

# **A historical view about linguistic competence and students achievements in higher education**

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## **Abstract**

Education in Algeria has undergone different reforms and a set of changes especially in English language teaching at nearly all levels. When being introduced, competency-based approach find some obstacles in Algeria that was not the case for European countries which find interests in higher education. This research paper aims to speak about ‘competence’ and ‘competency’ before examining the competency-based approach as an approach which provides a shift from the traditional focus learning outcomes and learner-centred educational objectives to a more sophisticated one. It will also show this approach as an important step reform in education in addition to life enquiries and future job opportunities for students.

**Keywords:**competence-reform-orientation-communication collapse-linguistic performance

## 1.Introduction

One of Globalization characteristic on society is a rapid change and modernization in all spheres. The first change has touched economy an industrial increase, That transformation affects widely international relations so the impact was on education . The concept of a learner's competency is a very important subject because it determines learner's readiness, let him/her contribute in the social development;Moreover,It brings guidance and orientation to the modern labor market, providing learner's with the ability to depend on themselves in finding solutions to problems. The last years, the developed countries aimed at equipping the person with the essential knowledge, competency and various skills to make him or her interact with the a rapid developing technological society in harmony. Being with a large experience, the developed countries started orientating and updating education, promoting of the training programs towards competency-based approach. It is essential to understand the very concept of 'competency' and the principles of the competency-based approach and how it is implemented in educational institutions because it has been proved that knowledge, skills, working habits acquired by young people would enable intellectual progress of an individual and the

formation of the abilities to quickly respond to the demands of the time.

### **1.1 Communicative competence**

Communicative competence is the capability to discuss and command apposite social behaviours, it needs the active commitment of the learner in the construction of the target language (Canale and Swain 1980; Celce-Murcia et al 1995; Hymes 1972). Four dimensions of communicative competence are recognized; the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (Linguistic competence); the how to begin, insert, add to, and extend a conversation, and the capability to do this in a regular and logical manner (discourse competence); the capability to communicate effectively and recover difficulties caused by communication collapse (strategic competence) Terms usually used to point to aspects of CLT contain 'process oriented,' 'task-based,' 'group work and discussion' and 'learner-centered' teaching. Communicative Language Teaching addresses to both processes and objectives in classroom learning

Language teaching is communication. It is seen as a social tool which all speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone either orally or in writing. So, it can be seen as a way of teaching in which the application of communicative activities and the foreign language attempts to advance students' competence of knowing and sharing different knowledge. It centers on the

aspect that learning is assisted in a purposeful, real situation where activities are achieved with the teacher's guidance. The definitions also hint that in order to carry out CLT successfully particularly in the EFL context; EFL teachers need to improve communicative competence, and need to have knowledge about the culture of the foreign language. students English proficiency, beliefs, attitudes will affect the implementation of CLT.

## **1.2 Background Of Communicative language teaching**

Communicative language teaching came into existence in the 1970's as a result of Hymes influence on the development of CLT .CLT's roots can ultimately be traced back to Chomsky's criticism of structural linguistic theory (1966). the innate knowledge of the linguistic system of the language, called Audio Lingual Method (ALM) into question based on the idea that learners know more about the language than what they could have learned if they depended only on the input they are exposed to. Hymes (1972) view that communicative competence and socio-cultural context must also be considered in addition to linguistic competence formed the basis of CLT, O'grady points out that:

The scope and diversity of human thought and experience place great demands on language because communication is not restricted to a fixed set of topics, language must do something more than provide a package of ready

made messages. It must enable us to produce and understand new words, phrases and sentences as the need arises. In short, human language must be creative-allowing novelty and innovation in response to new thoughts, experiences and situations.

O'grady(1997)

Broadly speaking, The need for foreign language learning was created after World War II, changes in educational systems created the need to learn English for varied purposes, such as further education or vocation .The introduction of Foreign languages begun in secondary schools in the 1960s and 1970s. This created. the need for new methods to meet the learners' needs for communication; old methods such as GTM and ALM merely focused on structural aspects of the language. To be able to communicate a learner needs what Hymes (1972) calls 'communicative competence', where knowledge of language entails more than knowledge of its grammar and vocabulary; they also require knowledge of how to use the language appropriately in different situations. Canale and Swain (1980) tried to specify what communicative competence entails and suggested the four competencies: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Not only methods but syllabuses were also affected by the movement towards communication and there was also a realization that structural syllabuses were no longer adequate to achieve communicative competence. There was a need for a syllabus that

would enable learners to communicate at an early stage through functions such as apologizing, requesting, etc. and notions such as time, frequency, designed to help beginner adult learners to achieve basic communicative competence by teaching vocabulary, grammar and other skills alongside their functional and notional use.

