The Realism of the Competency Approach Strategy in the Algerian School and Its Challenges from the Perspective of Secondary Education Teachers

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Abstract

This study examines teaching strategies based on a competency approach adopted by the National Committee for Reforming the Algerian Educational System in 2003. This followed a protocol agreement between UNESCO and the Ministry of National Education after the Director-General of UNESCO visited Algeria in February 2001 at the invitation of the President of the Republic. This resulted in the implementation of teaching practices based on this pedagogy at various educational levels.

While the theoretical foundations of competency-based teaching are indeed robust, their practical implementation has encountered significant challenges. This was evident from the views of several secondary school teachers, who stated that implementing this teaching approach over the past two decades has enhanced students' academic performance in qualitative and quantitative terms. However, they also noted that outputs based on previous approaches were of a higher quality than those based on competency-based pedagogy. This disparity is attributed to the difficulties and challenges that teachers have encountered when applying this approach in practice.

To shed light on these difficulties and seek solutions to enhance the quality and quantity of outputs from the Algerian school system, the researcher addressed many aspects that necessitate reconsidering the application methods. This will be elaborated upon in a research paper titled "The Competency Approach: Between Strategy and Reality in the Algerian School: An Empirical Study in Secondary Schools of Constantine'.

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Introduction:

Educational reform is an ongoing process that is subject to evaluation and oversight. The best school is not one that establishes committees for reform, but one in which reform is an integral part of its structure and which continuously engages with its environment and drives it forward.

Based on a profound understanding of development dynamics and the need for improvement, the educational system has sought new methods to enhance performance and productivity. The behavioral school provided the foundation and scientific justification for learning through objectives, based on a meaningful and beneficial framework often summarised as rational management, clearly defined tasks and goals, and systematic methods for implementation and evaluation (assessment measures)[1]. Behavioural schools serve as the scientific basis for teaching through objectives and are characterised by the use of experimental methods derived from the natural sciences. These methods focus on the study of the observable, external behaviour of living organisms — behaviour that can be measured and observed. This approach views psychological phenomena as behaviours that can be observed and measured, and asserts that educational objectives can only be genuine learning goals if they are observable and measurable.

Previously, the Algerian educational system experimented with this pedagogy through its curriculum content and training plans at the level of educational authorities, emphasising the importance of teaching in shaping learners' minds, improving productivity and translating assessment measures.

However, the adoption of this pedagogy has caused several crises in the Algerian educational system, including:[2]

1. The isolation of schools from their economic, social and cultural environments.

2. The transformation of the school into a tool for reinforcing cultural, political and economic disparities.

3. The educational system's weak contributions to creating real conditions for comprehensive societal advancement, along with its poor performance in fostering knowledge accumulation and global integration.

4. The educational system focuses on quantitative aspects at the expense of qualitative ones.

These imbalances necessitate a comprehensive review of the educational system, particularly its foundational principles. In this context, competency-based pedagogy emerges as a modern concept applicable at various levels of educational institutions and in the training domain. This concept considers an individual's adaptation to their natural, social, cultural and economic environment to be one of the main goals[3].

Thus, the competency approach to education is not an independent perspective from the goal-oriented teaching approach. Rather, it is a corrective movement within this pedagogy that aims to overcome criticisms and rectify deviations that have led it to become entrenched in behavioural proceduralism. This results in a conditional reaction that eliminates individuality and distinction, while also excluding innovative thinking[4].

The competency approach aims to place learners at the centre of modern educational philosophy, developing their personalities and making them capable of lifelong learning. This philosophy is based on the principle of 'learning how

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[1]- Mohammad Buallak: Introduction to the Competency-Based Education Approach, Blida, Algeria, Qasr al-Kitab, 1999, p. 49.

[2]- Ministry of National Education:The Yearbook, National Center for Educational Documents, Algeria, 2003.

[3]- Mohammad al-Duraij:Competencies in Education, Casablanca, Morocco, Ramsis Publications, 2000, p. 28.

[4]- Mohammad al-Duraij:Competencies in Education, Casablanca, Morocco, Ramsis Publications, 2000, p. 47.

