

Investigating the Challenges in Implementing Competency-Based Approach as a Framework for In-service EFL Teachers' Training

بَحْثُ تَحْدِيَّاتِ تَنْفِيذِ الْمُقَارَبَةِ بِالْكَفَاءَاتِ إِطَارًا لِلتَّكْوِينِ أَثْنَاءِ الْخِدْمَةِ
لِأَسَاتِذَةِ الْإِنْجِلِيزِيَّةِ كُلِّغَةٍ أَعْجَنِيَّةٍ

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Received: 24/10/2021

Accepted: 10/11/2021

Published: 28/12/2021

Abstract

This paper deals primarily with the challenges in implementing competency-based approach in in-service EFL teachers' training. It is an attempt to identify how these challenges may hinder the teaching and learning processes, to a great extent. The research was conducted via questionnaires to collect EFL teacher trainers' views and opinions regarding the new education reform implications and challenges. Therefore, the results revealed that ignoring teachers' standpoints in any education reform, EFL teachers and teacher trainer's lack of training as well as inadequacy of teaching aids contribute, to a great extent, to the deficiency of competency-based approach.

Keywords: Education Reform; Competency-Based Approach; EFL Teachers; Teacher Trainers; In-Service Training.

ملخص:

يعنى هذا المقال بتحديات تنفيذ المقاربة بالكفاءات إطارا للتكوين أثناء الخدمة لأساتذة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ويتعلق الأمر بمحاولة لتعريف كيف أنّ هذه التحديات تعيق، إلى حد كبير، مسار التعليم والتعلم. قمنا بهذا البحث عبر استبيانات تهدف إلى جمع رؤى وآراء مكوّني معلّمي الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية فيما يخصّ تداعيات وتحديات الإصلاح التربويّ الجديد. وعليه، فإنّ النتائج قد أظهرت أنّ عدم الأخذ بعين الاعتبار المعلّمين في أيّ إصلاح تربويّ، ناهيك عن النقص في تكوين معلّمي الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ومكوّني المعلّمين، وعدم ملائمة الوسائل التعليمية تساهم، إلى حد كبير، في نجاعة المقاربة بالكفاءات.

كلمات مفتاحية: الإصلاح التربويّ، المقاربة بالكفاءات، معلّمو الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مكوّنو المعلّمين، التكوين أثناء الخدمة.

1. Introduction

Education approaches have witnessed novel shifts over the past few decades in accordance with the development of Information and Communication Technologies. These changes were brought to make the teaching and learning processes more effective and efficient. This is why, Competency-based education (CBE) proves to be the most appropriate approach, as CBE evolved from the fact that it is considered as a means to meet today's world needs and challenges. The competency-based approach emerged in the 1970s in the United States of America; then, it was developed and used in many educational settings including the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia. So, it was necessary for the educational system in Algeria to design and adopt a new curricula based on competencies rather than objectives to cope with the new trends of education all over the world. In this context, the former Minister of National Education Aboubaker Benbouzid claims that:

Education must be in a perpetual renewal since the world today undergoes several changes in all domains: social , political , cultural , scientific and technical fields. As a consequence we must do our best so that our educational systems can meet the needs of the development and take up the technological challenge which is the only way to have access to the twenty-first century. (qtd in Benzerroug, 2012, p. 330)

On this basis, one can say that teachers must develop and update their knowledge, skills and competencies hand in hand with this reform, as they are one of the key elements for the success of this new change. To this end, competency-based in-service training for EFL teachers is considered as a primary tool for enhancing teaching competencies and keeping teachers abreast of everything new in the educational system. However, implementing the competency-based approach (CBA), as a framework for in-service training, has proved to be a challenging task for EFL teacher trainers since CBA is an approach, which needs a lot of efforts and aids. Therefore, this article aims to explore the challenges that impede the integration of CBA in in-service training as well as how these challenges may frustrate the education reform process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of In-service Training

In-service training (henceforth INST) has always been a focus of discussion in the field of pedagogy. Researchers have provided multiple of definitions of INST. Billing (as cited in Osamwonyi, 2016) defines INST as an on-going process of developing a group of employees. This process includes the description of expected needs of individuals for fostering their job achievement. Palming (2017) adds that INST is “a skilled and private education for academics to enhance their potency, ability, data and motivation in their skilled work” (p. 23). In-service training is a workshop for a specific group of professionals to enhance their skills, knowledge, techniques and methods for excellent and efficient performance (Amadi, 2013).

