

Attitudes of EFL Teachers toward the Competency Based Language Teaching: The Case of South Algerian Secondary Schools in Adrar

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Abstract

After more than seventeen years of implementation (2003) in the Algerian educational system, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers react unexpectedly to the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT). They show resistance and resilience to change via variable attitudes towards CBLT. The paper reports the results of a field investigation carried out in eight secondary schools in Adrar, cultural and administrative capital of the southwest of Algeria. It assesses south Algerian EFL teachers' attitudes towards CBLT through a questionnaire administered to twenty educators. The most striking answers are the teachers' negative attitudes and diverging opinions toward its "top-down" implementation. The findings highlight a major issue to the Ministry of Education, the syllabus designers and the teachers at the micro-level, for they impact negatively on the spread and success of CBLT. The paper invites for debates about curricula and pedagogy in Algeria.

Keywords: Adrar, Algeria, secondary schools, Competency-Based Language Teaching, English as a Foreign Language

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Introduction

The Competency-Based Approach (CBA) was introduced for the first time in American schools in the 1960s. The theory was based on cognitive, socio-educational, and socio-constructivist principles to enable learners produce correct spoken and written language through meaningful sentences. Other objectives were teaching the learners the so-called 'know-how-to-do', 'know-how-to-act', and 'know-how-to-be' standards; in a few words, how to behave competently in front of any tasks, situations, and contexts. Those meta-linguistic activities were supposed to train the learners to be skilled people able to confront and deal with the real world.

In September 2003, the Algerian Ministry of Education adopts CBA for the teaching of Mathematics, Physics, and Arabic. On page 4, the *Program of English as a Second Foreign Language: First Year Middle School Teachers' Guide* (2003) defines the new approach in the following terms: "... a know how to act process which interacts and mobilizes a set of capacities, skills and an amount of knowledge that will be used effectively in various problem-situations or in circumstances that have never occurred before." (as cited in Benadla, 2013, p:146)

Nowadays, local and national academies of education see that CBA is the most suitable teaching method for preparing the learners to meet and understand a foreign culture, or an unfamiliar person. Hence, Rezig (2011) links motivation to social context when she admits that: "some students who develop a negative attitude to the foreign language culture have learning differences because of the striking cultural differences between the Algerian and the English societies." (p:1330)ⁱ

Within CBA, the learners develop their own cognitive and socio-constructive skills by knowing more about the various and different cultures and civilizations of the world, mainly the European. Its ultimate aim is improving the skills and knowledge acquired by the learners not only at school but also in everyday life. Thus, CBA is not a learning-teaching strategy based on the learners' mnemonic abilities; instead, it reinforces their intellectual capacities (Richards & Rogers, 2001).ⁱⁱ

The current paper reports on the results of a field research which ultimate aim is to direct scholarly attention to EFL teachers' experience after implementing CBLT into the Algerian educational institutions and, most particularly, to foreign language teaching programs. The main questions are: (1) How do south Algerian EFL teachers behave towards the new pedagogy? (2) What are the main hindrances to such an implementation? And (3) Is CBLT successful in Algeria? The findings provide first-hand explanations and accounts of south Algerian EFL teachers' practices in teaching English within the new approach.

Literature Review

Implementing CBA/CBLT to Algerian schools

The governmental decision regarding the application of CBA and CBLT to the whole Algerian educational system sought the promotion of new methods of teaching the sciences, Mathematics and Physics, and foreign languages, i.e., English and French. From September 2003 onwards, CBLT was introduced into Algerian middle and secondary schools through a "top-down" decision,

that is to say, from the macro-level (Ministry of Education) to the meso- (academies of education) and micro-level (the teachers and school directors). The approach focussed on the learner rather than on the teacher, i.e., it was learner-oriented. Yet, one of its main drawbacks was the teachers' and learners' entry and exit profiles, which were not taken into consideration while importing it from the US (Bouhadiba, 2006). The teachers, for instance, did not receive any training with the new techniques of language teaching. The fact that they were not prepared to use the novel method caused undesirable results at the pedagogical level. More than that, the educators opposed strong defiance towards the modern techniques and resorted to carrying on with the traditional methods of language teaching based on the blackboard and the textbook. Additionally, under CBA and CBLT, the pupils have become learners looking for grades rather than knowledge.

