South Algerian EFL Learners' Evaluation of CBLT

تقييم المتعلمين في الجنوب الجزائري للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية وفق المنهج CBLT

Bachir Bouhania,[1] University of Adrar

bouhania@yahoo.fr

Abstract: After more than ten years of implementation in the Algerian educational system, the Competency Based Approach (CBA) and the Competency Based Language Teaching (CBLT) present more drawbacks than advantages. For example, conversely to the traditional methods of teaching and learning, CBLT is not teacher but learner-centred. Consequently, EFL learners react differently to the new approach. Investigating such hindrances in south Algerian secondary schools of the administrative department (Wilaya) of Adrar reveals that the learners negatively evaluate (CBLT) as a new method of teaching English. This small-scale study elicited data from two hundred sixty-five (n=265) questionnaires filled in by pupils in eight different secondary schools. The research considers both scientific and literary streams, and aims at assessing and evaluating CBLT according to one of its main actors, the learners. The paper analyses the results of the questionnaires and states the facts. It also invites debates about the findings and their interpretations.

Key words: Adrar, CBA, CBLT, English, evaluation

ملخص: بعد أكثر من عشر سنوات من التنفيذ في النظام التعليمي الجزائري، فإن النهج القائم على الكفاءة (CBA) والتعليم اللغوي القائم على الكفاءة (CBLT) يمثلان عيوبًا أكثر من المزايا. على سبيل المثال، على عكس الأساليب التقليدية في التعليم والتعلم، فإن CBLT يركز على المتعلم وليس المعلمَ وبالتالي، فإن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يتفاعلون بشكل مختلف مع المنهج الجديد. يكشف التحقيق هذه العوائق في المدارس الثانوية جنوب الجزائر بولاية أدرار وأن المتعلمين يقيّمون سلبًا (CBLT) كطريقة جديدة لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. استخلصت هذه الدراسة الصغيرة من بيانات من مائتي خمسة وستين (ن = 265) استبيانات لتلاميذ في ثماني مدارس ثانوية مختلفة. يبحث البحث في مجرى العلوم والأدب على حد سواء، ويهدف إلى تقييم CBLT وفقا لأحد الجهات الفاعلة الرئيسية، المتعلمين. تحلل الورقة نتائج الاستبيانات وتوضح الحقائق. كما تدعو لنقاشات حول النتائج وتفسيراتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدرار، CBA، CBLT، الإنجليزية، التقييم

---

[1] - The sending author

Introduction

The researcher clarifies the general frame of his treated subject, than the special frame that the article emphasIn September 2003, the Algerian Ministry of National Education adopts the Competency-based Approach (CBA) for teaching Mathematics, Physics, and Arabic. It was considered as a step towards a ``reopening to the outside world`` (Bouhadiba, 2015, p 6) to reverse the loss of the teaching and learning of foreign languages of the 1990s at the educational and higher educational levels. It was also meant to reinforce Algeria's image within the international diplomatic, economic and political spheres particularly after the dark decade, or the ``wave of violence and uncertainty`` (ibid, p: 5) through the most important means of worldwide communication, English.

CBA is a teaching method which prepares the learners ``to better understand the "Other" (i.e., what is foreign, the foreign culture and the foreigner) (cf. Spolsky 1989 as cited in Rezig 2011, p1330; for further details see Messerhi 2014) and to know more on different cultures and civilizations for his own cognitive and socio-constructive development'' (ibid. p: 6). A functional approach, CBA aims at improving the learners' skills and knowledge both at the educational and everyday life levels. It bases its strategy on the reinforcement of the learners' intellectual abilities rather than on their memory (cf. Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p 15).

CBA promotes the teaching input and outcome. Moreover, it expands the learners' autonomous, interactive, social, linguistic, strategic, and pragmatic competencies, and develops their knowledge and skills. Hence, the Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT) focuses on socio-educational goals to teach the Algerian student how to deal with foreign (European) cultures and speech communities. It also tries to meet the learners' aspirations and expectations in terms of citizenship, occupational and life competencies.

1. CBLT in Algeria

CBLT is an up-down institutional decision aiming at fostering new ways of teaching foreign languages (Bouhadiba, 2005, p4) It is implemented in Algeria as a method for teaching English, French, German, and Spanish. However, it was applied without prior evaluations of the teachers' and the learners' entry and exit profiles.

The teachers were neither prepared nor trained to move into the new learner-centred method of teaching, (Sarnou, 2015, p78-79). The learners, on the other hand, care about the grades more than knowledge-building.

