

## The Competency-Based Approach in the Higher Education Realm: A Myth or a Reality? (The Case of Master-One Students Specializing in Literature and Civilization at the University of Oran 2)

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### Abstract:

This paper seeks to determine whether the competency-based approach (CBA) is employed in the Algerian higher education institutions, particularly in the literature class, by answering the question: to what extent is the CBA used at the university level?

The stakeholders involved in this endeavor are twenty EFL master-one students-specializing in literature and civilization, at the University of Oran2 and four literature teachers affiliating themselves with the same university. Two different sorts of questionnaires were designed for this investigation-the first is for students, while the second is for teachers.

The questionnaires are centred around five major themes-teacher-student relationship, teachers' and students' roles, teachers' expectations, students' involvement, and assessment-that are thought to be determinants of the CBA's presence in the higher-education literature class. The results show that the competency-based approach is far from being completely implemented.

**Key words:** the competency-based approach; higher education; literature; master-one students; investigation

Maalim

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## Introduction

Recently, the competency-based approach (CBA) has been proven effective in many educational settings around the world, and the Algerian schools are no exception (Benzerroug, 2019; Chelli, 2010; Kim, 2015). However, despite its outreach as concerns schools in Algeria—in that the school curriculum of the three school levels (primary, middle, and secondary education) is based on this approach—it is far from being implemented in higher education, if not non-existent. Moreover, the Algerian higher education system is, to a greater extent, still relying on traditional methods of teaching, which are basically teacher-centered (Belal & Ouahmiche, 2021; Kheladi, 2013).

Teacher-centered education excludes the learner from participating in the process of knowledge construction. Rather than negotiating learning and being actively involved in the learning situation, the learner becomes an automaton whose function is limited to only receiving the teacher's input (Freire, 2005). This knowledge transmission process is what constitutes the core of the teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning (Asiri, 2019). Besides the fact that a great deal of attention is focused on the teacher as a source of all knowledge and wisdom, all kinds of decision-making matters depend on the teacher only (Garrett, 2008). Depriving learners of taking part in the learning process and spoon-feeding them instead with ready-made knowledge is what constitutes an oppressive pedagogy (Freire, 2005). Teacher-centered education is all but liberating. It caters neither to the learners' needs nor to their autonomy. The learner's needs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills that she/he brings to the classroom should be at the heart of any non-oppressive pedagogical approach.

Efforts to involve the student in the learning process, making her/him the active agent who constructs knowledge by her- or himself—otherwise with the help of a competent individual, usually a classmate—have shifted the emphasis from the teacher to the learner. What is now called a student-centered approach (SCA) to learning is in fact the complete opposite of the traditional teacher-centered approach, in terms of the learning goals, the teachers' and students' roles, classroom management, the types of activities, methods, and techniques of instruction, methods of assessment, among others (Mascolo, 2009).

Taking its essence from the SCA, the CBA has emerged as a response to the traditional methods of teaching, which are basically teacher-fronted. Unlike the teacher-centered

instruction-which marginalizes the learner-and the student-centered model-which overemphasizes the student-the CBA acts as a mid-way approach that focuses on the student without overlooking the teacher's assistance and support in the learning process. Furthermore, what makes the CBA different from its predecessors is the learning objectives it sets in order to achieve its ultimate goal-that of developing students' competencies (Açikgöz & Babadogan, 2021).

Defining and elaborating a list of competencies and helping the learner to achieve them are at the heart of the competency-based approach. Time should not interfere with this process, for what is crucial is not merely receiving knowledge, but rather demonstrating mastery of that knowledge. Having the learner show excellence in and/or mastery over a particular competency is key to the successful working of the CBA (Djalal, 2022).

The Algerian higher education, in particular, is still, to some extent, dominated by teacher-led instruction (Belal & Ouahmiche, 2021; Kheladi, 2013). As this paper demonstrates, the CBA is, up until now, not fully implemented. Master classes, which are supposed to be manageable, fail to apply this approach, as the present research paper shows. Many reasons could be attributed to this failure-one of these is the lack of awareness on the part of some teachers as concerns the competency-based approach.