The implementation of CBA and CBLT induced changes in attitudes, behaviors, and roles of both teachers and learners. On the other hand, the pupils got demoralized because the new methods necessitated their full involvement in the teaching-learning process (Bouhania, 2019). Hence, their interest in language learning was either instrumental, i.e., getting diplomas to fetch for jobs, or vocational, learning English or French for chatting and exchanging ideas with foreigners, or for traveling and tourism (Bouhadiba, 2006; Sarnou, Koç, Houcine & Bouhadiba, 2012). Within CBLT, the English language lost its communicative nature, and the learners got concerned with classroom activities, only (Benadla, 2013).

Seventeen years after its introduction to Algerian educational agencies, CBLT is still debatable, particularly between the Ministry of Education, local academies of national education, school administrations, education inspectors, teachers, and finally, the pupils and their parents. The next lines focus on the main actors of CBLT in Algeria, the teachers, with particular considerations to their attitudes towards the various "top-down" processes within the CBA/CBLT paradigm.

CBLT Teachers and Learners

The teachers and the learners are the main characters of CBA/CBLT. The teachers execute their new duties as part of the latest teaching strategies, while the learners have to play other parts and perform different learning strategies. The roles of the teachers change from evaluating and monitoring to autonomous instruction. Their tasks consist in helping the learners be responsible, participate to the learning process, and share in knowledge building through discovery activities and learning schemes. Therefore, the teachers, have become the guides, the counselors, and the facilitators. They take part into debates with students to facilitate their passage from passive consumers to active producers of knowledge (Bouhadiba, 2015).

One of the main goals of CBA is teaching the learners how to put into practice their acquired knowledge in realistic circumstances. More than being creative, CBA learners must have critical thinking and the capacity to deal with concrete and real-life issues in real-world circumstances. The learners challenge themselves and cooperate with their classmates. They also take part in classroom activities by proposing elaborations.

EFL in Algeria

In Algeria, various academic papers dealt with the English language teaching and learning issues at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Some tackled the subject of motivation in class and what were the main demotivating factors that hindered the process. (Soulimane-Benhabib, 2015).ⁱⁱⁱ The conclusions were twofold; first, the teacher's personality, and the learners' negative attitudes towards both the foreign language and the community where it is used were hindering rather than encouraging the learning process. And second, the teaching materials, such as the course book and the blackboard, were judged quite irrelevant.

Other researchers were concerned with the reading skill (Chelli, 2013; Torki, 2013). Their concern was about the reasons that foster or inhibit fluency in that productive skill. Another concern was the learning material and the role it played in the teaching-learning process from the perspectives of both secondary school and university teachers and learners (Torki, 2013; Ladaci, 2017). According to Torki (2013), the teachers complain about the learners' low level at the reading and writing levels; on the other hand, schoolchildren, as well as university students (Ladaci, 2017) criticize the teaching materials that they deem unsuitable for the learning process. Ladaci (2017) considers the use of technology in the classroom as a must rather than an option. For her, the use of ICT in the 21st century means not relying on traditional or instructional methods of language teaching. Kondos (2018), on her part, affirms that the use of the "new technology" such as computers, laptops, digital workbooks and digital boards differ substantially from the "old technology" such as blackboards, whiteboards and textbooks. As an example, the computer in class enables learners to "acquire an inquiring, critical and creative mind to capitalize on the opportunities driven by the growth of information, knowledge and technology" (p:220). She further declares that technology has become part of the foreign language teachers' skill, particularly for those teaching EFL.

For Boudersa (2013), the reading and writing skills are part and parcel of the literacy paradigm; yet, they are not determinant aspects for the boosting of the learners' levels of literacy. She explained that: "The reason behind this is that this tendency which concentrates on reading and writing reflects a limited view of literacy as a dynamic concept that encompasses several social and cultural aspects in reading and writing practices" (p:284).

