THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPETENCY- BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MOROCCAN HIGH SCHOOLS

Choraih Mohamed Amine[1]

Abstract

The study investigates the implementation of Competency-Based Language Teaching in Moroccan high schools. It seeks to discover whether or not some EFL teachers in high schools know about and implement the Competency-based approach. It also aims to underline the challenges and the difficulties EFL teachers face when implementing this approach and the impact of implementing it on students' performance in the EFL classroom. Participants of the study were mainly high school teachers as the present study deals with the implementation of Competency-Based Language Teaching in Moroccan high schools. The total number of participants is twenty teachers from different cities in Morocco. A questionnaire was designed to be the main instrument of this study. The questionnaire was delivered to and filled out by high school teachers from all over Morocco. The results show that EFL high school teachers are aware of CBLT. Indeed, the majority of them implement it in their classrooms. Additionally, EFL high school teachers face several difficulties when implementing CBLT such as time constraints and the difficulty of assessment. However, EFL high school teachers state that the implementation of CBLT has a positive impact on students' performance, namely enhancing students' communicative skills.

Keywords: Competency-Based Language Teaching, CBLT, Moroccan High Schools, Moroccan Education, Teaching Approach.

[1] Doctoral student. University of Moulay Ismail, **Morocco**. E-mail: m.choraih@edu.umi.ac.ma. ORCID: 0000-0002-1723-1281

Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) not only requires equipping learners with linguistic knowledge, but also practical skills that can be of benefit to them. The paper is concerned with the implementation of competency-based language teaching (CBLT) within the Moroccan education system, specifically in high schools. The approach in question centers on equipping learners with competencies or practical skills needed in real-life situations. The paper aims to have an idea about the extent to which the approach in question is recognized and implemented by Moroccan EFL high school teachers. The research also seeks to identify the challenges that the said teachers face in their attempt to implement CBLT. Furthermore, it aims to explore teachers' perceptions of the impact of CBLT on students' performance.

Several studies have investigated the implementation of CBLT by teachers in different countries. For instance, in Vietnam, Yen and Thao (2024) have explored the implementation and perception of competency-based assessment practices among Vietnamese EFL instructors. In Taiwan, Lin and Tiao (2022) have suggested multimodal materials to promote CBLT. In Algeria Boukhentache (2020) provides practical applications of CBLT in the classroom.

CBLT in Morocco is referred to in the National Charter of Education and Training as the teaching of technical and professional competencies that learners are required to obtain (National Charter of Education and Training, 1999, p. 10). In the same vein, according to Richards and Rodgers (2014), competencies are described as essential skills that are needed for the effective performance of real-life tasks (p. 156). Accordingly, CBLT as an approach needs to be implemented in the Moroccan education system. For this reason, it is important to know first the extent to which CBLT is implemented as well as the challenges faced during its application in Moroccan high schools.

Literature Review

Definition of Competency

According to Perrenoud (1999), cited in Competency-based Approach Guide which was published in December 2009 by the Ministry of Education in Morocco, competency is the ability to effectively deal with several

situations. These situations can be controlled using the possession of the necessary knowledge as well as the ability to organize knowledge to identify and solve problems. In other words, competency is the ability to make use of resources and knowledge so as to solve problems and thus to deal with the situation in question.

Richards and Rodgers (2014) assert that "competencies consist of a description of the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors required for effective performance of a real-world task or activity" (p. 156). Therefore, competencies can be clearly defined as the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that are of great importance in performing effective tasks or activities that are related to real life. A prime example presented by Mrowicki (1986), cited in Richards and Rodgers (2014), shows how competencies can be related to the field of work and social survival in a new environment. Areas whereby competencies are developed during an ESL curriculum dedicated to immigrants and refugees encompass task performance, safety, general world-related, work schedules, time sheets, paychecks, social language, job application, and job interview (p.156).

So, these areas help develop competencies of learners in the sense that they are related to real-life situations such as sitting for a job interview or using a particular social language to survive in a given environment. To conclude, competencies are the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that learners will be able to have by the end of the course to make use of them in real-life situations. Competency-Based Education (CBE).

According to Richard and Rodgers (2014), CBE is an educational movement whose main focus is the outcomes of learning to develop language programs. In other terms, it is concerned with the outcomes of learning rather than the different processes of learning. This indicates that this movement's approach to teaching is outcomes-based. It also considers the needs of all the parties, namely students, teachers, and the community (pp. 151-152).

Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT)

Richards and Rodgers (2014) define CBLT as "an application of the principles of Competency-Based Education to language teaching" (p. 151). This definition highlights that CBE provides theories and principles that are applied in teaching. Thus, the application of these principles is referred to

as CBLT.

According to Auerbach (1986), the implementation of CBLT programs requires attention to eight key features:

- A focus on successful function in society.

- A focus on life skills

- Task or performance-centered orientation.

- Modularized instruction.

- Outcomes that are made explicit a priori.

- Continuous and ongoing assessment.

- Demonstrated mastery of performance objectives.