This case study, conducted at the University of Oran<sup>2</sup>, involves twenty master one students specializing in literature and civilization and four of their literature teachers. It seeks to determine whether the competency-based approach is used in higher education.

## **1. Literature Review**

### ***1.1. The Competency-based Approach***

The competency-based approach first appeared by the end of the 1960s in the United States (Aïder, 2012; Bernikova, 2017; Chitour, 2015; Rahman et al., 2014; Wong, 2008) as a result of a call to revise the curriculum and improve teacher training (Rahman et al., 2014). In the United Kingdom, educationalists started to take notice of the CBA due to the rise in unemployment, young people's unreadiness for work, and poor training (Rahman et al., 2014). Historically speaking, the CBA emerged as a response to the USSR (*Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*) advancement in technology (space technology) (Chitour, 2015).

The Americans were then forced to reconsider their educational system. In fact, they sought to create programs/courses that have the learners act in accordance with a set of necessary criteria so as to integrate into a particular domain. Furthermore, in order to put an end to the alarming rate of secondary school dropouts, the Americans came up with what is called *Vocational Education Act* of 1963, which allows not only funding but also integrating the continuous training with the professional one (Chitour, 2015, p.35).

In actual fact, this movement aimed at ameliorating the programs offer so as to respond to the needs of the labor market. Its effects would extend to the public school sector, namely the primary and secondary schools, as well as to teacher training. These effects would also involve the specification and evaluation of the training programs, which could only be done by funding and promoting the institutions and programs characterized by the delineation of the competences and behaviors expected to be learned (Chitour, 2015).

Moreover, at the socio-cultural level, two cultural trends paved the way for the emergence of the competency-based approach: personalization and accountability. These were the reactions of a society that saw itself as a victim of the individual's irresponsibility in the very system that undermines the role of the individual in her or his formation career and life choices (Chitour, 2015).

In the 1970s, the quality of education became a major preoccupation in the educational policy of the United States (Aïder, 2012). The educational reform that was taking place back then encouraged other developed nations to deal with that problem (that concerns the quality of education) while being aware of the dangers awaiting their educational system in the short term and the future of their societies in the long term.

All the member countries of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the IEA (International Association for Educational Achievement) made a huge effort to set the benchmark indicators in educational policies in order to set forth some recommendations that would improve the quality of training (Aïder, 2012). Henceforth, the link between economic imperatives and education would become stronger than ever, and

competencies had to be in line with the expectations and needs of the labor market (Aïder, 2012).

At the international level, the many different approaches that made use of the competency-based approach in curricula studies had been subject to limited evaluations (Toualbi & Tawil, 2006). That is why some believed that the CBA sets out to regroup, in terms of disciplinary competences, some specific objectives-stemming from the outcome-based pedagogy-which already preserved the forms and aspects of the targeted learning objectives.

For others, the competency-based approach was synonymous with the development of life competences, which are geared toward the development of the individuals' attitudes towards the respect of the environment and the preservation of one's and others' health. Still, others thought that the CBA consists of making learning more concrete and operational-directed towards integration in society. Finally, there was another faction that believed that adapting the CBA is synonymous with making learning more active.

In this view, the emphasis is placed particularly on the development of learning situations that would substitute lectures, which are generally centered on the teacher. Thus, it is a matter of placing the learner at the center of learning instead of entrusting that position to the teacher (Toualbi & Tawil, 2006). The CBA then emerged as a consequence of a need for a new notion that denotes learning that is centered on experience and/or experiment rather than mere know-how (Aithaddouchane et al., 2017).

The competency-based approach went through stages in its early days. Back then, it was more or less like a *'to-do list'*, and the aim was to transmit 'knowledge' to students who would then memorize it (Bernikova, 2017, p.316). This conception has changed, for at the present moment, what is crucial is not learning per se, but rather how to learn, i.e., how to find information, how to treat it, and how to put it into use (Bernikova, 2017).