According to Hamadouche (2013) there is a clear impact of the English language and its culture on Algerian EFL learners. This effect is noticeable in the attitudes of the learners vis-à-vis both the language and its native users. Hamadouche (2013) emphasises the fact that the young Algerian EFL learners make errors simply because they do not know the English sociolinguistic conventions for language use (Paige, Jorstad, Paulson, Klein & Colby, 1999), and also because they are far from the right sociocultural context. In other words, EFL learners in Algerian schools do not put into practice the language they learn. Hence, there is no way they can know how to perform it in real-life situations.

To verify whether the implementation of CBLT in Algeria was successful or not, the present study analyses results obtained out of a field-research carried out at some secondary schools in the administrative department of Adrar. The EFL

teachers involved in the research belong to either the new system, i.e., CBLT, or to the old system of language teaching.

Methodology

The current research elicited data from twenty south Algerian EFL teachers chosen at random from eight different secondary schools. The questionnaires used were anonymous so as to reduce social desirability on the part of the respondents (Paulhus, 1984). And to avoid any misunderstandings on the part of the school administrators, the questions asked were of a Yes/No type, i.e., closed answers.

Research Setting

The eight secondary schools split into two categories, those located in Adrar-centre (n=6) and those situated in Reggane (n=2), at about one hundred and fifteen kilometers south of Adrar-centre. Among the twenty teachers who take part in the study, there are twelve females and eight males. They teach either literary or scientific streams. They are aged 32 to 34 years old. Most teachers graduated from universities with BA or MA diplomas; some others have higher education school certificates. Their minimum teaching experience is five years.

Table 1. *Demographic details of the sample of teachers*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Mean of age</i>
<i>Women</i>	12	33.75
<i>Men</i>	08	32.65
<i>Total</i>	20	33.3

Table2. *Geographical location of the secondary schools*

<i>Areas</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Adrar (Tuat)</i>	El-Maghili	06
	Balkin II	
	Khaled Ibn El Walid	
	Tililane	
	Abi Hamid El-Ghazali	
	Hakkoumi Laid	
<i>Reggane (Middle-Tuat)</i>	Regganee Nouveau	02
	Ibn Rochd	
<i>Total</i>		<u>08</u>

Data Analysis

The next lines report the results of thirteen questions answered by twenty teachers:

1. Did you receive any training in CBLT? Yes: 55% No: 45%

Two tendencies emerge: the teachers are either trained in CBLT methods and techniques or not. This divergence reflects different approaches towards EFL teaching. Besides, the teachers' split stand points mean that two different methods of EFL lecturing are in use at the same time, the traditional and the new one. Consequently, the pupils experience two diverse processes of EFL learning-teaching.

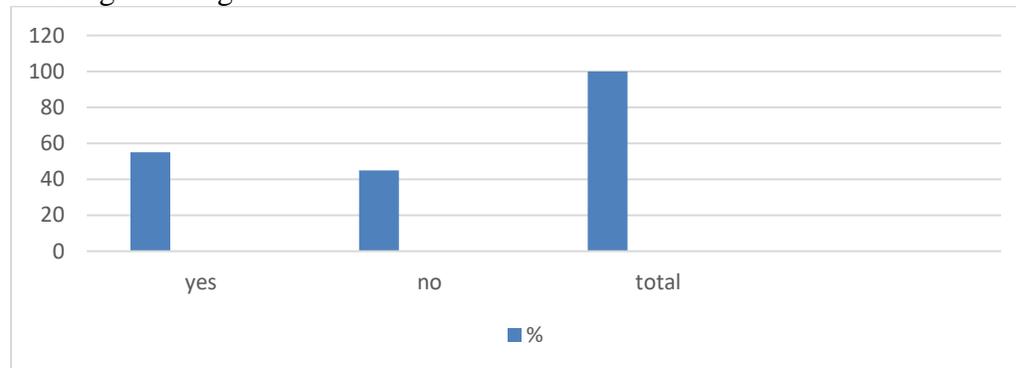


Figure1. Percentage of teachers trained in CBA in the Wilaya of Adrar

2. Do you think that the texts are suitable to the learners' level? Yes: 40%, No: 60%

60% (i.e., 12) of the whole informants, judge the texts provided by the copybooks not suitable to the learners' level. However, eight teachers (40%) admit the reverse. As a consequence, the teachers confront a dilemma, which is the unsuitability of the texts to the literary or scientific educational streams. This situation neither facilitates the teaching process nor does it conform to the learners' ambitions and aspirations.

