The Competency-Based Approach & the LMD System

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Abstract

The adoption of the LMD system in higher education in Algeria has become a necessity in order to go along with rapid changes in all spheres of life. The development of education was influenced by such features as globalization, the formation of a unified space and competitiveness in the labour market. But in spite of the change from the traditional system to the LMD system, there is no real change at the university level. However, in the previous levels –middle and secondary education- a recent approach has been implemeted together with the change of syllabuses and course books. The question which should be raised is that normally this should have a continuation or at least we should try to adopt an approach that suits the change towards the LMD system. This contribution first gives an overview of the theoretical aspects of competency-based approach and the background to the LMD and then goes on to consider the suitability of such as approach with LMD purposes. But before doing that, the terms competence and competency will be defined briefly. It is also intended to stimulate discussion &bout the need of a change in teaching in accordance with new demands of life including job requirements in order to foster learner's autonomy, and thus, to form a graduate responsible and capable of facing rapid changes in the era of globalization.

1. Competence versus Competency

Over the last two decades, discourse around education and training has shifted towards the use a pseudo-commercial language of markets, investment and products. The interest in competence and competency has been part of this move. These two terms remain difficult to define in a satisfactory way and are often used interchangeably. The former is the quality of being adequately or well-qualified physically and intellectually, or the ability to do something well measured against a standard, especially the ability acquired through experience or training. De Se Co (2002; cited in Lobanova and Shunin, 2008: 47*)* defines competence as "a system of internal and external mental structures and

abilities assuming mobilization of knowledge, cognitive skills and also social behavioural components such as attitudes, emotions for successful realization of activity in a particular context". In this respect, competence can be understood as a dynamic, organizing the structure of activity characteristic allowing a person to adapt to various situations on the basis of gained experience and practice.

Another definition has been provided about teaching English in Algeria which considers 'competency' as "a system of conceptual and procedural parts of knowledge organized into schemes that help identify a problem task and its solution through an efficient action within a set of situations" (Ameziane, 2005:12). A competency is a "know -how to act process which integrates and mobilizes a set of capacities, skills and an amount of knowledge that will be used effectively in various problem-solving situations in circumstances that have never occurred before"(*ibid.).* In other words, 'a competency' may be simply defined as the ability of a student or worker to accomplish tasks adequately, to find solutions and to realize them in real life situations. Besides, competencies are the various skills learners have to be taught; this may lead them to acquire the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an interactional way to be able to use them later on either in their jobs or in the demanding daily life. For more precision, an analysis of the term 'competence' and 'competency' has been illustrated in the form of a ladder (fig 1.1.) or an ascending scale by Schneckenberg and Wildt (2006 ; cited in Lobanova and Shunin, 2008: 12) .

According to them, the process of competency achievement is complex because it requires the development of necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to carry out successfully specific or superior tasks. This process begins with the perception of information which accommodates and adapts in mental structures and leads to the second step; i.e. to knowledge. If this knowledge is applied adequately in a certain context, it may enable the learner to do a certain task provided he is motivated enough and has a positive attitude towards it. This can lead to competence if the task is adequate to the required level. But on the way to competency achievement, the learner may become proficient in doing that task through much experience in order to reach a superior level of performance. All of this requires from him much effort and involvement. As we have already emphasized, 'competence' is a dynamic, objective characteristic which is strongly rooted in experience and situational practice. Through activities in various situations, a person constructs competency. We conclude that competency as a realization of a need for self-development and self-actualization is a basic component of a social mature person. The meaning of the term 'competency' becomes clearer than before and confirms the definition relating it with superior performance or ability relating it to excellence in a specific activity. The concept 'competency' can be used in different fields, but while dealing with language learning, it is communicative language competence which is dominant in communicative language teaching and which includes a set of competencies to develop to make learners proficient.

2.Theoretical Aspect of the Competency-Based Approach

After having defined such concepts, 'the Competency-Based Approach' will be examined to understand its theoretical principles. There are different models of curriculum development, some focusing on knowledge transmission and assessment of such knowledge and others more on skills and personal development. The CBA is a very recent approach which focuses on outcomes of learning. Rodgers *et.al* (1995) argue that "the broader general outcomes associated with education can be described in competency terms, measured and effected through learning experiences". It addresses what the learners are expected to do rather than on what they are expected to learn about (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 141). It consists of teachers basing their instructions on concepts expecting to foster deeper and broader understanding.

The CBA has become a privileged topic in curriculum discourse as it claims that learners should mobilize their values, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours in a personal and independent way to address challenges successfully. Challenges are present everywhere, and they can be academic, but also practical and life- oriented. The CBA in education and learning requires a focus not only on input but also on outcomes or results. Such results, however, do not pertain only to academic knowledge, as in traditional testing where rote memorization of pre-fabricated knowledge is required. Competencies are not just skills as opposed to knowledge, but represent a complex articulation of knowledge, attitudes and skills that learners can use whenever they are needed not just in examination. The CBA curricula fostering learner-friendly teaching and learning strategies could engender a shift from sheer memorization to the development of higher order intellectual skills and life skills, including communication, social, emotional and other relevant skills. Competency-Based Education (CBE) focuses on outcomes 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" (*ibid.*).