The reason why there are different views regarding the competency-based approach is the fact that the distinction between the terms "competence" and "competency" is blurred (Makulova et al., 2015, p. 183)-in fact, they both share the same meaning (Kennedy et al.,

2009). A study-conducted by Salman et al. (2020)-which sought to explore the different meanings and usage of the words competence and competency, substantiated the claim that the two terms have the same meaning and can be used interchangeably.

As noted by Salman et al. (2020) and Barman and Konwar (2011), many writers in the literature-the likes of Winterton, McClelland, Thornston, and Le Boterf-used either one of these concepts (competence/competency) in their writing, or the two of them interchangeably.

While competence refers to “the underlying characteristics and attributes of an individual that allow the effective execution of a particular task in a given situation” (as cited in Salman et al., 2020, p. 9), competency, in a similar fashion, pertains to “the underlying characteristics of an individual that is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job” (as cited in Salman et al., 2020, p. 9). Those characteristics, according to Dubois (as cited in Chouhan & Srivastava, 2014, p. 16) are “knowledge, skills, mindsets, thought patterns, and the like-that.” The use of the concept of competence has been generalized in education. If the term has substituted knowledge today, it is mainly to underscore the interdependence between knowledge and its cognitive treatment (Aïder, 2012).

As a matter of fact, it is not knowledge itself that matters but rather its practical use. In this sense, competence is understood as aptitude and know-how indispensable for achieving a targeted goal (Aïder, 2012). Teaching then has to adopt new methods that encourage the individuals’ autonomy-they will think for themselves.

This would, however, involve a shift from teacher-centered methods to those centered on the students. The teacher no longer provides knowledge to be memorized but rather helps her/his learners in their construction of competencies. The teacher’s role would be to facilitate the learning process by guiding learners in their efforts to apply their prior knowledge in new situations (Aïder, 2012).

It should be noted that the competency-based approach has its origins in “*mastery learning*” and “*criterion-referencing assessment*” (Lassnigg, 2017, p.10). In this regard, learning and

teaching should proceed in accordance with a set of specified competencies, which are expected to be demonstrated to prove mastery (Lassnigg, 2017). According to Wong (2008), It [the competency-based approach] referred to an educational movement that advocated defining educational goals in terms of precise measurable description of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours students should possess at the end of a course of study. (p.180).

Besides aiming at promoting the development of major competencies, which are crucial to the individual's involvement in social activities (Serdenciuc, 2013), the CBA places an emphasis on "*metacognitive self-awareness*" in "*experiential learning*", which helps take learning outside the classroom to other contexts (Serdenciuc, 2013, p.755). For Roegiers (as cited in Aithaddouchane et al., 2017), the competency-based approach rests upon three major goals:

- To focus attention on the competencies that students have excelled in;
- To make the learning outcomes meaningful so that students will grasp the "*what*" and "*why*" of learning. This can be realized by connecting learning to situations that are familiar to the students and by having the latter apply their know-how in those situations (Aithaddouchane et al., 2017, p.4);
- To confirm and check the learners' attainment as concerns how they have dealt with a particular predicament-regardless of the size of knowledge that learners tend to forget quickly, and which they do not know how to apply in authentic situations.

The CBA, also referred to as pedagogy of integration and an outcome-based approach, involves juxtaposing knowledge, know-how, and attitudes-all necessary to solve actual life issues. According to Richards and Rodgers (as cited in Nkwetisama, 2012), the CBA focuses attention on the learning outcomes. It emphasizes the application of know-how rather than mere acquisition. For Schneck (Nkwetisama, 2012), this kind of instruction-the CBA-can be adjusted to the learners', teachers,' and community's needs.

For Savage (as cited in Nkwetisama, 2012), the CBA is based on performance-showing excellence in fundamental “*life skills*” that arise as indispensable for the process of integrating into the community. It is then “*a functional approach to education that emphasizes life skills and evaluates mastery of those skills according to actual learner performance,*” (as cited in Nkwetisama, 2012, p.520).