### **1.3The historical background of linguistic competence**

The idea of communicative competence is originally derived from Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. By competence Chomsky means the shared knowledge of the ideal speaker-listener set in a completely homogeneous community. Hymes (1972) finds Chomsky's distinction of competence and performance too narrow to describe language behaviour as a whole. He points out that the theory does not account for socio-cultural factors. Hymes deems it necessary to distinguish two kinds of competence, linguistic competence that deals with producing and understanding grammatically correct sentences, and communicative competence that deals with producing and understanding sentences that are appropriate and acceptable to a particular situation. Widdowson (1978) strongly suggests that teachers have to teach communicative competence along with linguistic competence. He distinguishes two aspects of performance: 'usage' and 'use', communicative abilities have to be developed at the same time as the linguistic skills; otherwise the mere acquisition of the

linguistic skills may inhibit the development of communicative abilities

Canal and Swain (1980) believe that the socio-linguistic work of Hymes is important to the development of a communicative approach to language learning. Hymes says that there are values of grammar that would be useless without rules of use, Canal and Swain maintain that there are rules of use that would be useless without rules of grammar. They strongly believe that the study of grammatical competence is as essential as the study of socio-linguistic competence. Knowledge of language alone does not adequately prepare learners for effective and appropriate use of the target language. They must have knowledge which involves what is expected from them socially and culturally. As Bachman (1990, pp.87-88) defines, grammatical competence comprises the competencies involved in language use, while textual competence includes the knowledge of joining utterances together to form a unit of language by applying the rules of cohesion and rhetorical organization. All this can be generalized as linguistic competence. The discussion of communicative competence is mainly based on the recent version from Bachman (1990). He divided communicative competence into: organizational competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence. Organizational competence consists of two types of abilities: grammatical and contextual. Since linguistics constitutes a universal grammar, linguistics have focused on language competence. The fundamental objective is to understand exactly

how this system develops and the mechanisms people use when they use it. Linguistic competence is described as a sort of universal grammar or ideal language system. It represents innate knowledge of and ability to use a language's syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. That might provide some explanations for certain types of speech disorders or make it easier for people to learn additional languages. Most people are linguistically competent in their native language, and what are perceived as deficiencies in language knowledge often are simply problems with performance, not in understanding. Because of the clues it might provide for solving language disorders or aiding language acquisition.

Linguistic performance is quite similar: speech usually contains lots of hesitations and hesitations, but that doesn't mean that the competence underlying that speech is flawed. Since competence can't be observed directly, linguists use linguistic performance as a basis for making hypotheses and drawing conclusions about what competence must be like. However, in most cases they try to disregard performance factors (the inevitable speech errors, incomplete utterances, and so on) and focus on consistent patterns in their study of linguistic competence.

## **2.The Notion of Competence versus Competency**

Competence and competency has been a great subject of interest around the world. Changes



witnessed by commerce and business, technological increase and so on. it is defined as ‘a cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge and skills that enable a person ( or an organization) to behave effectively in a job or a situation in comparison to competency (ies) which refers to a cluster of abilities relating to excellence in a specific activity’. The former is the quality of being well qualified physically and intellectually, or the ability to do something well measured against a standard, especially the ability acquired through experience or training.

Competence indicates sufficiency (state of being good enough) of knowledge and skills that enable one to act in a variety of situations because each level of personality has its own requirements.

between competence and performance. Linguistic competence deals with using the right grammar, vocabulary, and general tone that are dealt with in a particular discourse community. For that, Communicative competence refers to knowing what speech is appropriate in a given social situation. Many scholars have found communicative competence as a superior model of language following Hymes opposition to Chomsky's linguistic competence. Many discussions have occurred with regard to linguistic competence and communicative competence in the second and foreign language teaching. the term linguistics was invented By Dell Hymes in 1966 showing that he dislikes the idea of Noam Chomsky(1965) that was about using the

distinction between competence and performance. Hymes agreed to be responsible from ethnographic exploration of communicative competence that included communicative form and function in integral relation to each other, to follow Chomsky's abstract opinion on competence.

## **2.1 Competency- Based Approach in education**

Curriculum has witnessed a variety of developed models and assessing knowledge. The competency based approach consists of teachers basing their instructions on concepts expecting to foster deeper and broader understanding. CBA is a very popular approach which focuses on measurable and useable knowledge, skills and abilities. Competency-based approach is about organizing the content of a curriculum in terms of the development of competencies using specific pedagogical practices that correspond to the main orientations. This new step in education doesn't focus only on input, but also on learner's outcomes and results. Such results don't belong to academic requirements based on student's prefabrication of knowledge. The competency-based approach claims that learners should mobilize their values, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors in a personal, independent way, to address challenges successfully. CBA curricula fostering learner-

friendly teaching and learning strategies, could lead to a sheer memorization to the development of higher order intellectual skills and life skills, including communication, social and emotional and other relevant skills .