CBE is a functional approach to education that emphasizes life skills and evaluates mastery of those skills according to actual learner performance. It was defined by the U.S. Office of Education as a performance-based process leading to a demonstrated mastery of basic life skills necessary for the individual to function proficiently in society (Savage, 1993: 15). We can simply say that the CBA is an outcome-based instruction which is adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and the community. Competencies describe the ability to apply basic and other skills in situations that are commonly encountered in everyday life. Thus, CBE is based on a set of outcomes that are derived from an analysis of tasks typically required of students in life situations.

3. The LMD System

3.1 Background

LMD system is the name given in France to the harmonization of academic degrees throughout the European union. It stands for ' Licence ' equivalent of bachelor's degree', Master and Doctorate' The countries of the European Union have decided to harmonize their training courses for higher education and to adopt a system of common diplomas based on LMD**.**

3.2. AIMS of the LMD

The aims of the LMD are as follows:

- To allow diplomas to be compared and become equivalent at European level.

- To develop the professionalization of higher education while preserving the general interest of teaching.

- To strengthen the learning of transverse skills such as fluency in foreign modern languages and computer skills.

3.3. Points of Interest

The interests of the LMD are:

- Encouraging students' mobility.

- Encouraging the students' access to the world of work.

- Allowing students to build up a personalized education plan gradually.

3.4. The Rationale behind Adopting the Competency-Based approach in the LMD

System

At the present time the concept of a learner's competency acquires importance. It is defined by many factors because in the opinion of many international experts it is the very indicator, which makes it possible to determine readiness of a learner and a graduate for his/her further personal development and active participation in the social life. Being oriented to the modern labour market, education considers that one of the priorities at present is the

ability to operate such technologies and knowledge, which meet the requirements of informational society and prepare young people to play a new part in society.

In the last two decades developed countries such as Great Britain, Canada, Germany, France and New Zealand started discussion on how to equip a person with necessary knowledge, skills, competency in order to ensure his/her harmonious interaction with a quickly developing technological society. Educational experience in many countries shows that one way of updating the content of education is the orientation of the training programmes towards the competency-based approach. Scientists in European countries consider that knowledge, skills, working habits acquired by young people if transformed into competencies would enable intellectual development of an individual and the formation of the ability to quickly respond to the demands of the time.

The world which is being formed due to a collision of new values and technologies, new geopolitical relations, new life styles and communication requires brand new ideas and analogies , classification and frameworks. This concept reflects the modern paradigm of public life and is a basis for the re-formation of educational goals in both the developed and developing countries. It is why education at present is subject to great changes taking place in modern society. In this respect, first, students need to be able to use a wide range of tools for interacting effectively with the environment: both physical ones such as information technology, and socio-cultural ones such as the use of language. Second, 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, it is important that they are able to interact effectively.Third , students need to be able to take responsibility for managing their own lives, situate their lives in much broader social contexts and act autonomously.

Where there has been significant interest in innovative educational development towards education for change, much of formal education remains traditional. Traditional educational approaches are generally teacher-centred. Developing a learner-centred 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 views. Redefining education with learner focus requires commitment to innovate and find an alternative approach.As mentioned previously, 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 independent learning skills, critical thinking, self-direction in learning.

Hyde and other commentators tell us that learning in all subjects areas involves inventing and constructing new ideas. They suggest that the constructivist theory be incorporated into curriculum and advocate that teachers create environments in which learners construct their own knowledge. A constructivist approach is recommended to be used to create learners who are autonomous, inquisitive thinkers who question, investigate and reason.. In addition to that it encourages creativity, originality and high order competencies. This kind of learning is characterized by the capacity for autonomous learning and motivation towards learning. This leads us to say that these are the real objectives of the reform in high education to attain the goals set. In other words, if we want a real reform in high education, this should not involve just a change in some programmes, but the use of an approach that suits the system adopted. CBA can be considered as one way of doing that as its principles and the purposes of the LMD system are similar in the sense that the development of competencies will lead students to be capable to compete in the world of work and in the changing life.

Conclusion

Educational reforms in many parts of the world is expressed in terms of competencies to develop in learners whether in high education or other levels. As defined previously competencies are attained after various activities to reach excellence in doing specific skills enabling young people to adapt to the changing world. One of the approaches seen appropriate to the educational content is competency-based approach - an outcome based approach- which focuses on measurable and useable skills and abilities. It claims that learners should mobilize their values, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in a personal way to address the challenges successfully.

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