All in all, unlike the traditional methods of teaching-which are basically teacher-centered; they do not prepare students for future employment; they are dependent on textbooks; and they do not enlighten students about the goals of their learning-the competency-based approach, on the other hand, is student-centered; it is geared towards employment; it focuses on mastery; and it makes use of the “*media*” to achieve its goal, which is getting students to master what they are assigned to do (Rahman et al., 2014, p. 1072).

## 1. 2. The Algerian Context

As far as higher education is concerned, at the beginning of the 1970s, the idea of implementing the competency-based approach was not unfamiliar. McClelland (as cited in Barman & Konwar, 2011) stated: “higher education must move beyond institutional reputation as an indicator of graduate competence towards a competency-based approach reflective of work place needs” (p. 62).

Due to the rapid and significant development of globalization in recent years, the kind of know-how needed for the execution of a particular task is changing, in which case the need for competent individuals is soaring. Knowledge has become the main asset to the economy that relies mostly on the individual’s characteristics. These exigencies regarding globalization have brought to light new rhetoric in the higher educational realm, which calls for the immediate implementation of a competency-based curriculum in order to deal efficiently and effectively with the demands of the labor market (Barman & Konwar, 2011).

Since the curriculum design may determine the success of any course of education, it has been targeted by calls for the implementation of measured or assessed outcomes, which would certify that students are competent, i.e., they can perform up-to-standards the assigned task. In that regard, the curriculum should be designed in such a way that competencies are

targeted so that the educational input would be geared towards employment, hence acceptable to the labor market. A competency-based curriculum, according to Barman and Konwar, (2011), Summarizes academic and professional profiles, defines new objectives in the learning process, enhances learning environments and shifts the concept of learning as accumulation of knowledge to learning as a permanent attitude towards knowledge acquisition. (p. 10)

In fact, a competency-based curriculum focuses attention on competences; bases learning tasks on performance and whether or not they meet the standards; centers on the learner; and uses formative assessment (Barman & Konwar, 2011).

The CBA's curriculum design relies on the definition of competencies (Barman & Konwar, 2011). Developing a CBA's curriculum in higher education necessitates the following: (1) the identification of disciplinary competencies, (2) the elaboration of measurement standards, and (3) basing assessment on performance (proficiency) (Barman & Konwar, 2011). Barman and Konwar (2011) added: "*it is extremely important that the intended learning outcomes (competencies), teaching & [sic] learning approaches and assessment are aligned*" (p. 13).

Long-time hindered from making progress in terms of connecting with the scientific world, the Algerian educational system decided to fix an ambitious goal: reviewing the school programs in three years' time in order to make them compliant with the Algerian society's and school's needs in particular (as cited in Toualbi & Tawil, 2006). In this regard, the competency-based approach stood out as a necessity to evolve the educational system. The latter launched into reforming in depth the school programs so as to respond to the different challenges which are but not limited to (a) translating to the school the recent institutional, economic, social, and cultural changes, which would allow it to transmit the values of tolerance and dialogue, and to prepare students to exercise their citizenship in a democratic society; (b) allowing the school to fulfill its function, i.e., socialization and qualification; (c) continuing the demonstration of teaching, making it accessible to a large population and guaranteeing that each individual has an equal chance to succeed; (d) responding to the challenges of economic globalization, which requires, more or less, higher qualifications that are compatible with the

demands of job mobility; and (e) making use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in schools and other contexts (as cited in Toualbi & Tawil, 2006).

## 2. Methodology

The study takes place in the department of English, at the University of Oran 2, in Algeria. It makes use of both quantitative and qualitative research-though the former type of research is more predominant-to reach its goal: determining the extent to which the CBA is used in higher education.