- Individualized, student-centered instruction. (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p.153)

Grognet and Crandall (1982), cited in Richard and Rodgers (2014) maintain that CBLT programs focus primarily on "a performance outline of language tasks that lead to a demonstrated mastery of language associated with specific skills that are necessary for individuals to function proficiently in the society in which they live" (p. 151). In other words, these programs' main concern is to make sure that the performance and mastery of language as well as the skills can be used by learners to function in a particular society. So, emphasis is placed on the fact that learners will be able to use what they have learned in their society. In simple terms, what is important in this sense is what I can do with what I have learned.

Docking (1994), cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001), argues that CBLT is designed around the notion of competency rather than the notion of subject knowledge. Therefore, the focus is on what students can do with language rather than what they know about it. To put it clearly, attention is directed to the notion of competencies or learning outcomes.

Competency-Based approach had been adopted by the end of the 1970s in a number of countries throughout the world. It reemerged as a major approach to language programs including English as a Second Language (ESL) (Richards and Rodgers 2001).

CBLT in Morocco

Many countries around the world began to adopt CBLT. Morocco, in turn, adopted it as an approach to teaching in its educational system. Indeed, in 1999, the National Charter of Education and Training, which implied a significant change, was drafted. This change can be marked by the focus on new ideas including the implementation of a competency-based approach. This can be inferred from the fact that considerable emphasis is put on the skills and knowledge about this country and the world. What is more, competencies that are needed outside the classroom are also mentioned in the National Charter of Education and Training. Students should be able to obtain technical and professional competencies which function in the local and regional environment of their school. (National Charter of Education and Training, 1999, p. 10). Ezirari (2024) states that the adoption of CBLT has made learners the cornerstone of the learning process in the sense that their needs and cognitive capacities are taken into account. This framework has emerged as a result of development in various fields of study such as artificial intelligence, neurology, differential, social, and educational psychology, multiple intelligences theory, and Chomskian Linguistics (p. 18).

Competency-based Curriculum

A competency-based curriculum simply means the application of the principles of competency-based education in the curriculum. In this respect, Richards and Rodgers (2001) provide an example of a program, namely the Australian Migrant Education Program. A competency-based curriculum was planned to be the framework for the program under investigation.

Hagan (1994), cited in Richard and Rodgers (2001), provides a description of how the framework operates: students are firstly tested to place them in "their current proficiency level, their learning pace, their needs, and their social goals for learning English" (p. 147).

It is noteworthy to mention that at the first and second stage, twelve competencies are presented in terms of general language development. At the third stage, students are placed in groups with respect to their goal focus. There are four domains into which the competency descriptions at each stage are divided. These domains are as follows:

- Knowledge and learning competencies

- Oral competencies

- Reading competencies

- Writing competencies

Docking (1994), cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001), asserts that to develop and plan a syllabus, one needs to:

- Start with the field of knowledge.

- Select concepts, knowledge, and skills that the field of knowledge is composed of.

- Develop a syllabus and course content.

- Specify objectives.

- Assess students based on norm-referencing.

- Give students marks for their performance (pp. 143-144).

Heriansyah et al. (2021) assert that schools in Indonesia are allowed to design their own syllabus based on certain aspects such as school capability, teacher, student, and facility. External parties can also participate in designing the syllabus such as community members and private industry or company (p. 425).

In an Algerian context, Boukhentache (2020) provides a practical application of CBLT in the curriculum through teaching listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Steps are suggested to help learners attain the required competencies (pp. 109-114).

The role of the teacher and the learner

Based on what has been said earlier regarding factors involved in the implementation of CBLT and Competency-Based Curriculum, one can infer both the teacher and the learner's role.

On the one hand, the teacher's role is to specify the objectives of the course. This will make students aware of what they are supposed to study beforehand. This, in fact, will help them direct their attention on the field of knowledge they will learn. Derseh et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of teachers' awareness of the purpose of CBLT assessment (p. 82). The teacher should also assess students based on norm-referencing and give students feedback on their performance. Indeed, Lin and Tiao (2022)

highlight the importance of teacher's observation in finding significant changes in students' learning attitude when they are in a multimodal competency-based language learning environment (p. 90). Moreover, the teacher is required to provide students with concrete tasks which will be useful to them later in their lives. What is more, teachers should break objectives into narrowly focused sub-objectives and define these objectives in terms of individual needs. Outcomes are of paramount importance in that teachers should agree with students on them and make them appear clear to students.

On the other hand, students are, in turn, concerned with competencies in the sense that they "can judge whether the competencies seem relevant and useful". Moreover, students should be aware of the competencies which will be taught in order to know the needs to be learned. Last, but not least, students are supposed to master competencies "one at a time" so as to be cognizant of what they have learned and what they need to learn (Richards and Rodgers 2001, pp. 146-147).

Challenges of Implementing CBLT

There are several challenges in the implementation of competency-based curriculum in the EFL classroom. Possible challenges include difficulties in managing the class due to the large number of students, readiness for both teachers and students, passivity of learners and difficulties in assessing students' performance. Indeed, Yen and Thao (2024) maintain that the challenges comprise mainly adapting to new assessment methodologies, the scarcity of resources and insufficient institutional support (p. 8). In the same vein, Atuhura and Nambi (2024) mention challenges of implementing CBLT in an African context, namely in Uganda. Challenges comprise, among others, scarcity of instructional materials, time constraints and large class sizes, limited planning and stakeholder support, and inconsistencies between local culture and expected change in learning styles (pp. 247-251). In Ethiopia, Derseh et al. (2024) highlight the failure of teachers to apply the assessment components that can measure students' performance in speaking skills notwithstanding the fact that the syllabus outlines the target competencies (p.79).