According to the Educational Information Network in the European Union (EURYDICE), INST is a number of activities whereby teachers participate for the purpose of enhancing their knowledge and assessing their skills and professional approach (qtd in Bayrakci, 2009). Anna Saiti and Christos Saitis (2006) declare that INST is a vital process for professional development and teachers' qualification. Likewise, Marsha and Naftaly (qtd in Omar, 2014) state that INST is a key factor for strengthening teaching competencies and skills for better learners learning outcomes.

2.1.1 The Need for In-service Training

In-service teachers training must be a part of any educational system to help teachers regularly develop their competencies. That is to say, no one can deny the role of INST in enhancing teaching competencies and knowledge. Che Mohd Zulkifli Che Omar (ibid) states that INST has great impact on education reforms and changes, as it serves as a means for keeping teachers in touch with any innovations in the field of pedagogy. Marcha and Naftaly (ibid), in turn, emphasize that it is only via INST for teachers that we can develop and improve the quality of education.

In addition, Farouk (qtd in Almasry & Mohammed, 2012) asserts that in-service training is much more crucial than pre-service training. According to him, in-service training should be embedded in teachers' profession because it is the only way to update and develop teaching competencies. Hence, in-service EFL teachers' training fills the gap between what teachers have been taught in the pre-service training and the actual performance.

I. Imogie (qtd in Osamwonyi, 2016) points out some benefits of INST among which:

- Offering opportunities for teachers to upgrade their skills, knowledge and competencies for better performance.
- Raising the number of competent and skilled teachers at all levels.
- By managing resources and salaries paid to teachers' in-service training programme, employers were able to successfully decrease the economic burden.
- The programme offers the institutions, where in-service training implements the opportunity to increase their sources of revenue.
- INST offers many staff members the chance to have a second source of income.
- During prolonged leisure, the training enables staff members to provide their services to important areas of national development

Furthermore, INST programmes primary aim is to enable teachers to face challenges of the teaching and learning processes (Craft, 1996). ANN Margaret Smith (2006) deems that INST is essential for raising teachers' self-confidence in their performance.

INST for teachers can be an effective way to motivate teachers if it is done in accordance with their needs and beliefs; and this leads EFL teachers to the achievement of their teaching objectives.

2.1.2 The Effectiveness of In-service Training

Literature mentions that the effectiveness of INST depends on some crucial factors. Teacher trainers and inspectors, who play a vital role in in-service EFL teachers' training, have several responsibilities, including motivating trainee teachers, by creating a comfortable atmosphere in the learning environment so that trainees will not feel stressed and uncomfortable. Thus, teacher trainers have to consider the different level of experience of EFL teachers since INST is not only addressed to EFL novice teachers, but also to EFL experienced teachers. Besides, teacher trainers must ensure EFL teachers readiness for training and raise their awareness of the importance of INST. Another point worth noting is that teacher trainers and inspectors have to take into consideration the principles of adult learners, due to the fact that they are dealing and working with adults.

As a second point, the effectiveness of INST is closely related to teachers' attitudes towards the training programme. EFL teachers' attitudes, if they are positive, would help teachers develop their competencies, and thereby EFL teachers' attitudes contribute to the achievement of INST goals.

Another important factor is EFL teachers' needs analysis. The latter is the process of gathering information about target needs (necessities, wants and lacks) and learning needs (how to achieve the target objectives). Needs analysis must be the key stage of designing any in-service EFL teachers' training programme. In fact, needs analysis can be done by different methods, such as interviews, questionnaires, checklists, triangulation methods, etc.