### 2. 1. Participants

The study involves 20 master-one students specializing in literature and civilization at the University of Oran, in Algeria, and 4 literature teachers from the same university. More information about the informants is provided in the table below:

**Table 1.** Demographic

<i>Participants</i>		
<i>Students</i>	<i>Total number</i>	<i>20</i>
	<i>Age</i>	<i>20-37</i>
	<i>Male / Female</i>	<i>Male: 6</i> <i>Female: 14</i>
	<i>Specialty</i>	<i>Literature and Civilization</i>
	<i>Way of participation</i>	<i>Questionnaire</i>
<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Total number</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>Age</i>	<i>26-50</i>
	<i>Male / Female</i>	<i>Female: 4</i>
	<i>Specialty</i>	<i>Literature</i>
	<i>Way of participation</i>	<i>Questionnaire</i>

### 2. 2. Material

The present study has made use of an online questionnaire, dedicated to students and teachers. The students' questionnaire comprises ten questions while the teachers' includes five. Both questionnaires involve close- and open-ended questions, all centered around five

themes: teacher-student relationship, teachers' and students' roles, teachers' expectations, students' involvement, and assessment.

### 2.3. Procedure

A questionnaire, created by Google forms, is sent to students via Facebook. The researcher has managed to locate the students and send them the questionnaire thanks to their Facebook group where they meet online regularly.

Likewise, the researcher has also emailed a questionnaire to four literature teachers, as they were the only literature teachers available in the English department.

## 3. The Results

### 3.1. The Results of the Students' Questionnaire

**Question 1:** What is your teacher like?

**Table 2.** Students' Attitudes towards the Teacher

Answer	Friend	Father	Dictator
Number of students	10	2	8
Percentage	50%	10%	40%

The aim of this question is to know the nature of the teacher-student relationship. The findings showed that half the students (50%) think of their teacher as a friend, while 10% consider the teacher as a father.

**Question 2:** How often do you work in groups?

**Table 3.** The Frequency of Working in Groups

Frequency	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
The total number of students	0	1	2	12	5
Percentage	0%	5%	10%	60%	25%

The informants were asked if they engage in group work. The results showed that a considerable number of students, representing 60%, reported that they hardly work in groups while a quarter of them (25%) confessed that they never engage in group work.

Also, 10% of students stated that they do work in groups every now and then, and only 5% of them said that they do so usually.

**Question 3:** How often do you have a class debate with your teacher?

**Table 4.** Class Debates with the Teacher

Frequency	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Number of students	3	4	7	3	3
Percentage	15%	20%	35%	15%	15%

The reason students were asked this question is to find out how often they involve themselves with their teacher in class debates. In this regard, a portion of students, representing 35% of the sample, stated that they have class debates sometimes. Twenty percent of the participants claimed that they are usually involved in class debates. Still, a small proportion of students (15%) said that they always engage in class debates. However, another equal proportion (15%) revealed that they rarely do so. Surprisingly, the remaining 15% of students denied being ever involved in a debate.

**Question 4:** How often do you consult your teacher in class?

**Table 5.** The Frequency of Consulting the Teacher

Frequency	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Number of students	3	7	8	2	0
Percentage	15%	35%	40%	10%	0%

The students were asked this question in order to figure out the extent to which students consult their teacher. In this respect, the highest proportion of students (40%) reported that they consult their teacher sometimes, and 35% of them revealed that they usually turn to their teacher for consultation. Another proportion (15%) confessed that they always refer to their teacher. Only 10% of them disclosed that they rarely consult their teacher.

**Question 5:** How often are you invited to express your opinions in class?

**Table 6.** The Frequency of Expressing Opinions in Class

Frequency	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Number of students	4	4	8	4	0
Percentage	20%	20%	40%	20%	0%

The purpose behind asking this question to students is simply to know the frequency at which students are allowed to give their say on a particular subject matter. In this regard, a number of students (40%) stated that they are invited to express opinions sometimes, while another portion (20%) claimed that they are usually welcome to have their say.

An equal number of students (20%) affirmed that they are always allowed to express opinions in class. However, 20% of students said that they are rarely given such an opportunity.