Purpose of study

This study aims to discover whether some EFL teachers in high schools are

cognizant of the Competency-based approach or not. It also endeavors to discover whether competency-based language teaching is implemented in high schools or not as well as underline the challenges and the difficulties some EFL teachers face when implementing this approach. Based on these objectives, four main questions can be asked:

- Do some EFL teachers in high schools know about the CBLT?

- Do some EFL teachers implement CBLT in the classroom?

- Are there any difficulties that some EFL teachers face when implementing this approach? If yes, what are they?

To find answers to these questions, three hypotheses have been formulated.

H1: There are some EFL teachers in high schools that are aware of CBLT.

H2: Some EFL teachers implement CBLT in high schools.

H3: There are a number of difficulties teachers face when implementing CBLT such as difference in students' learning styles.

Method

Participants

This study adopts a purposive sampling method by selecting high school teachers from different cities in Morocco, specifically Rabat, Marrakech, Azilal, Chefchaouen and Fes. The purpose of selecting these teachers is owing to their involvement in the implementation of CBLT in Moroccan high schools (Etikan et al., 2016). A limited number of participants has been chosen based on their attendance in a national conference organized by the Moroccan Association of Teachers of English. The total number of participants is twenty high school teachers. This number can be considered sufficient given the exploratory nature of the study that prioritizes depth over breadth. Therefore, the focus is on obtaining a small and in-depth sample rather than a large population (Creswell, 2014).

Instrument

In order to collect the required data in an efficient way, a questionnaire was designed to be the main instrument of this study. The questionnaire was

delivered to and filled out by twenty high school teachers from all over Morocco. The questionnaire begins with a brief introduction indicating the purpose of the questionnaire as well as a reassurance of participants' confidentiality and a request to answer questions as honestly as possible. Afterward, background information of participants is requested, namely gender, age, high school, and city. The questionnaire is made up primarily of Yes/No questions and open-ended questions. The rationale behind the choice of open-ended questions in the questionnaire is to make sure that teachers really understand and thus implement Competency-Based Language Teaching in their classroom. The questions are mentioned in the results section for data presentation. Finally, participants are thanked for their cooperation.

Data analysis procedure

In order to analyze the data, Excel has been used. The data has been analyzed quantitatively through percentages which represent the participants' answers to Yes/No questions. For a visual representation of these percentages, Excel was also used to provide graphs. Open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively by organizing participants' answers in themes and commenting on them.

Validity and reliability

The questionnaire has been developed and reviewed carefully in order to guarantee the validity and reliability of the research instrument. Indeed, content validity has been respected in that the core of the questionnaire aligns with the literature relating to CBLT. In terms of construct validity, the instrument assesses teachers' knowledge, beliefs and classroom practices. This assessment reflects the exploratory nature of the study. Regarding reliability, thematic analysis has been adopted to deal with open-ended responses. The data collected from the questionnaire has been subject to a careful check to ensure consistency using the same coding system.

Results

This section presents results based on respondents' answers in the questionnaire.

Question 1

Figure 1: Do you know about Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT)?

As is shown in the graph above, 100% of participants (EFL teachers) state that they know about Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT). This means that they have some information about the approach under investigation. Thus, they were able provide a brief definition of CBLT. A number of definitions were given by many respondents. CBLT was defined as a learner-centered approach to language teaching in which language learning/teaching is regarded as a set of goals and competencies. It mainly focuses on certain skills and objectives that students should achieve by the end of the course. Generally speaking, it centers on the objectives and competencies to be achieved by students. Teacher 1 defines CBLT as the following: "It is a set of skills acquired during lessons preparing students for real life tasks." Teacher 2 defines CBLT as "an approach that focuses mainly on certain skills and objectives that students should achieve by the end of the course."

Question 2
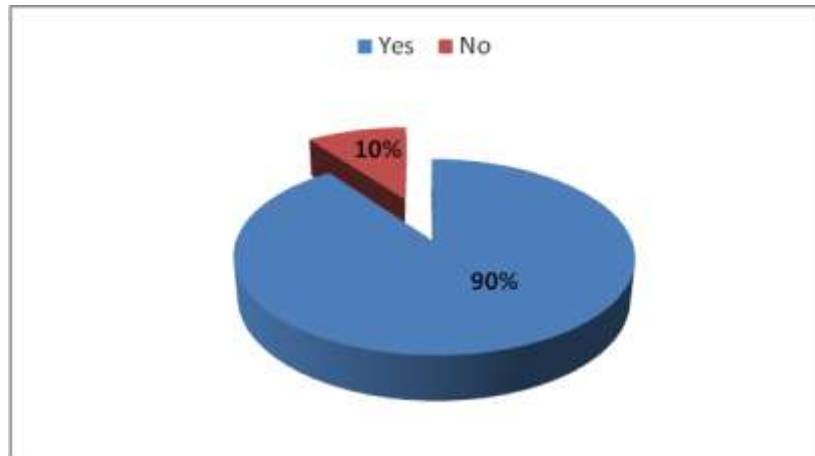
Figure 2: Do you, as a high school teacher, use CBLT in your classrooms?