On the other hand, modes of INST, particularly, workshops, micro-teaching and publications, provide teachers with opportunities to share their experience, exchange and discuss ideas and standpoints about specific issues. These modes also provide many practical activities and tasks. Consequently, varying INST types and modes would make training more successful and effective.

2.2 Competency-Based Approach

Competency-based approach is an approach to teaching, focusing on skills and knowledge required to solve problems in real life. Its roots go back to Generative Grammar of Noam Chomsky (1965), who asserts that:

We thus make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)...In actual fact, it obviously could not directly reflect competence. A record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course, and so on. The problem for the linguist, as well as for the child learning language, is to determine from

the data of performance the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker-hearer and that he puts to use in actual performance. (p. 04)

Nevertheless, Hymes (qtd in Canale & Swain, 1980) criticized Chomsky's linguistic theory and his emphasis on linguistic competence, pushing aside another more consequential kind of competence that every speaker needs to master: communicative competence.

CBA has a number of characteristics and benefits, which have been the driving force behind implementing CBA in the educational system. First and foremost, CBA is considered as a tool to meet the new generation needs and interests. Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers (2014) emphasize that learners' needs analysis is the starting point of designing a competency-based syllabus. In the same line, Allen E. Schenk (qtd in Richards & Rodgers, *ibid*) indicates that CBA is "outcome-based and is adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and the community" (p. 151).

The CBA supports the idea of lifelong learning in that it consists of a variety of learner's tasks, which help prepare learners to link what they learn at school to real-life situations. The Ministry of National Education (2003) declares that CBA is 'a know-how to act process' that contains abilities, skills and knowledge learners will use effectively in solving problems. Likewise, David Nunan (2007) states that CBA "focuses on language as a tool for communication rather than on language as an end itself" (p. 425). So, the CBA aids learners to communicate orally as well as in a written form.

Richards and Rodgers (*ibid*) agree that CBA is "an educational movement that focuses on the outcomes or outputs of learning in the development language programmes... CBA addresses what the learners are expected to do with language" (p.141). Stephen Blakemore (2008), in turn, claims that CBA meets learners' needs since it is learner-centred approach. He adds that by using CBA, learners work on their own pace and develop critical thinking. In other terms, CBA reinforces autonomous learning to a great extent.

2.2.1 Competency-Based Training

To meet the complex demand of the new educational reform in Algeria, EFL teachers need to develop their knowledge of the subject matter, skills and teaching competencies. In this vein, INST seems to be the most important and effective process for updating and improving EFL teachers' skills, teaching methods, pedagogical techniques and classroom performance.

The Commission of National Education (qtd in Rahman et al., 2011) claims that "we say it with force and without reservation that none of the reforms we are proposing will succeed unless we are able to recruit to the teaching profession at all levels men and woman of the highest abilities, and can train them" (p. 150). To put it another way, teachers are at the core of the success of any educational reform; the Algerian EFL teachers are never an exception.

Competency-based training (CBT) has evolved in the late 1970s as a result of lack of sufficient and fruitful in-service teachers' training, and, thus, lack of learners' good achievement. The CBT traced back to behaviourist theory of human psychology. Unlike time-based training, CBT focuses on the mastery of specific skills and competencies (Sullivan & McIntosh, 1996). What they claim is that time-based training does not take into account teachers' attitudes, prior knowledge and experience, which lead to the ineffectiveness of training. Since CBA centres on what learners can do, as a result of learning, training EFL teachers under CBA framework would enable them to link theory to practice.

It is clear, from what have been discussed, that implementing CBA in in-service EFL teachers' training has a positive influence on EFL teachers' performance and students' learning achievement as well. On the other hand, CBA stresses the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in teaching and learning processes. For that reason, ICT seems to be one of the key characteristics of CBA. Indeed, the importance of ICT teacher training is emphasized by different scholars.