Shifting from the traditional methods of language teaching entails changing attitudes, behaviours, and roles of both the teachers and the learners. However, more than ten years of implementation, the ill-prepared teachers and the demotivated learners have caused negative results to CBLT in Algeria. The former refuse to give in to the new pedagogy and the latter have an instrumental interest in learning English (Bouhadiba 2006; Sarnou et al. 2012). Within CBLT, the communicative nature of English in EFL classes is lost, and the learners' concern for English is restricted to classroom activities, only (Benadla, 2013). Nowadays, CBLT is a source of tension and criticism between the Ministry of Education, the academies, the school administrations, the education inspectors, the teachers, and finally the pupils and their parents.

2. Main Actors

Teachers and learners are the main actors in CBA and CBLT. The former respect their 'role and teaching strategies', the latter perform other 'role and learning strategies'. The teacher is an autonomous instructor who guides, facilitates and gets involved in discussions with the learners to enable them become responsible and active. He makes them participate in the learning process, and share in knowledge building through discovery activities and learning strategies.

The learners perform what they are taught in class, and put their acquired knowledge into practice in society. They must be creative, have a critical mind and a certain ability to deal with concrete matters in real-world situations. The learners are not passive consumers, but active learners who confront challenges, cooperate with their peers, and suggest improvements to classroom activities.

3. EFL in Algeria

At departments of English, the learning material plays a significant role for both Algerian teachers and institutions. Yet, the students complain about the unsuitability of the teaching materials used in EFL classrooms (Torki, 2013, p4). Soulimane-Benhabib

(2015), on her side, adds that motivation is a key factor to succeed or fail to learn foreign languages, and that among the causes of students' demotivation are the teacher's personality and the learners' negative attitudes towards the foreign language, the target community and the materials used.

Hamadouche (2013) concurs that the English language and culture impact on Algerian EFL learners as is evidenced by their attitudes towards the language and its native users. Nevertheless, without any prior knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for language use (Paige et al., 1999) and being far from the right sociocultural context, Algerian EFL students are bound to make errors. In other words, the Algerian EFL learner does not find the suitable context to practice the language he learns, and does not know when and how to perform it in real life activities.

In Algeria, the various EFL approaches and methods implemented by the Ministry of Education starting from the 1960s have had several drawbacks and hindrances that can be summed up as follows:

– Low quality of teaching at the intermediate, secondary and university levels
– Low level of competence of both pupils and undergraduate students
– Lack of the target language's environment (summer linguistic village, language immersion)
– Lack of motivation on the part of both pupils' and students
– Instrumental learning of the foreign language
– Inconsistent curricula and teaching methodologies
– Impact of the mother-tongue (phonology, syntax, lexical-semantics) on the learning process
– Unprepared EFL teachers and lack of continuous training programs

With the aim of evaluating the success or the failure of CBLT in Algeria, the present field-research is undertaken with EFL learners at the secondary school level.

4. **The Research**

Two hundred sixty-five (n=265) pupils participate to the research. They are chosen among eight secondary schools within the

administrative department of Adrar: 06 in Adrar-center and 02 in Reggane which is 150 kilometers far from Adrar. They are either from literary or scientific streams. The questionnaires consist of ten questions in relation to CBA and its principles. Table 1 reports the participants' numbers according to their gender and schools.

Table1 shows that 63.01% of the whole informants are girls. Their important number in secondary schools reflects the demographic reality of the Algerian educational system where there are more female than male learners.

Table1: Number of informants by secondary school and gender

Schools	Number of students	Boys	Girls
Adrar El-Maghili	25	07	18
Balkin 2	26	06	20
Khaled Ibn El Walid	26	08	18
Tililane	30	20	10
Abi Hamid El-Ghazali	37	13	24
Hakkoumi Laid	41	19	22
Reggane Nouveau	31	07	24
Ibn Rochd	49	18	31
Total	265	98	167

The next lines report the results of the closed questions asked in the questionnaires.

a) Do you have a computer at home? Yes: 68.97%   No: 31.03

The number of learners who do have computers at home is significant (68.97%). However, those who do not have one are noteworthy, i.e. 31.03%. Most of the computer owners live in Adrar-centre (Abi Hamad El-Ghazali (89.18%), Balkin 2 (84.61%), Khaled Ibn El-Walid (76.92%), El-Maghili (76%), and Technicum Hakkoumi Laid (58.53%), or in Reggane (Ibn-Rochd (65.3%), and Reggane Nouveau (61.29%). Those who do not possess a computer live in Tililane, a district characterized by low-income inhabitants and social-type of public housing.