The graph above shows that 90% of the respondents use CBLT in their classrooms. However, only 10% say that they do not use CBLT in their classrooms. This shows that most EFL high school teachers use CBLT in their classrooms. On the one hand, teachers who use CBLT say that it focused on communication, life skills and successful functioning in society. On the other, teachers who do not use CBLT in their classroom say that it is difficult to implement for some reasons, namely time constraints, large classes and the need to finish the program.

Question 3. How do you implement CBLT in your classroom?

90% of participants (who use CBLT) point out that they use it through having students exposed to different activities especially those that are functional and communicative. They use also role play and videos in the classroom where the target competency is performed in situations that are akin to those in real life. What is more, teachers implement CBLT via bringing authentic material to the classroom which makes students feel as if they are in real life situations.
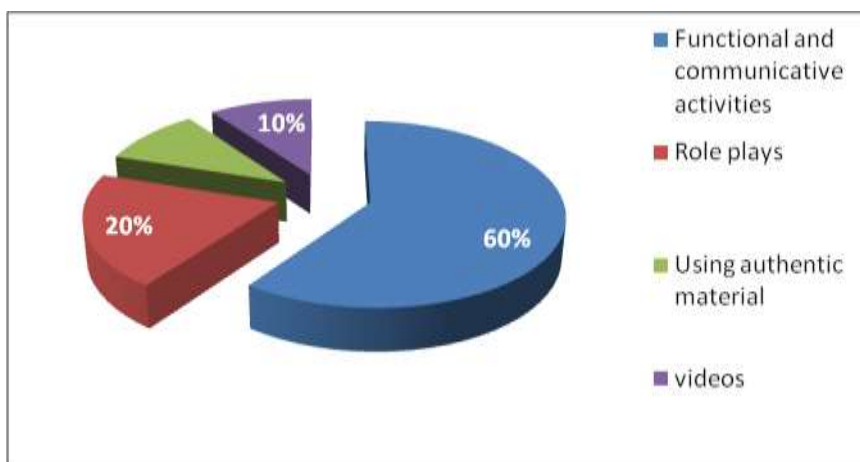
Figure 3. How EFL high school teachers use CBLT

As is indicated in the graph above, 60% of respondents say that they use CBLT through using functional and communicative activities. 20% of participanrs use role palys to implement CBLT. 10% of EFL high school teacher use authentic materials and 10% state that they use videos.
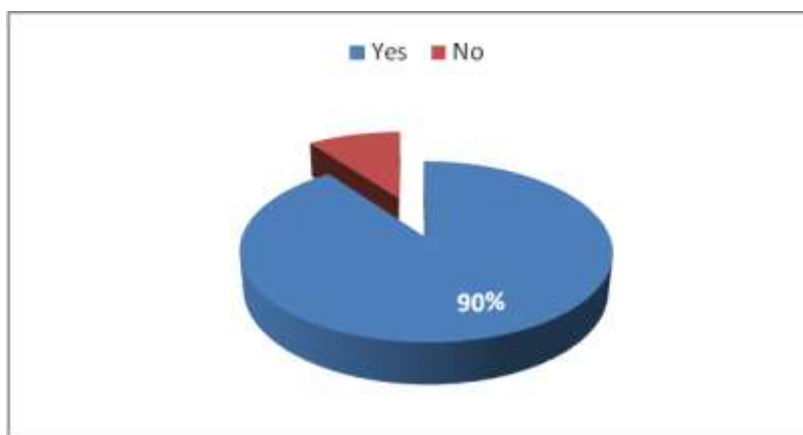
Question 4

Figure 4. Do you face any difficulties when implementing this approach?

As is displayed in the graph, 90% of respondents admit that they encounter some difficulties when they implement CBLT. However, 10% of

participants say that they do not face any difficulties when implementing this approach simply because they do not use this approach. There are a number of difficulties which high school teachers face. These difficulties are the following:

- The difficulty in creating situations that are similar to those of real life.