2.2.2 The Need for ICT Teacher Training

The increase in the use of ICTs in the last decades has really a significant and positive impact on education in that ICTs led to the improvement of teaching methods and approaches, and, thus, better learning outcomes. However, the majority of teachers in different parts of the world, including Algerian teachers, are still struggling with integrating ICT in their teaching, claiming that they are not familiarised with technology. To put it differently, lack of teachers' training is one of the main obstacles to integrating ICT in the classroom.

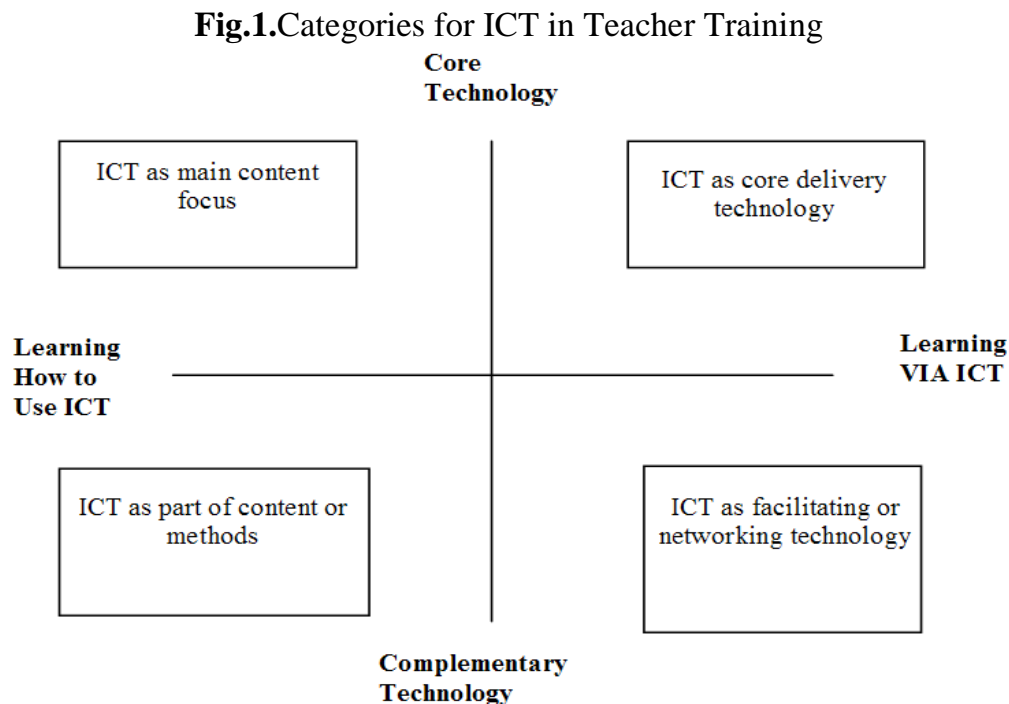
In this regard, Martha Nkechinyere Amadi (2013) argues that inadequate pre-service teachers' training and in-service training results in failure in integrating ICTs in education system. Therefore, teachers must have regular and continuous ICT training to be more competent and qualified in incorporating ICT in teaching and learning. According to Betty Collis (2001), the products of ICT that should be studied in in-service education are:

- Software and simulations course for knowledge transmission and conceptual improvement.
- Tutorial programmes to use emails and virtual conferencing for promoting communication.
- Collaborative software that helps teachers to communicate and work easily with each other.
- Conceptual diagrams to clarify key concepts and support critical thinking.
- Software that enables teachers to access educational platforms and databases.
- Specific computer-based means for subject domains, like mathematics and engineering drawing.
- Software for assessing learners and designing tests.

- A set of educational resources retrieved from websites.

Collis and Insung Jung (qtd in Jung, 2005) agree that ICT teacher training can be conducted by different modes: training teachers to use ICT and training teachers via ICT.