3. Do you give the learners any homework to do? Yes: 90%, No: 10%

The answers are not ambiguous. The majority agrees to give some assignments to the learners, while two teachers prefer not. Hence, the teachers assign homework to their learners respecting, as such, the old methods of foreign language teaching-learning.

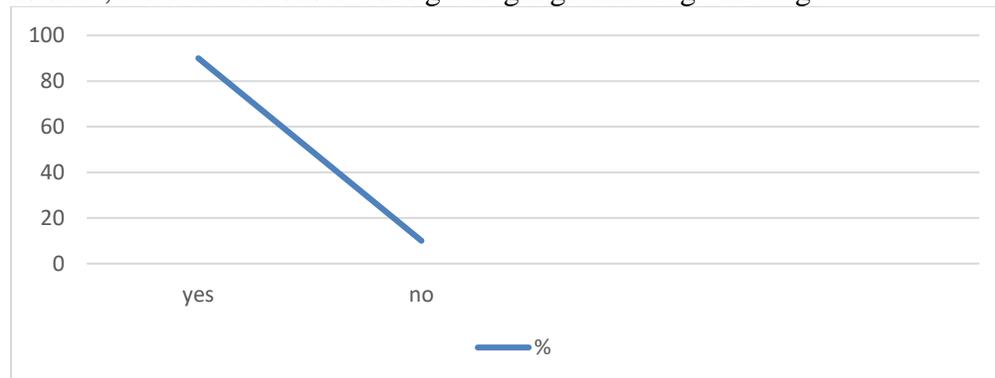


Figure2. Percentage of teachers who give pupils homework

4. Are the copybook's instructions clear? Yes: 45% No: 55%

As far as this question is concerned, the opinions of those who agree and those who disagree are nearly equal. More than half of the informants think that the instructions are not easily understood by the learners. The other half believes that the copybook instructions are clear enough for the pupils. These results demonstrate that the south Algerian secondary school EFL teachers do not agree on the contents and form of the coursebook.

5. Do the tasks and levels of difficulty help learners be independent? Yes: 25% No: 75%

Once again, the teachers answer emphatically. The majority think that tasks and levels of difficulty constitute hindrances to the learners' independence within CBLT. The teachers, then, are aware that the learners need their help to understand the foreign language.

6. Do you think that the listening/reading activities motivate pupils? Yes:55% No: 45%

To this question, the answers diverge. Most informants are in favor of listening and reading activities. Yet, it is also noticeable that the other half of the teachers do not deem listening and reading interesting to the pupils. In other words, the secondary school teachers do not make use of the same techniques to transmit English to their learners, and, by the same token, two of the most fundamental skills of foreign language learning are not utilized.

