66%) of our informants have more than five years of experience, and 46.66% (n=14) of the participants have got more than 10 years in the field of teaching. Such data is encouraging as this category has normally constructed an idea about the different obstacles and daily problems that teachers and learners in Secondary Education, chiefly EFL teachers are facing to achieve acceptable levels in English language teaching-learning under CBLT. After all, this approach has been adopted for eighteen years now and our aim has not been to get to the bottom of the areas of strengths and those weaknesses of traditional approaches and contemporary ones.

Question 2: What language teaching approach / method do you prefer?

Approaches/ Methods	Responses	Percentage (%)	
The Grammar Translation Method (GTM)	00	00.00%	
The Audio-lingual Method (ALM)	03	10.00%	59.99%
The Communicative Approach (CA)	08	26.66%	
The Objective-based Approach (OBA)	07	23.33%	
The Competency-based Approach (CBA)	12	40.00%	
Total	30	99.99%	

Table 2: Teachers' favourite approaches/methods

In table two, more than half of the respondents (18=59.99%) did not tick CBA as their favourite approach of instruction, whereas 40.00%, i.e., 12 teachers informed the researcher that they prefer it over others. These statistics probably explain why most ELT classrooms seem to be teacher-centred for the majority of teachers do not feel comfortable with CBLT principles which, in turn, causes a quick come back to traditional models of teaching. This discomfort can be referred to teachers' lack of theoretical background and practice that concern their pre-service orientation (University) as well as in-service training (seminars with Inspectors).

Question 3: Do the current syllabuses in English textbooks meet the objectives of CBLT?

Informants' answers	Number (n/30)	Percentage (%)
Very much	3	10.00%
Somehow	23	76.66%
No idea	4	13.33%
Total	30	99.99%

Table 3: Syllabi's compliance with CBLT

Data displayed in this table show that only three respondents (10.00%) who stated that textbooks meet "very much" the objectives of CBLT, while other four teachers (13.33%) declared that they have "no idea" which seems bizarre at this level. The rest do appear to portray a unified picture regarding the suitability of the syllabi of the three grades to CBLT approach in

which the vast majority (23=76.66%) reckon that the current textbooks of English in Secondary Schools do not completely meet CBLT's objectives/principles. In such situation, EFL teachers are recommended to make efforts to modify, adapt, or even change some contents of the textbooks in order to simplify matters for their learners and help them attain the targeted competencies. Doing so each time is truly difficult and time consuming, especially when we know that teachers are requested to cover the lengthy syllabuses by the end of the school year which is practically hard.

Question 4: Which of the following stand as roadblocks against the true implementation of CBLT in the Algerian Secondary School?

Obstacles	Number (n/30)	Percentages (%)
Learners' lack of motivation	18	60.00%
Inappropriate teaching materials beside shortage of means	24	80.00%
Inadequate in-service training (lack of practice)	17	56.66%
Classroom over-crowdedness	19	63.33%

Table 4: Obstacles facing the true implementation of CBLT

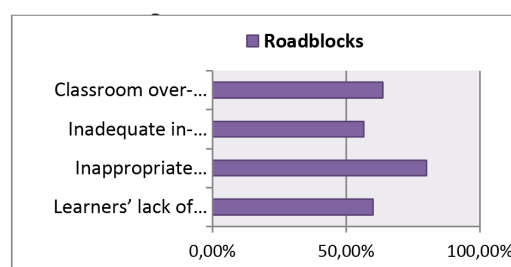


Figure 1: Roadblocks against CBLT application

As this table demonstrates, 80.00% (n=24) of the respondents believe that teaching materials' inappropriateness besides the shortage of means are the main obstacles that prevent the correct application of CBA in Algeria. Nineteen (63.33%) informants chose classroom over-crowdedness, 18 teachers (60.00%) chose learners' lack of motivation, and

56.66% (n=17) think that the inadequate in-service training seminars with Inspectors are the ones which stand as roadblocks because these conferences, according to 21 (70%) EFL teachers, focus much more on theory and give very little or no attention to practice. In fact, every single obstacle above has been selected by more than half of the informants, and that means the teaching/learning environment is arriving at highly complicated levels which make ELT enhancement very difficult unless the situation changes.