**Question 6:** How often are you assessed during class?

**Table 7.** The Assessment Frequency

Frequency	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Number of students	2	5	8	5
Percentage	10%	25%	40%	25%

The informants were asked how often they are tested during class. A considerable number of them, representing 40%, reported that they are rarely assessed, while a quarter of students (25%) disclosed that they are never tested during class.

Another quarter of the students (25%) informed the researcher that they take a test sometimes. Only 10% affirmed that they are assessed regularly.

**Question 7:** Does your teacher explain to you what a one-year literature course is about?

**Table 8.** The Clarification of the Literature Course's Content

Answer	Yes, she/he does	No, she/he doesn't
Number of students	13	7
Percentage	65%	35%

In this question, the participants were asked to say whether their teacher explains what the literature course is about. More than half of the participants, representing 65%, reported that their teacher clarifies the content of the course; however, slightly over a third of the participants (35%) claimed that their teacher does not do so.

**Question 8:** Does your teacher inform you about what you will accomplish by the end of the literature course?

**Table 9.** Communicating the Learning Outcomes

Answer	Yes, she/he does	No, she/he doesn't
Number of students	7	13
Percentage	35%	65%

The goal of posing this question is to know whether students are informed about what they will accomplish by end of the course. As shown in the table above, a significant number of students (65%) stated that they are not informed about what they are expected to achieve, while the other 35% said that they do not know what they are supposed to accomplish by the end of the course.

**Question 9:** Does your teacher insist on repeating a particular point that you have not understood yet?

**Table 10.** The Repetition of Ungrasped Information

Answer	Yes, she/he does	No, she/he doesn't
Number of students	15	5
Percentage	75%	25%

The point of asking this question is to know if the teacher tends to repeat her- or himself when students struggle with understanding something. As illustrated in the table above, the majority of the participants (75%) confirmed that their teacher does repeat un-understood points to them; however, the remaining students, representing 25%, denied ever witnessing their teacher repeating to them.

**Question 10:** Do you think you can influence the selection of the lesson (decide on which lesson to be taught)?

**Table 11.** The Selection of the Lesson

Answer	Yes, I do	No, I don't
Number of students	10	10
Percentage	50%	50%

The rationale behind asking this question is to know if students are involved in the selection of the lesson. As displayed in the table above, the answers equally split, with 50% of the participants believing that they play a part in the process of selecting the lesson, and the other 50% denying having such influence.

### 3. 1. 1. The Discussion of the Students' Questionnaire Results

*The results of the analyzed data indicate that even though some features of the competency-based-approach are used by the respondents, the approach is far from being completely implemented in higher education. Students rarely engage in group work, though the latter is a major characteristic of both the competency-based and the student-centered approaches.*

*Similarly, table 4 shows that students do not regularly engage in debates with their teacher, insinuating the likelihood that the class is teacher-centered. This is not the case, nevertheless, when it comes to students' consultation with their teacher. As seen in table 5, almost half of the students, at times, turn to their teacher. As for question six, the participants' answers to that question, nonetheless, imply that teaching is teacher-fronted since roughly half of the students claimed that they are rarely assessed. This may also suggest that assessment is summative, i.e., done at the end of the course.*

*One major characteristic of the competency-based approach is that it informs students what is expected from them through communicating to them explicitly, either in spoken or written form, what they are supposed to achieve by the end of the course. In spite of the fact that the content of the literature course is clarified to the students, as displayed in table 8, students are still not aware of the learning outcomes they are expected to achieve by the end of the course (see table 9).*

*Proceeding to the next level until mastery of a particular competency is demonstrated is one of the main characteristics of the CBA. This study finds that the teacher tends to focus attention on her students' mastery of the lesson's content-this is shown in table 10.*

*The aim of the last question is to determine whether students have any influence on the choice of the lesson. Since the teacher-student negotiation (specifically with adult learners) vis-à-vis the selection of the lesson is characteristic of student-centered approaches—particularly the competency-based approach—students' answers to that question were expected to confirm the existence of the CBA. However, as demonstrated in table 11, the results are equally split between those who think they can influence the choice of the lesson and those who think they can't.*