- Time constraint

- Problem of assessment

- Students' linguistic differences

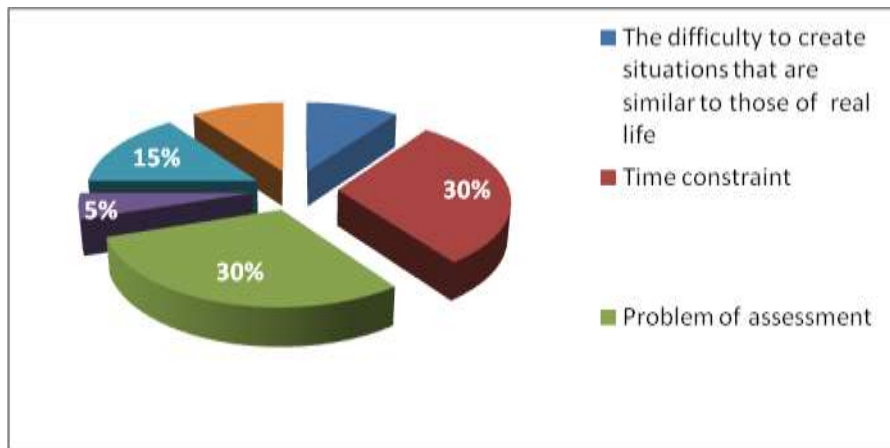- Overcrowded classrooms

- Lack or even absence of material

Figure 5. Difficulties when implementing CBLT

The graph above shows that 30 % of participants state that the difficulty they encounter is time constraints, while 30% of respondents point out that they have difficulties related to assessment. 15% of EFL high school teachers say that overcrowded classrooms is another difficulty. 10% of respondents say that the difficulty they find is lack or even absence of material, while 5% of participants state that students' linguistic differences is impedes the implementation of CBLT.
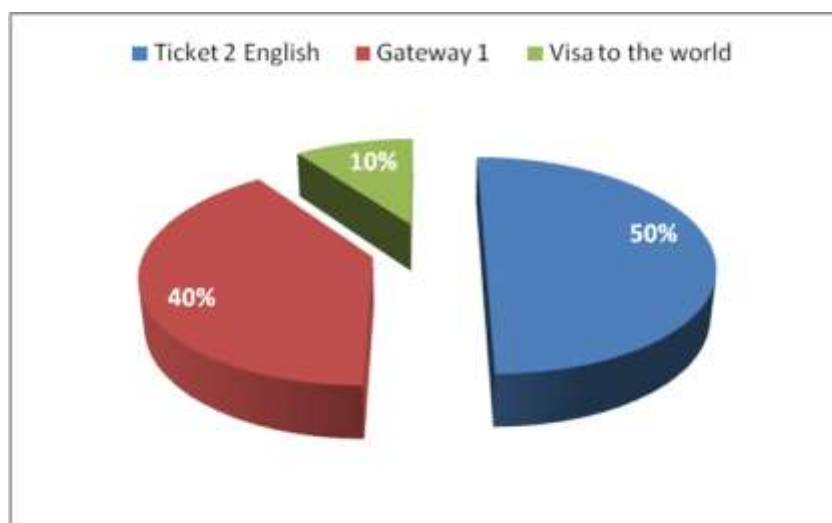
Question 5

Figure 6. What textbooks do you use in your classrooms?

This graph indicates that 50% of participants use Ticket 2 English as their textbook. 40% state that they use Gateway 1, while 10% of respondents use Visa to the World. This means that the majority of high school teachers in this study use Ticket 2 English, whereas the minority of high school teachers use Visa to the World.

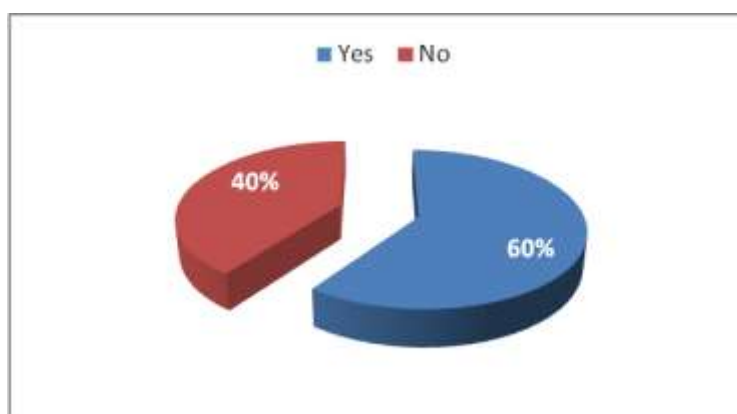*Question 6.* Do the textbooks you use in your classrooms adopt the CBLT approach?

Figure 7: Ticket 2 English

The graph shows that 60% of participants, who use Ticket 2 English, think

that the textbook adopt CBLT, while 40% state that they the textbook they use does not adopt CBLT. This means that the majority of participants who use Ticket 2 English as their textbook think that it adopts CBLT.
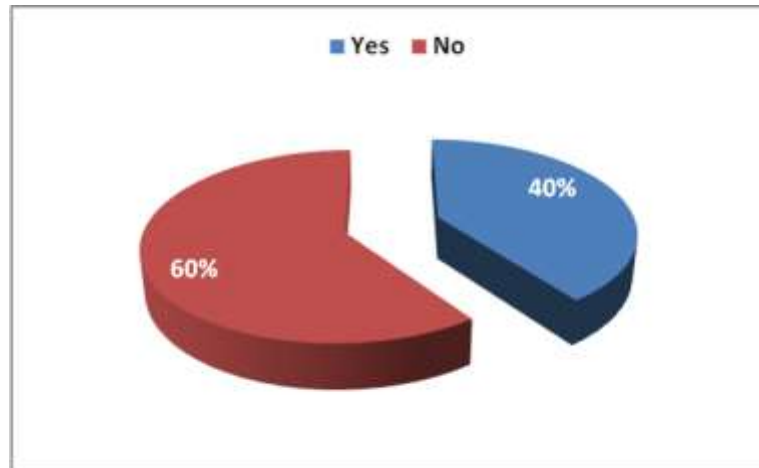