Competency-based education is based on learners expectations of learning. It refers to an educational movement that advocates defining educational goals in terms of precise measurable descriptions of knowledge, skills and behaviours students should possess at the end of a course of study.

## **2.2 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN TEACHING**

Communicative competence should be acquired in different areas in speaking ,reading ,listening and writing. For that teachers contribute to rise pupil's communicative abilities and strategies when dealing with the four skills..In order to analyze how communicative competence is implemented in school, the focus is on tasks based method which is a contribution of communicative language teaching. The task based language teaching is defined as a method based on tasks whose primary purposes is to make learners use the foreign language. These tasks rely on authentic events where authentic language is

used. So, accuracy will be gained when practicing the L2 in an accidental way. What learners really acquire is the implicit knowledge. Tasks differ from activities, they focus on meaning than on form. To create one's language instead of reproducing the language given to them. This will make them eager to continue if even out of the class.

### **3. A historical view on Competency-Based Approach**

linguistics have focused on language competence. The main objective is to understand exactly how this system develops and the mechanisms people use when they use it. Being a universal grammar or ideal language system. It represents innate knowledge and ability to use a language's syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. That might provide some explanations for certain types of speech disorders or make it easier for people to learn additional languages. Most people are linguistically competent in their native language. Because of the clues it might provide for solving language disorders or aiding language acquisition, linguists are very interested in competence. Linguistic performance is quite similar: speech usually contains lots of mistakes and hesitations, but that doesn't mean that the competence underlying that speech is flawed. Since competence can't be observed directly, linguists use linguistic performance as a basis for making

hypotheses and drawing conclusions. However, in most cases they try to disregard performance factors (the inevitable speech errors, incomplete utterances, and so on) and focus on consistent patterns in their study of linguistic competence. Some would agree that the differences in the values of different systems of education are what is worth exploring rather than historical details because we need to make values explicit. Values are, however, relative things and one person's construction of the inherent values of any educational system or curriculum offering may not ring true for another.

CBA developed in ways that were influenced by more than one narrow approach to learning.

In the 1970s CBA teaching was related to five approaches. These were: mastery learning, criterion-reference testing minimum-competency testing competence in education and programmed learning. These movements shared three things in common: modules design and assessment around a list of observable behaviors and the concept of

### **3.1The main characteristics of Competency-Based Approach**

CBA a problem-solving places learners in situations that test and check. their capacity to overcome problems and obstacles. As a consequence the learner becomes an effective competent user in real life situations outside the classroom.

In other words, learning is not concerned with the transmission of pre-determined knowledge and

know-how to be reproduced in vitro. Finally and most importantly, the CBA is a cognitive approach which is indebted to Bloom's taxonomy.

CBA expands on the communicative approach, it is in the sense that it seeks to make the attainment visible, i.e., concrete through the realization of projects. It also makes co-operate learning a concrete reality and opens new avenues for action interaction and the construction of new knowledge. In short, it is only through carrying project work that teachers and learners can live basic principles of CBA.

### **3.2 Competency- Based Approach and teacher's contributions**

Teachers' subservience is not required in CBA. It requires dynamic teachers who will draw on their professional skills in subject matter, methodology, how to make decisions in skill to enable the learners to be achievers. This also requires a style based on reflection on what, why and how to teach. The objectives will be fixed and traced to join teaching strategies to learning strategies.

The process of language acquisition is made through the development of appropriate learning like hypothesis making or hypothesis testing. It is already said that the teacher in a classroom is a researcher ; a fundamental aspect of his job is watching, listening and asking questions in order to learn more about how they learn so that teachers may bring great help to students. The ability to observe and listen to students and their experiences in the classroom

contributes to his or her ability to use a constructivist approach. Paradoxically, a constructivist approach contributes to our ability to observe and listen in the classroom. Thus, the process is circular. Teachers have to carefully watch them and listen to them. This kind of watching and listening may contribute to teacher's ability. A complete integration will be done since The classroom provide the learners with an ability to create contextualized and meaningful lessons.

### **3.3Competency-Based Approach and learner's role**

The learner should go through a process of personal appropriation, questioning his own convictions. This leads the learner to revise his prior knowledge and its scope to compare his own representations with those of his classmates, to search for information and validate it through consulting various sources of documentation and people in possession of information. In doing so, the learner will appeal to cognitive, affective and motivational strategies in order to set a balance between his previous knowledge and his newly acquired knowledge. The reflection of the learner will operate on his own learning processes, assure the quality of his acquisition and facilitate his retention. It is also necessary to note that negotiation is an important factor in a constructivist classroom. It unites teachers and students in a common purpose . Another quality of a constructivist classroom is its interactive nature .