### 3. 2. The Teachers' Questionnaire Results

**Question 1:** What is your relationship with your students like?

**Table 1.** Teacher-Student Relationship

Answers	Strictly professional	Friendly	Other Reponses
Number of teachers	1	0	3
Percentage	25%	0%	75%

This question aims at revealing the kind of relationship the teacher has with her students. A quarter of the respondents stated that their relationship with their students is strictly professional, yet no one described it as friendly. Instead, the remaining participants opted for such answers as:

- friendly professional;
- professional in a friendly way;
- based on respect and positive attitude.

**Question 2:** How do you describe your teaching?

**Table 2.** Describing Teaching

Answers	Teacher-centered	Leaner-centered	Subject-centered	Other Reponses
Number of teachers	1	1	1	1
Percentage	25%	25%	25%	25%

The goal of asking this question is to know which angle of the didactic triangle teaching is centered on. One teacher described her teaching as teacher-centered. One stated that hers is learner-centered. Another teacher revealed that she centers her teaching on the subject. Only one teacher said she is interested in the three aspects, as they are interconnected. She added: "My first interest is the learner, the second is the subject because that is the way to interest the learner to tease his or her curiosity. To achieve my goal (that is this transaction of knowledge) I have as a teacher to be a professional. This is how I see the link between the three elements."

**Question 3:** Do you make sure your students have mastered the intended learning outcomes before proceeding with new lessons?

**Table 3.** Confirming Mastery

Answers	Yes, I do	No, I don't
Number of teachers	3	1
Percentage	75%	25%

When asked if they confirm mastery of the intended learning outcomes before proceeding with new lessons, the majority of teachers, representing 75% of the sample, affirmed that they do so. Only one respondent returned a negative answer, arguing that a literature module is a lecture, not a class.

**Question 4:** Do you decide with your students on which text to study?

**Table 4.** Text Selection

Answers	Yes, I do	No, I don't	Other Reponses
Number of teachers	1	2	1
Percentage	25%	50%	25%

The informants were asked this question in order to find out if they involve their students in the text selection process. One informant said that she does include students when it comes to the selection of the text.

Two of the informants rejected the idea of involving students in such a matter. One of them justified her refusal. She said that uses texts that had success and abandons others that are less appreciated.

Only one respondent said that she does not involve her students in the selection of the literary text.

**Question 5:** What are the major techniques that you use when you teach literature?

Teachers were asked this question in order to elicit some answers regarding the kinds of teaching techniques they use in their classes. Their responses are as follows:

- Respondent 1: "I use the datashow to present my work in powerpoints (characters, themes, figures of speech...), I make them watch films on the related novels, and documentaries on authors or themes. I also encourage reading, and discussions."
- Respondent 2: "I use the teacher centered technique. I give a lecture while the students listen and take notes. In the remaining, 15 minutes, the students are welcome to ask questions and comment on some of the points. The lecture ends in a discussion."
- Respondent 3: "generally I use pictures. I provide few pictures that relate to the story and ask the student to order them according to their imagination without telling them the story. I rise [sic] the level of curiosity and most of them would read it by the next lecture."

### 3. 2. 1. The Discussion of the Teachers' Questionnaire

In answering the first question, most teachers described their relationship with their students as friendly; still, they linked this quality, i.e., friendliness, with professionalism. To quote their words, they described it as "friendly professional" or "professional in a friendly way".

A friendly teacher-student relationship is one major characteristic of the CBA. By having this kind of relationship with students, the teacher can establish a positive atmosphere where autonomy, self-confidence, and motivation prevail. The answer to the second question was expected to be a major determinant that may prove the presence of the CBA; however, there

was no decisive answer since the results in terms of percentages were the same-with the exception of one answer, which prioritizes both the learner and subject over other elements.