The following figure summarises the various forms of ICT teacher training that are adopted in different countries.



Source: Jung, 2005, p.95

2.2.2.1 ICT Use as Main Content Focus of Teacher Training:

This form stresses training teachers how to use ICT appropriately in their teaching. It helps teachers choose ICT tools and how to use them to enhance learning activities and create new methods and technique to asses learners' performance.

2.2.2.2 ICT Use as Part of Teaching Methods

This approach implements ICT in the training as an effective method to make the training aspects easier. This form of ICT teacher training is considered authentic since it allows teachers to see how ICT is used in classrooms in real settings.

2.2.2.3 ICT as Core Technology for Delivering Teacher Training

This approach has been recently introduced. It aims to training teachers to become competent online course instructors and supports distance learning. However, online ICT training for teachers is still operated in a limited scope and needs to be developed and improved from different aspects.

2.2.2.4 ICT Used to Facilitate Professional Development and Networking

ICT is used to encourage and improve continuous professional development. In this regard, many countries created websites in order to offer online resources. These websites provide different types of training and many teaching and learning resources. In addition to that, such websites support international professional development in that they enable teachers to interact and exchange educational and pedagogical experiences with teachers around the world. On the other hand, the use of ICT has proved to be one of the most effective way for self-training.

In a nutshell, ICT training must be an integral part of in-service teachers' training and any kind of professional development.

3. The Study

Competency-based education and training (CBET) is not new; it was implemented by the end of 1970s in work-related programmes for adult learners (Richrads & Rodgers, 2014). It is an approach that endeavours to enhance skills and competencies needed for efficient and effective teaching performance. Yet, many researchers agree on the fact that training teachers under CBA is still a pressing issue for teacher trainers.

This paper aims at investigating the challenges facing EFL teacher trainers to implement CBA as a framework for INST in the Algerian context, and how these challenges may hinder the success of the new reforms. So, the main question addressed in this study is:

- What are the challenges that may face EFL teacher trainers regarding implementing CBA in in-service EFL teachers training?

In order to answer the aforementioned question, we hypothesised that:

- EFL teacher trainers are struggling with CBA due to the lack of awareness of the new change, its importance, its implications on education quality and the lack of training and preparedness.

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

To fulfil the objectives of this paper, a questionnaire is administered to 22 EFL teacher trainers in Guelma city. The questionnaire investigates the challenges in implementing CBA in INST and how these challenges may negatively influence teaching competencies development regarding teaching under the CBA and, therefore, the quality of education.

3.2 Results

Table 1 EFL Teacher Trainers' Experience

Option	Less than 10	10 to 20	20 to 30	Total
Years of Experience	36.2%	45.2%	18.6%	100%

A quick glance at the table shows that most EFL teacher trainers are experienced; they have more than 10 years of experience.

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Table 2 Teachers and Education Reform

Option	Not at all	Partially	Substantially	Full	Total
Teachers' Involvement in the Education Reform	63.6%	22.7%	13.6%	0%	100%
The Effectiveness of Education and Any New Change	0%	31.8%	50%	18.2%	100%
Teachers' Lack of Awareness and the Success of the New Reform	0%	0%	4.5%	95.5%	100%

These results reveal that teachers are not fully engaged in the education reform process, which, absolutely, leads to the lack of awareness of the new curriculum demand. In this sense, adopting new educational system, without considering teachers' views, attitudes and expectations, would contribute to the ineffectiveness of this change to a great extent. On the other hand, the quality of education depends on so many factors including the education system, teachers, administrative staff, learners, parents, learning environment and teaching aids.