Question 5: Is the time spared to the teaching of English as a foreign language sufficient?

Options	Number (--/30)	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	06.66%
To some extent	12	40.00%
No	16	53.33%
Total	30	99.99%

Table 5: Time dedicated to EFL teaching/learning

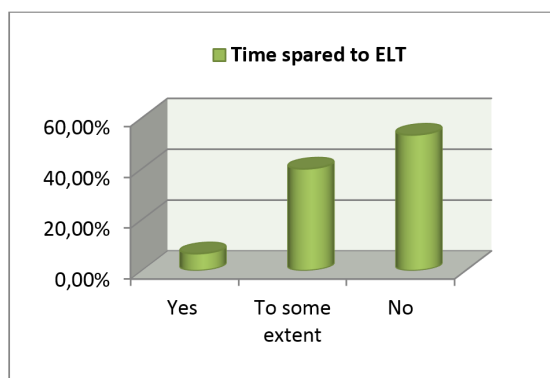


Figure 2: Time allotted to ELT in/sufficiency

As is immediately patent from this table, only two informants (06.66%) ticked the “yes” box, which pushed the researcher to question their honesty since more than two-third of the participants (90.33%= 40.00%+53.33%) did not seem satisfied. Indeed, they admitted that the time given/programmed to ELT as a subject in High Schools is not sufficient if compared with the designed syllabuses that are terribly long. The time factor is important particularly when working on competency building. The latter requires much time and efforts from the teacher’s part to satisfy the needs

of her/his learners, as far as individual differences are concerned.

Question 6: What do you suggest to enhance EFL teaching/learning?

Options	Number (--/30)	Percentage (%)
Increase the timing of ELT	13	43.33%
Lighten the syllabus	17	56.66%
Review the textbook content	17	56.66%

Table 6: Suggestions for ELT enhancement

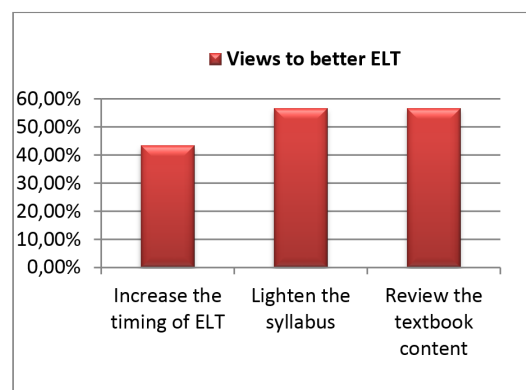


Figure 3: Views to better English language teaching and learning

This part attracts dozens of suggestions unless it is restricted to the provided options above. Our informants reacted positively towards this question where they gave each option almost an equal importance. The first suggestion was chosen by 13 respondents (43.33%) whereas the second and the third options were respectively selected by 17 (56.66%) teachers for each. Frankly, the three options are interrelated and significant to the degree that any kind of change in each suggestion will certainly influence the others. Put different, either reviewing or lightening the syllabi will greatly serve the timing of ELT which leads to much focus on competency measuring rather than time.

Question 7: After approximately two decades of its implementation, I see that CBLT is really helping teachers and learners to develop.