The above mentioned percentages give a picture about the learners' access to computer technology, which enables them to be up-

to-date with knowledge and information via the internet system. In other words, the pupils can prepare the lectures and be ready to participate to the process of learning.

b) Do you have access to the internet at school? Yes: 36.38   No: 63.62%

The percentage of 63.62% is quite revealing; for it tells that that the educational institutions do not provide the learners with one of the most important means of education, the internet. Surprisingly, learners from Tililane are those who have the most frequent access to the web and who benefit the most from the internet at school. Table 2 illustrates this finding.

Table2: Percentage of learners' access to Internet at school

Schools	Internet Access
Tililane	96,66
Reggane	54,83
B2	46,15
Ibn El Walid	38,46
Ibn Rochd	28,57
El-Maghili	8
Hakkoumi	4,87

Figure 1: Access to the Internet
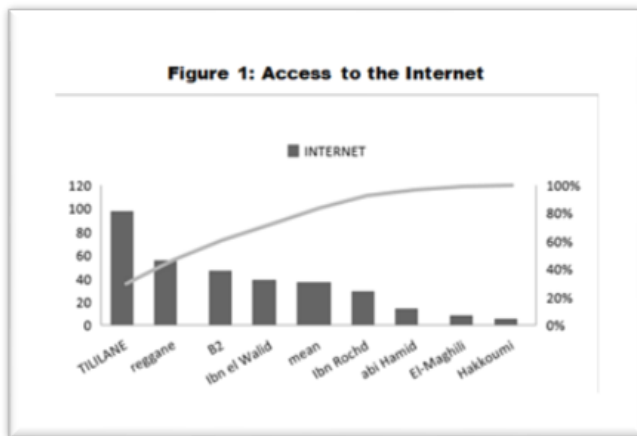
c) Do you use the internet?

Never: 16.79% Rarely: 12.76% Seldom: 60.28% Often: 9.52% No answer: 0.7%

A noticeable fact is that 60.28% of all learners seldom use the internet; a figure which is at the opposite of the CBLT principles encouraging the learners to participate in knowledge building.

Moreover, pupils who never make use of the internet are also important, for they represent 16.79% of the whole population. The next question shows that the learners' answers are not trustworthy.

Figure2: Use of the Internet
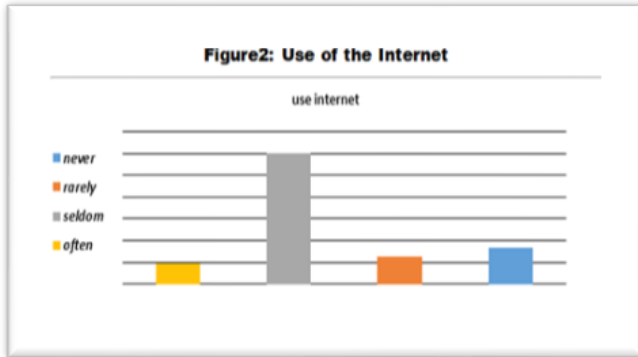
d) How do you collect the information for your research work?

My books: 24.3%, School library: 19.08% Internet: 44.11% CDs: 5.28%   Nothing: 5.06%

The fact that 44.11% of the pupils admit using the internet to collect information for their research work contradicts the percentage of 60.28% of learners who seldom use the World Wide Web. These contradictions show that the pupils are not objective in their answers.

Figure3: Learners' means of collecting information
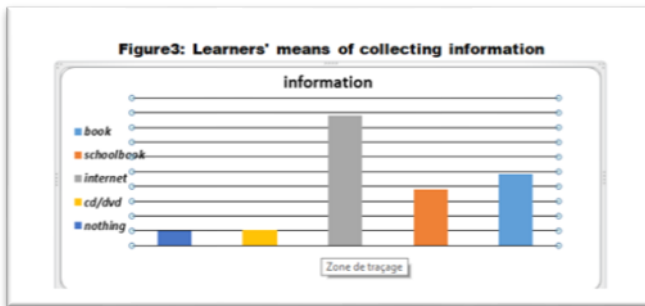
e) Do you use the course book alone at home?   Yes: 60%   No: 40%

Out of the scores obtained in the last question, one can note two tendencies. The first is that more than half of the informants admit using the course book alone at home. The second is that the number of learners who do not use the course book alone is too important and too significant pedagogically. In other words, since 40% of secondary school pupils still need help to do their homework a question asks itself: how can they participate to the preparation of the lectures if they cannot work with the coursebook alone?

f) How long are the texts in your English textbook?