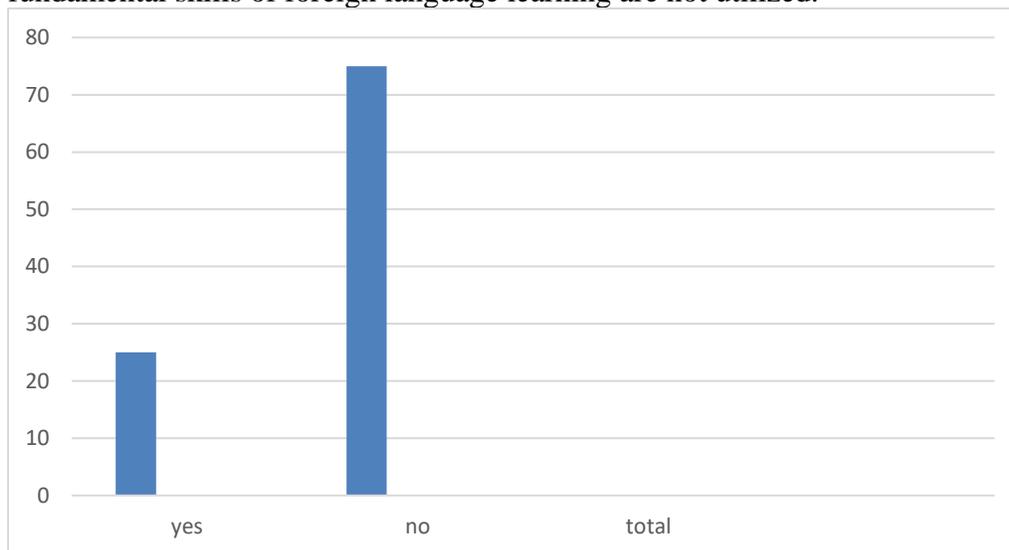


Figure3. Tasks and level of difficulty according to teachers

7. Is time devoted to each unit adequate? Yes: 30% No: 70%

Answers to question number seven are clear-cut. The majority agree that time devoted to each pedagogical unit is not adequate to reach the objectives fixed by the syllabus designers. Only six (30%) teachers think the opposite, and believe that time imparted to each lesson is appropriate to accomplish the aims of the programs. Once again, the teachers do not totally agree on the principles of CBLT. This disagreement may be because some teachers were formed in CBLT and use the new methods and tools, while others were not trained in CBLT and still use the old ways and techniques of EFL teaching.

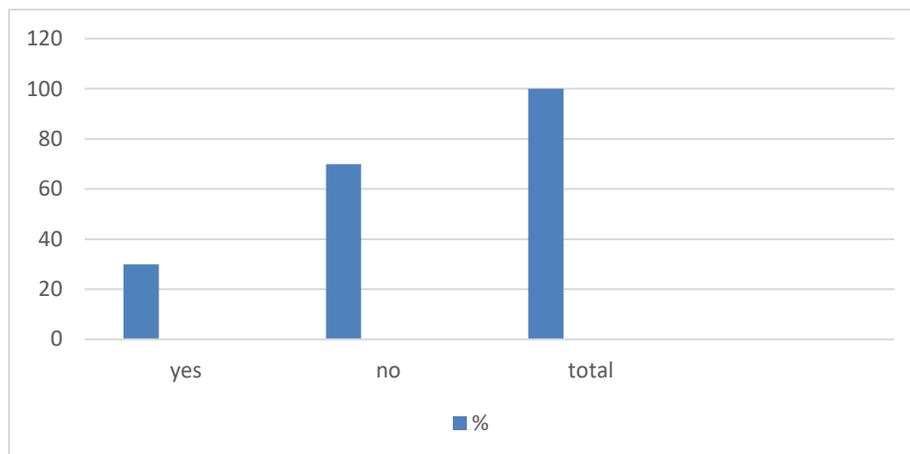


Figure4. Time devoted to each pedagogical unit

8. Do the learners have time to practice at home? Yes: 35% No: 65%

The EFL practitioners agree that the learners do not have enough time to practice at home. Their main argument is that secondary school pupils have too much coursework to do for other matters such as mathematics, science, history and geography, and philosophy. Consequently, they cannot perform all the activities requested by the teachers at the same time.

9. Does time allow for periodic review and remedial work? Yes: 10% No: 90%

The answers are unequivocal; most teachers assert that time is not enough to allow any periodic reviews, tests, or remedial works. That is, most teachers do not do any reviewing of the lectures before testing their pupils for the reason that they lack time. This fact shows that the teachers are under pressure because of the lecturers' time load, which is burdensome to both teachers and learners.