Table 3 CBA and In-service EFL Teachers' Training

Option	Not at all	Partially	Substantially	Full	Total
The Role of the Implementation of CBA in Improving Education	0%	0%	18.2%	81.8%	100%
EFL Teachers' Awareness of the Principles of CBA	0%	50%	45.5%	4.5%	100%
Sufficient Training for EFL Teacher Trainers	63.6%	36.4%	0%	0%	100%

The Ministry of National Education Guidelines to EFL Teacher Trainers	0%	50%	50%	0%	100%
The Application of CBA in Training	36.4%	45.5%	18.2%	0%	100%
Teaching Aids	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%

It noticeable that CBA, if it is integrated appropriately and all materials needed are available, will enhance learners' learning outcomes and, thus, the quality of education. However, CBA has faced some resistance by the majority of EFL teachers as they have not been well introduced to this approach; they really have problems with implementing CBA principles in their classrooms.

Another pressing issues for EFL teacher trainers are, on the one hand, the lack of training in how to deal with EFL teachers under CBA framework and ,on the other hand, teachers' resistance and reluctance to change since they prefer the traditional way of teaching. Therefore, in-service EFL teachers' training becomes more theoretical than practical; it is not authentic.

Concerning training programmes, EFL teacher trainers are given ready made training courses. To put it differently, EFL teacher trainers are, partially, involved in the process of planning and designing training programmes. Lastly, teaching aids inadequacy proves to be a real challenge to teachers as educational means are at the core of teaching and learning under communicative approach.

Table 3.2.4 The Use of ICT

Option	Not at all	Partially	Substantially	Full	Total
Pre-service EFL Teachers Training in ICT	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
In-service EFL Teachers Training in ICT	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%

As CBA emphasizes the use of ICT, EFL teachers and teacher trainers are required to use it; yet, the majority of them are not familiar with ICT, which, again, calls for the need of designing training sessions to help teachers overcome such challenges.

4. Conclusion

The present paper has shed lights on the benefits of competency-based approach, the need for in-service EFL teachers training under CBA principles and the importance of incorporating ICTs in the training programme. It strove to find out the challenges of

implementing CBA as a framework for INST. In fact, what is remarkable from both literature review and the practical part is that training EFL teachers, under CBA, seems to be a powerful factor in promoting the recent reform.

The collected data and analysed findings unveiled that the deficiencies of the CBA is related to many reasons. First of all, EFL teacher trainers' lack of sufficient knowledge about competency-based training and teaching that leads to training sessions being more theoretical than practical. Besides, the inadequacy of teaching aids and ICT training hinder applying CBA principles to a great extent since integrating ICT in teaching is one of the main principles of CBA.

It can be, generally, said that in-service-training for EFL teachers and teacher trainers is, ultimately, necessary in that it helps teachers to meet the requirements of the recent curriculum. In addition to that, paying more attention to ICTs, by designing ICT teachers' training and developing websites and platforms to provide teachers with different resources and teaching/learning activities, would facilitate the integration of ICT in the classroom as well as in the INST.

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6. Appendices

EFL Teacher Trainers' Questionnaire

Dear teacher trainer,

This study aims at exploring the challenges of in-service training within CBA framework and how involving teacher trainers in any educational reform may affect the success of the reforms.

We would be so grateful if you could answer the following questionnaire by ticking the appropriate answer. Much thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Section One: Background Information

1. How many years have you been training EFL teachers?

Years

Section Two: Teachers and Education Reform

2. Are EFL teacher trainers are involved in the education reform process.

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

3. Do you believe that the effectiveness of education and/or any new change is closely related to teachers?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

4. Does teachers' lack of awareness of any new change hinder the success of any new reform?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

Section Three: CBA and In-service Training

5. Do you think that the right implementation of CBA ameliorates the education system?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

6. Do you think that EFL teachers are knowledgeable about CBA principles?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

7. Do you receive sufficient training as EFL teacher trainers?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

8. Do you have any guidelines concerning the training programme?

a) Not at all

b) partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

9. Do you try to train EFL teachers under CBA framework?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

10. Does the education system provide you with the teaching aids needed?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

11. Did you receive any kind of pre-service training regarding the use of ICT?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full

12. Do you receive in-service ICT training?

a) Not at all

b) Partially

c) Substantially

d) Full