The choice of the literature teaching approach is keyed to the development of one or several aspects, such as language or culture. This is similar to what the CBA is striving to achieve, i.e., targeting one or several competencies. The response rate is equally shared among the options. Regardless, any of those literature teaching approaches is focused-with the exception of one, which is integrative-therefore, these approaches can be paralleled to the CBA's objectives, i.e., they can be integrated together.

Teachers were asked if they make sure that students have attained mastery of the learning outcome before proceeding with other points/lessons. Surprisingly, the majority of teachers do confirm mastery before proceeding with other content. This means that they are, perhaps, unintentionally making use of one of the major features of the outcome-based and the competency-based approaches.

The fourth question was asked to see if students could influence the selection of the text. The findings showed that students do not have any influence on the selection process. Although involving students in such a matter is a sign of a democratic classroom and can prove useful in the application of the CBA, the participants seem to hold firmly to their authoritarian position.

The final question (question five) was asked so as to learn if teachers' instructional practices are student-centered. The results showed that the techniques used in class are more or less teacher-centered. As seen in the literature, the CBA tends to be learner-centered (see Toualbi & Tawil, 2006), which is not necessarily the case in this study as some teacher-centered practices are still omnipresent.

### **Conclusion**

This research has attempted to find out if the competency-based approach is used in Algerian higher education, particularly in the literature class. Even though university students and teachers were concerned with this study, sampling involved only master-one students and their literature teachers.

All things being equal, it appears that the CBA is not yet completely implemented in higher education, especially in EFL master classes. This conclusion rests on the participants' answers to questions formulated in accordance with five classroom parameters: teacher-student relationship, teachers' and students' roles, teachers' expectations, students' involvement, and assessment.

Finally, future research would seek to experiment with the CBA and learn about the advantages and disadvantages of its implementation in the Algerian higher education institutions.

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## Appendices

### Appendix One: Students' Questionnaire

Dear students, I would be very grateful if you could answer the following questions. Your answers are crucial, for they will help me carry out my research.

DO GIVE YOUR HONEST ANSWERS!

#### 1) Student's profile:

##### a- Gender

Male

Female

##### b- Age:..

#### 2) Questions:

**Question 1:** What is your teacher like?

Friend

Father

Dictator

**Question 2:** How often do you work in groups?

Always

Usually

Sometimes

Hardly ever

Never

**Question 3:** How often do you have a class debate with your teacher?

Always

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

**Question 4:** How often do you consult your teacher in class?

Always

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

**Question 5:** How often are you invited to express your opinions in class?

Always

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

**Question 6:** How often are you assessed during class?

Always

Sometimes

Never

**Question 7:** Does your teacher explain to you what a one-year literature course is about?

Yes, s/he does

No, s/he doesn't

**Question 8:** Does your teacher inform you about what you will accomplish by the end of the literature course?

Yes, s/he does

No, s/he doesn't

**Question 9:** Does your teacher insist on repeating a particular point that you have not understood yet?

Yes, s/he does

No, s/he doesn't

**Question 10:** Do you think you can influence the selection of the lesson (decide on which lesson to be taught)?

Yes, I do

No, I don't

### Appendix Two: Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madam, as I'm doing research on the use of the competency-based approach in the master-one literature class, your answers to this questionnaire will be very crucial in this investigation. I'm looking forward to receiving from you. Thank you very much in advance.

**N.B.** In some questions there is the mention "autre" where you can add anything that is related.

#### 1) Student's profile:

##### a- Gender

Male

Female

##### b- Age: ..

#### 2) Questions:

**Question 1:** What is your relationship with your students like?

Stricly professional

Friendly

Other responses:.....

**Question 2:** How do you describe your teaching?

Teacher-centered

Learner-centered

Subject-centered

Other responses:.....

**Question 3:** Do you make sure your students have mastered the intended learning outcomes before proceeding with new lessons?

Yes, I do

No, I don't

**Question 4:** Do you decide with your students on which text to study?

Yes, I do

No, I don't

Other response:.....

**Question 5:** What are the major techniques that you use when you teach literature?