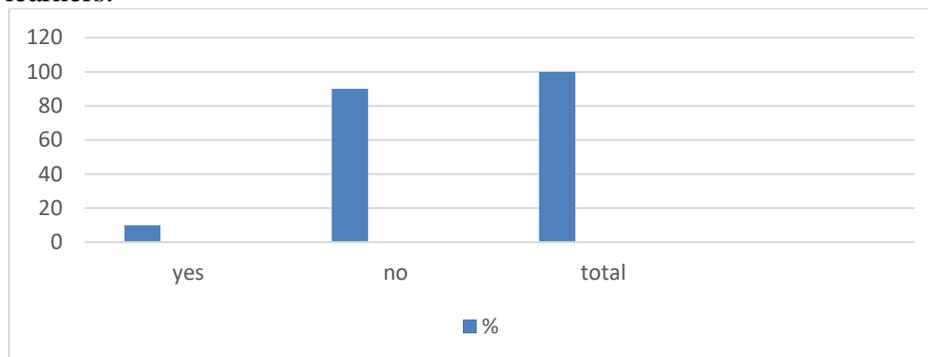


Figure5. Time for periodic review and remedial work

10. Does time devoted to pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar help to develop the learners' progress? Yes: 40% No: 60%

Twelve teachers declare without any doubt that time allocated to teaching pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar to EFL classes is not adequate. As a result, the learners' development and progress are at risk. Conversely, eight (or 40%) teachers affirm that the time allocated to those activities is quite sufficient to enhance the learners' development in learning English. In general, the results prove that the EFL informants do not follow the same pedagogical methods, and do not

profit from the duration of the lectures. They also do not evaluate positively their output or their pupils' intake.

11. Do you use any audio-visual aids to prepare the lessons? Yes: 60% No: 40%

A significant number of teachers admit using audio-visual aids, such as videotape recorders, documentaries, and films, to prepare the lessons. Yet, it is essential to note that eight (i.e.:40%) teachers avoid using any technological tools and still rely on traditional ways to prepare their lessons, such as the copybooks. Consequently, the teachers do not come to the lectures with the same updated information and, accordingly, do not transmit their knowledge with the same methods and techniques.

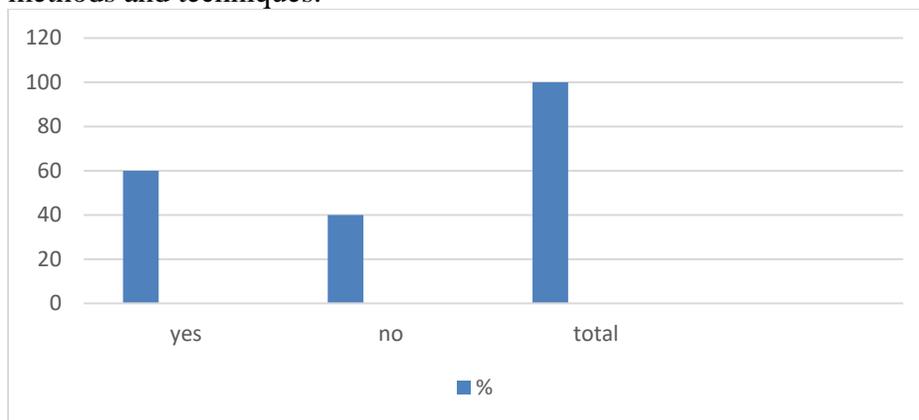


Figure6. Teachers' use of visual aids

12. Do you use ICT techniques? Yes: 50% No: 50%

The answers are equal in percentages. Half of the teachers use ICT, while the other half asserts the contrary. In other words, the teachers try to update their knowledge and information through the new means of technology such as slideshows, televisions, video, and the Internet. The results of this question verify those obtained in the previous one. They prove that the teachers are objective in their answers.

13. Did you have any training in the use of ICT? Yes: 40% No: 60%

The percentages are quite revealing; most teachers did not have any training in ICT. In a few words, these teachers cannot pretend to use modern audio-visual methods such as videoconferences, distance teaching-learning, and online teaching.