Answers	Number (--/30)	Percentage (%)
Fully agree	02	06.66%
Partly agree	21	70.00%
Do not agree	07	23.33%
Total	30	99.99%

Table 7: dis/satisfaction with regard to CBLT implementation

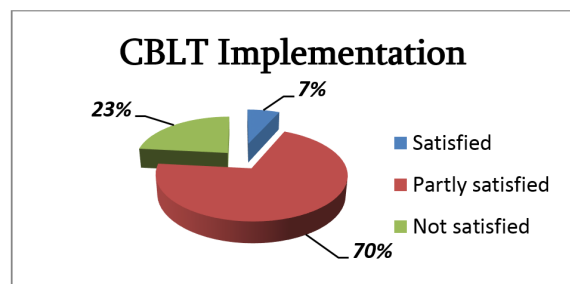


Figure 4: Teachers' satisfaction degree on CBLT implementation

The last question in the questionnaire, as expected, indicates that most of the respondents (21=70.00%) do not fully agree that CBLT is improving the teaching-learning process better than its ancestors. Only 2 informants (06.66%) ticked the first option and seven (7) teachers (23.33%) informed the researcher that they do not agree with this point of view since they are in daily struggles to find appropriate modifications/alternatives to help learners build competencies in different learning skills. Absolutely, based on investigation, findings in this research paper, and daily observation as a previous teacher in High School, we can say that the majority of English teachers are facing lots of problems, hindrances, and obstacles that prevent them from equipping learners with the targeted competencies or at least achieve acceptable levels in ELT.

b. Classroom observation

Observation became an important research tool in almost every field; it is, indeed, different from questionnaires in which the researcher has the opportunity to examine directly her/his area of interest. The researcher with the help of some teachers have attended a number of observational sessions with EFL

teachers (in the two Secondary Schools mentioned previously) and jotted down the following:

Teacher's behaviour	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Gives control over the classroom to her/his learners	10%	07%	23%	<u>60%</u>
Spares sufficient time for thinking	25%	24%	<u>46%</u>	05%
Uses cognitive terminology	<u>58%</u>	38%	04%	--
Encourages autonomous learning	--	30%	<u>45%</u>	25%
Supports discussions among learners	--	33%	<u>54%</u>	13%
Feeds learner-learner interaction	--	31%	<u>48%</u>	21%
Peer teaching is allowed	--	15%	<u>55%</u>	30%
Tolerates errors	15%	<u>57%</u>	10%	18%
plays the role of a(n)	guide	26%	49%	21%
	controller	<u>74%</u>	26%	--
	assistant	--	<u>56%</u>	44%
	facilitator	17%	36%	44%
promoter	18%	41%	36%	05%
Uses ICTs	--	--	15%	<u>85%</u>
Assessment takes place while teaching	--	09%	13%	<u>78%</u>

Table 8: Teacher's practices inside ELT classrooms

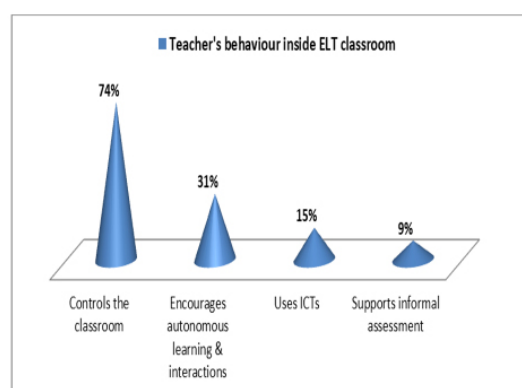


Figure 5: teacher's practices inside the classroom

What this table depicts is that EFL teachers, at least in the two Secondary Schools where classroom observation took place, seem far from implementing CBLT's principles inside their ELT classrooms.

Competency based education favours learner-centeredness where teachers are seen as guides, facilitators, assistants, and monitors who help their learners construct different language competencies and maintain autonomous learning. As shown above, teachers remain faithful to traditional models of teaching where they always (74%) control the class and rarely (60%) give learners the opportunity to do so. Behind the excuse of learners' low-level, long syllabus, and time insufficiency, Secondary School English teachers do not always/often encourage autonomous learning (independence) or support discussions and learner-learner interactions, but they sometimes do so to reach 45%, 54%, and 48% respectively. Moreover, roles such as learning facilitators (always=17%), promoters (always=18%), and informal assessors (never=78%) never arrive at an always or often grades in high percentages. Unfortunately, in the era of technology the vast majority of EFL teachers do not rely on ICTs (Information & Communication Technologies) usage (never=85%) for more teaching-learning flexibility and knowledge transferability.