### **3.4The Competency-Based Approach in Higher Education**

The fields of social activity and existence are concerned by the transformational processes observed nowadays especially the field of education a fundamental component of the formation of a person's world outcome. Over the last decades quick progression have been influenced by, disintegration of states, changes in the geopolitical map of the world, scientific discoveries and their implementations.

new values and technologies, new geopolitical relation, new life styles and communication are forming the world and that reflects the re-formation of educational objectives in both the developed and developing countries. That's why education is a subject to great changes taking place in modern society. Actually, The development of education is influenced by such features of social development as globalization, democratization, disintegration of the union of the nuclear power blocs and the formation of a unified information space.

A wide range of tools for interacting effectively with the environment is needed by students, both physical information technology, and socio-cultural ones such as the use of language

In an increasingly interdependent world, students need to be able to engage with others and since they will encounter people from a range of backgrounds, , students need to be able to take



responsibility for managing their own lives that they are able to interact in heterogeneous groups.

A significant interest in innovative educational development has been given to education for change. Traditional educational approaches are generally teacher-centered, moving from a situation where the teacher exercises power and control over the learner to where teaching becomes the facilitation of learning and the learner develops control and responsibility of learning.

increasing a learner-centered focus requires to understand and accept that learning is a very individual experience. Learners have individual learning styles and are

motivated by their own unique values and circumstances and bring to the learning situation their own personal experiences and world view. Redefining education with learner focus requires commitment to innovate and find an alternative approach.

As already mentioned, educational experience in many countries shows that one way of updating the content of education is through the implementation of CBA as it is based on socio-constructivism, it encourages the development of self-direction in learning independent learning skills, critical thinking. learning in all subjects areas involves inventing and constructing new ideas. A constructivist approach is recommended to be used to create learners who are autonomous, inquisitive thinkers who question, investigate and reason. CBA emphasizes education

for change, focusing on what learners need to know and be able to do so that they can participate in a changing world. It is concerned not only with what they learn but also how they learn and the context of their learning.

#### **4.Competency use in education**

The notion of communicative competence is one of the theories that concern the communicative approach to foreign language teaching especially in some areas as the case for speaking competencies because it is considered as valuable assets for pupils in the secondary school. In this paper, the focus is on the use of competency based-approach for developing learner's competency that is needed in oral communication. The word communication comes from a Latin word *communicare* which means that something becomes common no matter what people are going to do when they meet. whether it is to dine, play or work, they communicate. They do it by using gestures, signals, looks, intonation and words. The process is unavoidable. Communication includes many things such as influences. It constitutes an important social process, a tool for contact and transfer of ideas. Canale and Swain(1980) defined communicative competence in terms of three components: grammatical components: words and rules. Sociolinguistic competence: appropriateness strategy competence: appropriate use of strategic communicative strategies. Discourse competence. Cohesion and coherence were included through the influence of communicative

language teaching, it has become widely accepted that communicative competence should be the objective of language education.

### **5.Communicative competence and Teaching**

Communicative competence should be acquired in different areas in speaking,reading,listening and writing. For that, teachers contribute to rise pupil's communicative abilities and strategies. In order to analyze how communicative competence is implemented in school, the focus is on tasks based method which is a contribution of communicative language teaching. The task based language teaching is a method based on tasks whose primary purposes is to make learners use the foreign language. These tasks rely on authentic events where authentic language is used. So, accuracy will be gained when practicing the L2 in an accidental way. What learners really acquire is the implicit knowledge. Tasks differ from activities, they focus on meaning than on form. To create one's language instead of reproducing the language given to them. This will make them eager to continue if even out of the class.

### **6.What makes difference between competence and performance**

The ideal speaker listener is the one who knows language perfectly and is not affected by irrelevant conditions as memory limitations,distractions,shifts,interest and errors. Chomsky differentiates competency which is an

idealized capacity from performance. For him, competence is the ideal speaker's listener's knowledge of his or her language. The mental ability is a responsible agent for all those aspects of language. Chomsky separates competence and performance; he describes 'competence' as an idealized capacity that is located as a psychological or mental property or function and 'performance' as the production of actual utterances. In short, competence involves "knowing" the language and performance involves "doing" something with the language. The difficulty with this construct is that it is very difficult to assess competence without assessing performance.

### **7. Conclusion**

This present communication sheds light on Educational reforms in many parts of the world that deal with terms of competencies in order to develop learners abilities whether in high education or other levels. Learner's excellence is viewed through the specific skills to go hand in hand with the world's change. As a consequence learners should mobilize strongly their values, knowledge, attitudes and behavior in a personal way to address the challenges successfully. The appropriate approaches and measures to education are those which place learner's enquiries before other concerns and look for effective and adequate means.

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