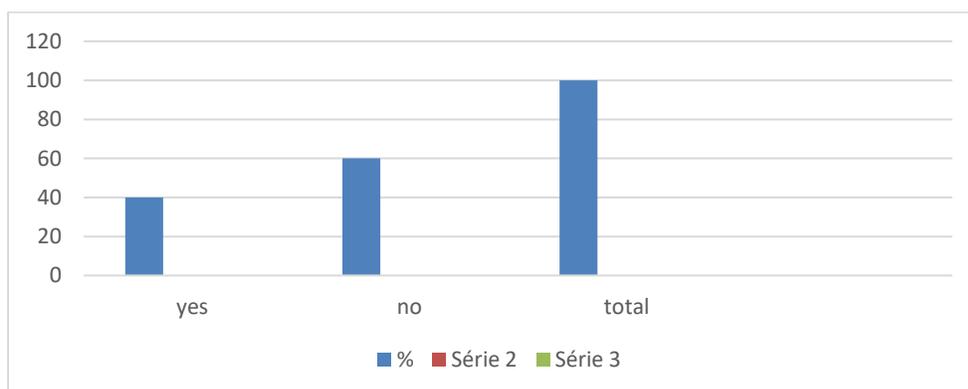


Figure7. Teachers' training in ICT use

Discussion

A rather ambiguous picture emerges out of the findings: there are two trends on the part of south Algerian EFL teachers, those in favour of change and those against it. The present section discusses the results obtained from the questionnaires filled in by the twenty secondary school educators regarding the implementation of CBLT. In other words, the Discussion section splits into two sub-parts; the first tackles the answers highlighting teachers' resistance to change, while the second deals with the teachers' resilience. Bouhadiba (2015) explains this reality when he says:

“Two diverging tendencies emerged right from the beginning (2003) among teachers, pupils, decision makers, the syndicates and parents alike. These were represented by those who accepted the changes in the educational system and pedagogic methodologies and those who were clearly resistant to change” (p:14)

Resistance to Change

Out of thirteen questions asked in the questionnaire, there are eight negative responses which represents 61.5% of the whole. These are questions number 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13.

Questions number two and four pose problems related to the EFL copybooks. These last, according to the teachers, do not facilitate the reading and comprehension process for the learners. The texts, supposedly preparing the learner to *know-how-to-do*, *know-how-to act* and *know-how-to-be* are neither adequate with the learner's levels, nor are they clear in matter of instructions. More than that, the texts do not reflect the learners' socio-cultural environment. These last assertions confirm both Rezig's (2011) and Boumediene & Hamzaoui-Elachachi's (2017) conclusions. For Rezig (2011), the social context plays a significant role in motivating and de-motivating the learning of foreign languages; for Boumediene and Hamzaoui-Elachachi (2017) text comprehension has become an obstruction to EFL students within Algerian secondary schools.

Question number five is a striking criticism to the implementation of CBLT in Algeria and to its expected outcomes. To the question: 'Do the tasks and level of difficulty help learners be independent?', the majority says 'No' (75%). These answers illustrate the reverse image; that is, instead of having a learner who: "...is able to interact in real situations by using transversal competencies on a wider scale." (Bouhadiba, 2003, p:179) the learners are still unable to face real-life situations whether inside or outside the class.

Questions number 7, 8, 9 and 10 concern the factor 'time' within CBLT in the Algerian educational system. The most prominent answers are that time is not respected (70% in Q7), not procedural (65% in Q8), not practical (90% in Q9), and finally not helpful (60% in Q10). These responses are not contrary to the principles of CBLT, for CBLT is not time-based. Rather, it is grounded on the evolution of the learners' achievement of know-how and abilities to realise assignments (Bouhadiba, 2006:173-174). The teachers complain about the CBLT principles, since they base their teaching on the former Algerian time-based educational system.