4. Discussion

In light of what has been found and analysed previously, the results of both the questionnaire and classroom observation seem to be of paramount importance as they may well serve to evaluate/assess CBLT application in the Algerian High School. The results revealed that EFL teachers do not really feel comfortable with this approach in the current environment where it is being implemented under the existing circumstances. The majority are unable to adapt with the designed syllabi for all levels because of the many obstacles and hindrances that stand against attaining fruitful results in English language teaching/learning. Throughout the questionnaire and classroom observation, the researcher attempted to identify the nature of some of these obstacles and hurdles.

Though the vast majority of the informants (90.00%) started teaching in the time where the 2000s' reform (which characterised by the implementation of CBA) has taken place, they still prefer traditional teaching approaches/methods that praise spoon-feeding process and teacher-centeredness. The latter

is an obstacle that prevents EFL teachers from taking the initiative to have a thorough idea about what competency-based education really is, and how beneficial it is when appropriately implemented. This job is supposed to be firstly done by Inspectors during the weekly/monthly meetings or seminars in which workshops are conducted. These seminars are, in fact, another hindrance instead of being a support; uncountable teachers' complaints are being made because such conferences/meetings concentrate much more on theory rather than practice. Most of the teachers participating at our study attested that the training courses that they were offered during their preliminary professional training session were not practically oriented. It is no wonder, therefore, that many of the teachers still blame the suitability of the approach to their own learners. Therefore, it is imperative that Inspectors, syllabus designers and all those academics and professionals reconsider what to incorporate into such highly crucial professional training sessions to form competent teachers.

The findings of both the questionnaire and classroom observation indicated that class over-crowdedness, learners' lack of motivation, absence of ICT's usage, and insufficient time programmed to ELT are real hurdles for teachers and learners. Thus, educational authorities are highly recommended to react upon these obstacles and others to reach a serene education environment and chiefly enhance English language teaching and learning in the Algerian High School.

5. Conclusion

The time CBA (CBLT) is gaining more popularity around the world, the education system in Algeria; particularly Secondary Education is still witnessing many problems and obstacles that hinder the true implementation of this approach. To overcome such obstacles and enhance EFL teaching and learning, this paper has unveiled a quite a profusion of rather worryingly daunting facts associated with a fruitful implementation of this approach locally; and provides some suggestions, based on the previously done investigation, that are ordered as follow:

- For a wide acceptance and adaptation, members of the teaching profession locally need to be adequately

acquainted with the strategies and rules of proper practice that this approach necessitates for its application to bring about the sought outcomes. That is, teachers' pre-service and in-service trainings ought to be reconsidered;

- Reviewing, lightening, or changing the current textbooks plus the different teaching materials becomes more than a necessity to build the different language skills and competencies;

- Dedicate much time to English language teaching/learning as the current timing is practically insufficient;

- Learners should be motivated as well as trained to take charge of their own learning, i.e., teachers are requested to lessen their roles inside ELT classrooms and encourage learner-centred atmosphere;

- Integrating ICTs inside ELT classrooms becomes inevitable for its utility and positive effects on both teachers and learners.

Again, this paper aimed, on the one hand, at raising awareness and identifying some of the hindrances that High School English teachers are actually facing when attempting to implement CBLT. On the other hand, it tends to help overcome these obstacles and hurdles through suggesting solutions and making recommendations to the educational authorities, experts, and teachers in order to react upon such weaknesses to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning in the Algerian Secondary School.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article according to the APA method:

Djerouane Fathi, & Bensafi Zoulikha. (2022). English Language Teaching and Learning under the Competency-Based Approach Principles in the Algerian High School: Real Hindrances & Possible Solutions. *Academic Review of Social and Human Studies*, vol 14, number 02, Hassiba Ben Bouali University of Chlef, Algeria, pages: 70-78.