Short: 11.53%   Average: 29.66% Long: 46.15% Very long: 11.68% No answers: 1.71%

Figure4: Learners' evaluations of length of texts
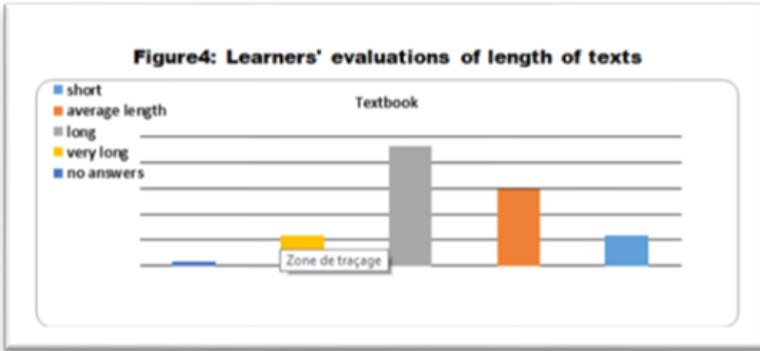
The majority agrees that the texts are long (46.15%). Some believe that they are average in length (29.66%), or very long (11.68%), or short (11.53%). In other words, the texts are variably evaluated by the learners in matter of length. The general tendency is that the majority of learners (87.49%) fares the texts as longer than expected.

g) How difficult are the texts?

Easy: 31.96% Difficult: 58.35% Very difficult: 8.85%   No answers: 0.81%

More than half of the secondary school learners who answered the questionnaires feel that the English texts are difficult (58.35%). Those who find the text easy represent 31.96% of the informants, whereas those who think that the texts are 'very difficult' do not exceed 09% of the whole pupils. Figure4 summarises the findings:

Figure5: Evaluating English Texts
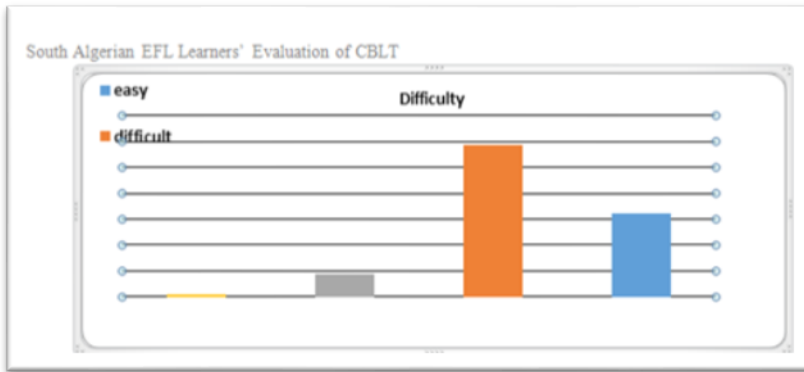
h) Do you understand the instructions and do the tasks without any help?

<div align="center">Yes: 48.79%   No: 51.21%</div>

Once again, the answers show that the learners do not agree on one same tendency. Most of them admit not understanding the instructions proposed in the texts and state that they are not able to do their tasks without any help. Others, on the other hand, have a reverse standpoint. They affirm that they do understand the texts, and that they do the tasks alone at home. The scores make it plain that the learners do not answer objectively the questions of the questionnaires, since they always have opposite tendencies and attitudes.

i) Do you find the texts interesting?   Yes: 68.18%   No: 31.82%

Many secondary school learners who participated to the research believe that the coursebook texts are interesting (68.18%). On the other side, an important number of pupils evaluates the texts negatively (31.82%). These percentages contradict those of questions 6 and 7, whereby the pupils find the texts long (46.15%) and difficult (58.35%), and confirm that their answers are not objective.

j) Does the teacher adapt the texts for you? Yes: 58.6%   No: 41.4 %

Concerning this question, the learners have two reverse positions. More than half of them (58.6%) state that the teachers adapt the texts; others (41.4%) admit the opposite. This shows that the scores obtained through the questionnaire are unbalanced and that answers of the learners are subjective.

5. Interpreting the results

CBA, CBE and CBLT are built upon the principle that the learners are not passive receivers but active participants to the teaching-learning process. Reading for the lectures through the internet is one way of participating to the lectures. Nowadays, the World Wide Web enables the students to actively take part in the learning process.