Figure 8. Gateway 1

40% of respondents who use Gateway 1 say that it adopts CBLT, while 60% of them state that it does not adopt CBLT. This implies that the majority think that Gateway 1 does not adopt CBLT.
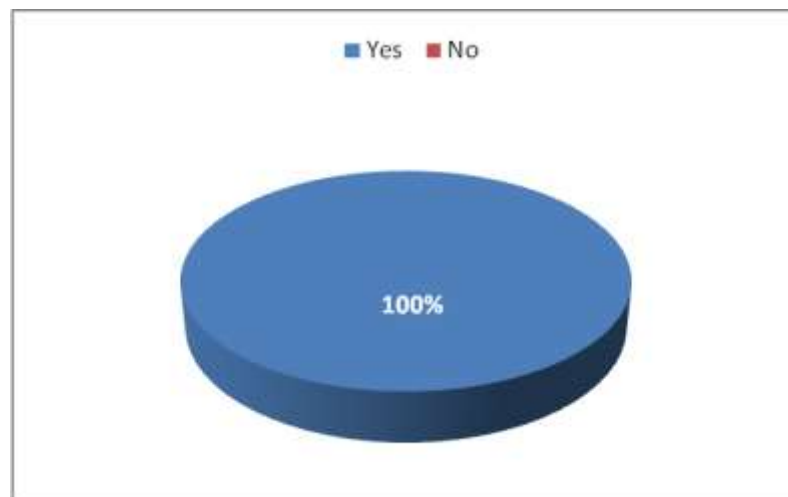

Figure 9. Visa to the World

100 % of participants who use Visa to the World think that CBLT is adopted

in the textbook they use. This means that all of them are aware of the fact that Visa to the World adopts CBLT.
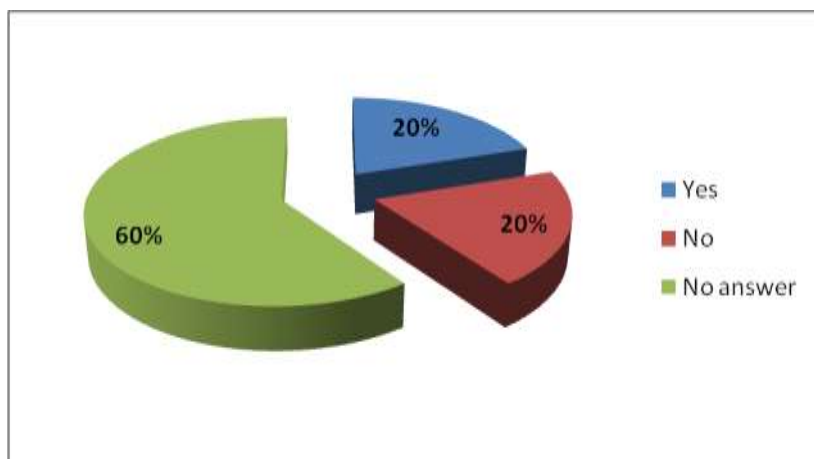
Question 7

Figure 10. Does your ELT inspector/supervisor require that you use CBLT?

From the graph above, one can see that 20% of participants state that their ELT inspectors require that they use CBLT. 20% of respondents said that they were not required to use CBLT by their inspectors. This shows that not all inspectors ask EFL high school teachers to implement CBLT in their classrooms. 60% of participants did not put a tick in the space provided for Yes or No. Indeed, they wrote some comments such as the fact that they 'have never met their inspector until now.' Some of them said that they do not know even their inspectors. For instance, "I haven't had the pleasure of meeting him or her" one participant commented on the question. As inspectors play a significant role in EFL high school teacher in-service training, they should be required to meet EFL high school teachers and raise their awareness of the CBLT approach in ELT.
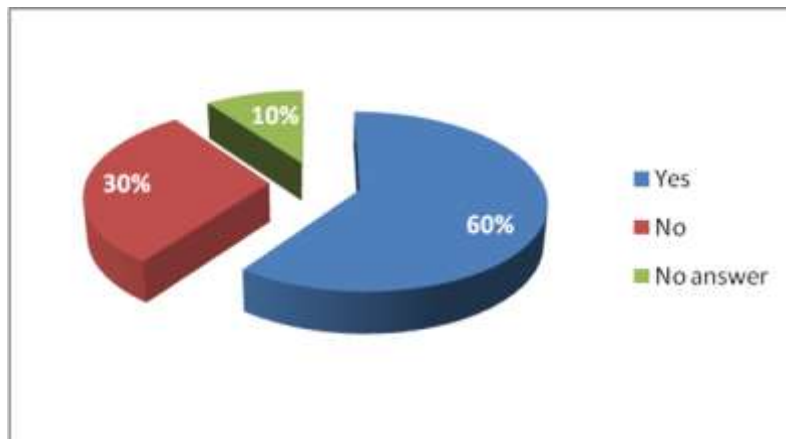
Question 8

Figure 11: Do you think that the implementation of CBLT in your classrooms has had any impact on your students' performance?

As is shown in the graph above, 60% of respondents think the implementation of CBLT in their classrooms has had an impact on their students' performance. 30% of participants say that the implementation of CBLT has had no impact on students' performance. 10% of respondents left the question unanswered for no obvious reason.