The last question receives a clear-cut answer, which is that the teachers were not trained to use any ICT technologies. Ladaci (2017) confirms this state of affairs when she attests:

“unfortunately, this technology [ICT] appears to be inefficiently used in many developing countries and Algeria is no exception” (p:161)

Resilience and Change

Resiliency on the part of the twenty south Algerian EFL teachers who took part in the research is apparent in the results obtained from questions number 1, 3, 6 and 11. An example is question number one; the teachers give nearly equal answers. 45% of them admit not receiving any training in CBA and CBLT while the remaining 55% say the contrary. This result illustrates the paradoxical reality found at secondary schools in the south of Algeria. The teaching staff uses two separate methods of EFL teaching, the traditional one, based on the Communicative Competence Approach, and the new one based on CBA/CBLT in the same schools and at the same time. This means that, at the micro level, the teachers do not conform to the instructions of local school authorities, the academies of education, the directors, and the inspectors of education. The teachers do not attend and participate to the seminars organised by the academies; they are satisfied with the ministerial instructions that disseminate the new methods of teaching, their objectives and didactic foci. In a few words, some teachers still prefer the old methods to the new ones.

Question number three illustrates another impediment to the CBLT principles within the Algerian educational system: to succeed in making the learners active participants to the learning process. The south Algerian EFL teachers who participated to the study declare that they give the learners homework, which is a habit inherited from former method of foreign language teaching under the communicative competence approach. CBLT, on the other hand, encourages the learners to develop “tasks to discover new situations” (Bouhadiba, 2006, p:178). In other words, the teachers should not burden the learners with homework, but push them towards using their meta-cognitive abilities to face and solve problem situations.

Concerning motivation through reading and listening activities, the teachers have nearly equal answers: 55% of ‘yes’ and 45% of ‘no’. This result, like that of question number one, shows that the teachers do not agree on the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations of their learners. Extrinsic motivation leads the learner to seek for external rewards, while the intrinsic motivation leads to gain personal satisfaction from the activity itself (Schmidt, Borale & Kassabgy, 1996 as cited in Albodakh and Cinkara, 2017). Hence, the twenty south Algerian EFL teachers do not have sharp decisions as far as motivation is achieved through the passive skills, reading and listening.

The use of audio-visual aids is another example of south Algerian EFL teachers’ resilience. The findings determine that 40% of the respondents admit not using any visual aids while 55% do. It is a well-known fact that dispensing lectures through visual aids elevates the motivation and proficiency (Ladaci 2017) of foreign language learners and CBLT is founded on that principle. However, the last question reveals the gap that characterises south Algerian EFL educators regarding one of the main means of EFL education: technology in the classroom. Brinton (2001) admits that: “media material may lend authenticity to the classroom situation, reinforcing for the students the direct relation between the language classroom and the outside world” (p:461 as cited in Ladaci, 2017, p:163).

Conclusion

The scores obtained out of the analyses of the teachers' questionnaires make it clear that the reality of EFL teaching in Algeria is far from that pictured by CBLT. Most teachers have negative attitudes towards the teaching procedures, the coursebook, and most certainly towards CBLT itself. Many south Algerian EFL teachers do not agree with the new method, neither do they agree on its actual implementation.

Not receiving any training in CBA handicaps, hinders, and diminishes the teachers' output and that of the learners. No training in the use of ICT means also no progress in FL teaching-learning.

Moreover, the teachers see that CBLT and its methods are not helpful for the learners. The secondary school teachers affirm that the new approach does not allow the learners to do their homework in due time, nor does it enable them to practice more at home. After all the interpretations mentioned above for both teachers and learners within the CBLT paradigm, it becomes clear that a re-evaluation of the whole system and syllabus is necessary.

Notes:

ⁱ Messerhi (2014) declares that Algerian EFL secondary school textbooks do not provide enough opportunities to discuss culture-related topics. Subsequently, she says: "students have few, and in some cases, have no opportunities to learn about culture-related activities especially discussions on cultural differences and similarities concerning social habits, values, use of idioms and slang, non-verbal communication, and the importance of appropriate choices for conversations in English." (p:167)

ⁱⁱ For Richards and Rodgers (2001), CBA bases its principles on: "what the learners are expected to do rather than on what they are expected to learn about." (p: 15)

ⁱⁱⁱ Dornyei (2001) asserts that: "A de-motivated learner is someone who was once motivated but has lost his/her commitment for some reason" (p:142)

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