In general, the results obtained through the questionnaires show that most learners admit having computers at home; a fact which facilitates homework, preparing the lectures, and doing personal projects. Internet at school is not available in all secondary schools; this fact represents a significant hindrance to the learners particularly for those who do not have computers at home. In other words, the principle whereby the output rather than the input to learning is the main focus of CBA (Richards and Rogers, 2001:141) is not respected by the educational institutions which do not provide the learners with an important communication and information tool, i.e. the internet.

The learners have different attitudes towards the English texts of the course book. The majority assumes that the texts are long and difficult, yet, interesting. These results must be taken into consideration by the course book designers for future improvements of the English texts. One way is to shorten and simplify the latter; the other is to diversify the themes so that they fit the socio-cultural contexts of the learners.

As a last word, the learners' answers are not objective as evidenced by the scores and percentages which contradict each other. Yet, the latter allow researchers to have a clearer picture about the pupils' reactions and to assess their behaviour towards the new system of teaching-learning under CBLT. The learners do not 'like' to do extra efforts and take part in the process of teaching-learning and knowledge building at school. They still prefer the traditional ways of learning, whereby the teachers are the all-knowing sole providers of knowledge; this is supported by their answer to the question number 8, 'Do you understand the instructions and do the tasks without any help?' 48.79% of the learners admit that they do understand the instructions and do their tasks alone, while 51.21% state the reverse.

Those opposing views prove that the learners do not have one same stand, and that they are still torn in between the new and the old

methods of teaching English. On the other side, the fact that the teachers adapt the texts to their pupils shows that they do not respect the CBLT's principle whereby the teacher is a guide in the classroom and is part of the audience rather than an intervener in the lecture.

Conclusion

The learners' answers and percentages make it clear that the reality of EFL teaching in Algeria is far from looking like the one proposed by CBA and CBLT. Most learners have negative attitudes towards the teaching procedures, the coursebook and mostly toward CBA itself. The latter fact is not only a huge handicap, but is also a significant hindrance to EFL in Algeria. It diminishes the learners' intake and output. The above mentioned interpretations of the learners' attitudes and judgments about CBLT make it clear that a re-evaluation of the whole system and syllabus is indispensable.

References

Benadla, L. (2013). The competency based language teaching in the Algerian middle school: from EFL acquisition planning to its practical teaching/learning. Arab World English Journal 4(1):158-165.

Boudersa, N. (2013). Promoting literacy and writing proficiency through a reading-based method. AWEJ 4(2):283-297.

Bouhadiba, F. (2006), The CBLT in Algeria: facts and findings. Revue Maghrébine des Langues 4:165-182.

Bouhadiba, F. (2015), Implementation of the CBLT in Algeria: from Euphoria to Bitter Criticism. AWEJ, August 2015. Bejaia International Conference Proceedings, pp: 3-16.

Chelli, S. (2013). Developing writing abilities by the use of self-assessment through portfolios. AWEJ 4 (2): 220-234.

Dornyei, Z. (2001). Motivational strategies: Creating and maintaining student motivation in the foreign language classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hamadouche, M. (2013). Intercultural studies in the Arab world from a contrastive rhetoric perspective. AWEJ Special Issue on Translation 2:181-188.

Messerhi, M. (2014). The teaching of English culture in Algerian secondary schools: the case of second year classes. AWEJ 5(1):167-179.

Ministry of Education, (2003). Guide for the National Program of English as a Second Foreign Language for 1st Year Middle School Teachers.

Paige, R. M., Jorstad, H., Paulson, L., Klein, F., & Colby, J. (1999). Culture learning in language education: A review of the literature. In R. M. Paige, D. Lange, & Y. Yershova (Eds.), Culture as the core: Integrating culture into the language curriculum (CARLA Working Paper Series, 15, pp. 47-114). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

Richards, J.C. and Rodgers, T.S. (2001). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching, 2nd Edition. Cambridge: CUP.

Sarnou, H.2015. Teacher''s Role and the Students' Autonomy under the LMD and the Integration of ICT. AWEJ Bejaia International Conference Proceedings. Pp:78-83.

Sarnou, H., Koç, S., Houcine, S., and Bouhadiba, F. (2012). LMD new system in the Algerian university. AWEJ 3(4):179-194.

Soulimane-Benhabib, N.Y. (2015). Factors demotivating ESP classrooms at the preparatory school of sciences and techniques, Tlemcen, Algeria. AWEJ 6(1):113-122.

Spolsky, B. (1989). Conditions for Second Learning: Introduction to a General Theory. Oxford: OUP.

Torki, (2013) Algerian university English language teaching materials: How readable are they? AWEJ 4(4):04-16.