EFL high school teachers state that students have become self-learners doing their best to be autonomous and dependent on themselves. What is more, students have become able to use the language effectively in real life situations. This means that students are able to use English outside the classroom. Despite everything mentioned about the impact of CBLT on students' performance, the impact remains limited, according to some participants, because of the difficulties encountered. These difficulties may include time constraints and overcrowded classrooms.
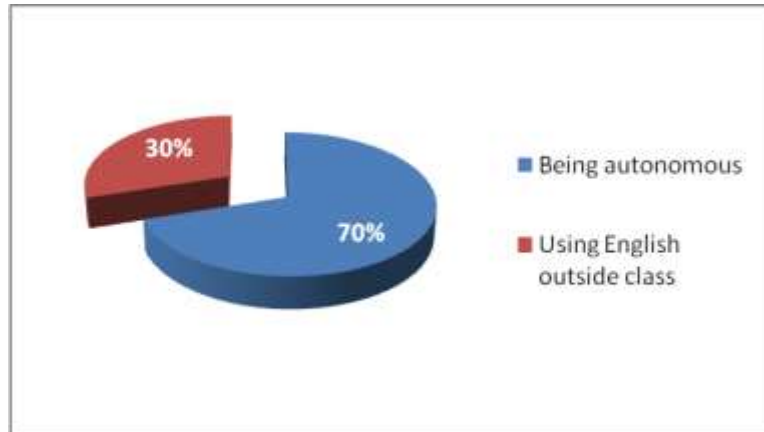
Figure 12: the impact of implementing CBLT on students' performance.

As is shown in the graph above 70% of respondents point out that implementing CBLT in the classroom made students be autonomous, while 30% of participants state that the implementation of CBLT helped students use English outside the classroom.

Question 9. What are the benefits and drawbacks of implementing CBLT in Moroccan classrooms?
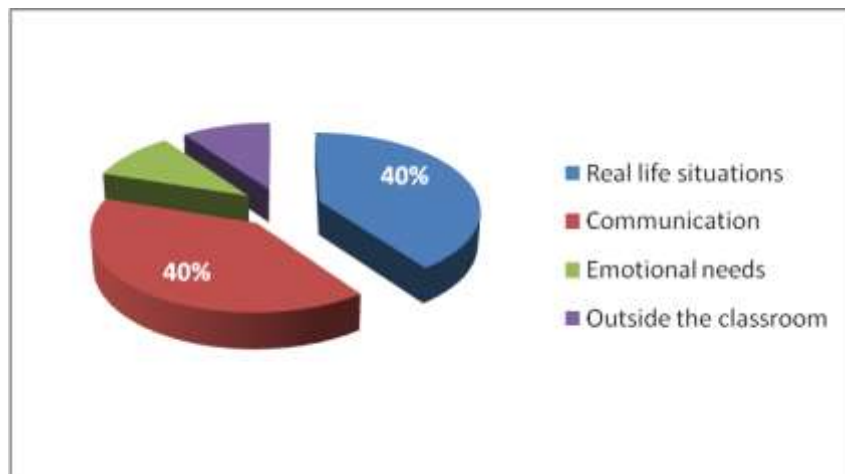

Figure 13. The benefits of implementing CBLT in Moroccan classrooms

The graph above shows that CBLT in Moroccan classrooms has a number of benefits. Indeed, participants agreed on some benefits. These benefits include the fact that CBLT focuses on real life situations that students find

themselves in. Another benefit of CBLT is also communication in the sense that it helps students develop their communicative skills. Emotional needs are considered as a benefit in the sense that CBLT caters for the students' needs in general and the emotional ones in particular such as being self-confidence. One more important benefit of CBLT is that it does not only call for the use of language in the classroom, but also outside the classroom. 40% of participants in this study think that a real life situation such as attending an interview is one benefit of implementing CBLT, while 40% of respondents state that enhancing communicative skills is another benefit. 10% of respondents (EFL high school teachers) state that the benefit of implementing CBLT is that it caters for students' emotional needs.
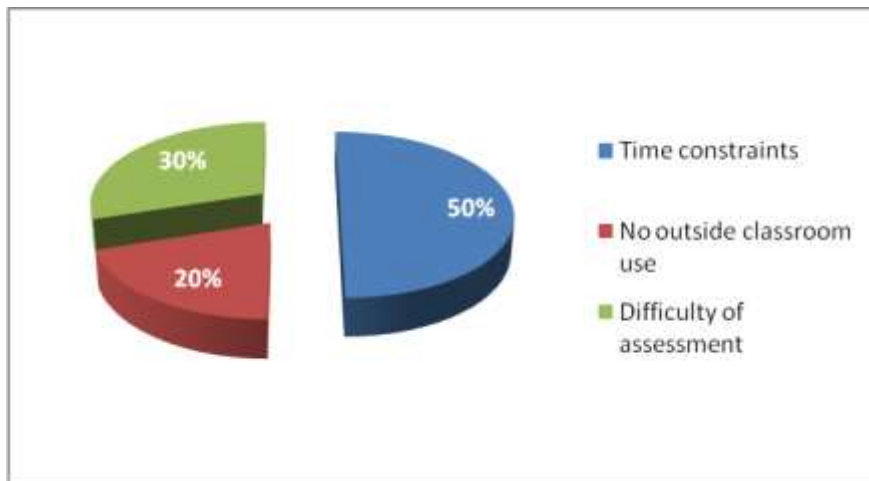

Figure 14: The drawbacks of implementing CBLT in Moroccan classrooms

The drawbacks of implementing CBLT in Moroccan classrooms that participants mentioned are: time constraints, difficulty of assessment and no outside classroom use of the skills and competencies they have learned in the EFL classroom. As is shown in the graph, 50% of EFL high school teachers state that the disadvantage of implementing CBLT is time constraint in the sense that it requires so much time. 30% of respondents say that it is difficult to assess students when implementing CBLT because many principles should be considered, such as taking into account the number of competencies that should be assessed. Moreover, 20% of

participants think that students do not use the competencies they have learned in the classroom in real life situations. In fact, students use the competencies they have learned only inside the EFL classroom. According to EFL high school teachers who took part in this study, CBLT is a challenging process for teachers, students and administrators.

Discussion of Results

In this section, the study's results are discussed in relation to the existing literature that is concerned with CBLT implementation in different countries around the world. The section comprises two subsections, specifically teachers' awareness of CBLT and its implementation in Moroccan high schools as well as challenges of implementing CBLT.

Teachers' Awareness of CBLT and its implementation in Moroccan High schools

Based on the participants' responses, it is worthwhile to mention that EFL high school teachers are aware of CBLT. This aligns with the emphasis of Derseh et al. (2024) on the importance of teachers' awareness in general and of being aware of the purpose of CBLT assessment. Additionally, the respondents seem to have background knowledge about it. This is clear from the definitions each one gave. Most definitions focus on communication and real-life skills as the main points emphasized in CBLT. Most EFL high school teachers stated that they implement CBLT. 90% of participants said that they use CBLT in their classrooms. To use the approach in question, they integrate communicative activities, such as role play with the assistance of authentic materials. Authentic materials help the teacher create situations that are similar to real life ones. This means that Moroccan EFL high school teachers who implement CBLT apply it in a practical way. Similarly, Boukhentache (2020) suggests a practical application of CBLT in the curriculum in Algeria.

Challenges of CBLT Implementation in Moroccan High Schools

EFL high school teachers, who implement CBLT in their classrooms, mentioned that they face many difficulties. Time constraints were considered as one difficulty. They asserted that there is not enough time to implement CBLT successfully. Indeed, Atuhura and Nambi (2024) mention similar challenges in Uganda. The problem of assessment is another difficulty. Indeed, EFL high school teachers find it hard to assess students

using CBLT. Moreover, students' linguistic and learning differences make it challenging for EFL teachers as they have to cater for all students' needs. Another problem is that an overcrowded classroom prevents EFL high school teachers from implementing CBLT successfully. Additionally, lack or absence of materials has a negative impact on the implementation of CBLT. The same challenges are also mentioned by Yen and Thao (2024). Therefore, these challenges are shared by many researchers in different countries.

Conclusion

Teachers' Awareness of CBLT

The first hypothesis of the present study is as follows: There are some EFL teachers in high schools that are aware of CBLT.

EFL high school teachers seem to be cognizant of CBLT even though some were not required to use CBLT in their classrooms. Therefore, one can say that CBLT is widely known among EFL high school teachers. This is implied from the fact that 100% of participants state that they know about CBLT. This result shows that the first hypothesis of the present study is confirmed.

The Implementation of CBLT

The second hypothesis of this study is the following: Some EFL teachers implement CBLT in high schools.

To make sure that EFL high school teachers implement CBLT, they were asked whether the textbooks they use adopt the approach or not. From what has been mentioned, one can say that the second hypothesis of this study is confirmed. Therefore, EFL high school teachers implement CBLT in their classrooms.

Difficulties Encountered When Implementing CBLT

The third hypothesis of the study is as follows: There are a number of difficulties teachers face when implementing CBLT, such as difference in students' learning styles.

Many difficulties are faced by EFL teachers when implementing CBLT. Time constraints, assessment difficulty and student's linguistic and learning differences. There are also overcrowded classrooms and the lack

or absence of materials needed to implement CBLT. What is more, one of the drawbacks of implementing CBLT in the EFL classroom is the fact that not all students use what they have learned in the classroom when they get outside. Despite these difficulties and drawbacks, EFL high school teachers who implement CBLT stated that there are some benefits. These benefits can include the use of situations which are similar to real life ones, the focus on communication as an important aspect of teaching and learning. Based on what has been stated above, it is clear that the third hypothesis of this study is confirmed.

Pedagogical Implications

CBLT should be implemented by all EFL high school teachers due to its importance in the learning and teaching process. Indeed, teachers who do not implement this approach need to be sensitized to its fruitful advantages and positive impact on students. EFL high school teachers should also come up with new ideas in order to face the problems encountered when implementing CBLT. EFL high school teachers need to direct their attention to the outcomes of implementing CBLT, especially that it links classroom experience to the learning of skills that target real-life situations in a fast-changing environment.

Suggestions for research

For further research, several suggestions can be given. As a case in point, future research can tackle the issue of problems encountered when implementing CBLT and provide some solutions to these problems. Another suggestion is that future studies can focus on the impact of CBLT on students' use of English outside the classroom. This means investigating the extent to which students use what they learn in the EFL classroom in real-life situations.

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