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to learn'. Furthermore, it enables individuals to acquire values, skills, abilities and competencies in a real and practical way, qualifying them for integration into professional life and allowing them to continue learning and demonstrate excellence when the required conditions and competencies are met. This approach connects individuals' personalities with their ability to adapt to their environment at every educational stage by equipping them with the necessary competencies for success. Consequently, researchers agree that the competency-based teaching approach is founded on cognitive constructivist theory, which was first outlined by Jean Piaget (1890–1980)[1].

This theory interprets learning through the principle of interaction between the self and the environment, emphasising the reciprocal relationship between the knowing self and the object of knowledge. It is also based on several assumptions and hypotheses, including the idea that 'the self is not passive when interacting with the environment; it processes what it receives through understanding, interpretation and perception, adjusting its data to fit its surroundings'[2].

Furthermore, every new learning experience relies on cognitive structures formed from previously acquired structures, contents, and concepts. Jerome Bruner (1915) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), both influenced by Piaget's constructivist theory, believe that "for true learning to occur, the learner must actively participate in the learning process; the learner does not merely receive knowledge but interprets it.[3]"

It is clear that proponents of constructivist theory, led by Piaget, argue that knowledge is not transmitted verbally but must be constructed and reconstructed by the individual learning it. This construction occurs through achieving balance in their cognitive structures, responding to the pressures of the situation and the environment in which learning takes place.

Thus, while we recognise the continued importance of transmitting the knowledge, skills and attitudes of previous generations, we also aspire for all students to acquire the competencies that will enable them to become individuals, citizens and workers who can adapt to new developments and actively participate in their society. In today's world, knowledge forms the core of the social system. The rapid evolution of knowledge and the significant impact of advancements in information and communication technologies on human life necessitate that individuals learn how to perform their roles within a complex social system and continuously renew their knowledge.

In May 2000, the President of the Republic established a National Reform Committee to address these challenges in the educational system. This committee was to consist of 157 members with expertise in education and training. Following a visit by the Director-General of UNESCO to Algeria in February 2001, at the invitation of the President, a protocol agreement was signed between UNESCO and the Ministry of National Education[4].

The Director-General of UNESCO announced: 'The ambitious pace and rapid reforms currently characterising education in Algeria reflect the development of Algerian society and its determination to integrate into a knowledge-based society on the horizon.[5]'

[1]- Dr. Buallak Muhammad and Professor Ben Tunis al-Tahir:Competency Approaches Between Theory and Application in the Algerian Educational System, National Institution of Printing Arts, al-Raghaya Unit, Algeria, 2014, p. 32.

[2]- Dr. Abd al-Karim Gharib:Competency Strategies and Methods of Evaluating Their Quality, Casablanca, Morocco, 2006, pp. 216-217.

[3]- Dr. Fathi Mustafa al-Zayyat:The Psychology of Learning Between Associative and Cognitive Perspectives, Cairo, Dar al-Nashr lil-Jami'at, 1st ed., 1996, p. 37.

[4]- Boubakeur Benbouzid: educational Reform in Algeria: Stakes and Achievements, Dar al-Qasbah Publishing, Algeria, 2009, pp. 25-29.

[5]- Boubakeur Benbouzid:Educational Reform in Algeria: Stakes and Achievements, Dar al-Qasbah Publishing, Algeria, 2009, pp. 27-28.

10. Same reference.

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In July 2002, the National People's Assembly approved a project to reform the education system, with the aim of fundamentally changing it to prepare young people for a new context characterised by civil, social and economic participation[1].

The objective of this educational reform support programme is to enhance the capabilities of Algerian staff in order to improve the quality of education provided. The reform also aims to transform pedagogy and renew curricula and textbooks, which had not been reviewed for over 25 years. It also aims to train educators and expand the use of modern information and communication technologies.

During this period, discussions about the emergence of 'smart schools', distance learning and virtual universities became prevalent, necessitating the integration of scientific and technological tools that are shaping the world today. Thus, the reform included:[2]

Firstly, the field of pedagogy:

- Reform of educational programmes.

Development of a new generation of textbooks.

Use of international coding in the exact and experimental sciences.

- Rehabilitation of excellence in basic mathematics, mathematics techniques and philosophy.

Modification of curricula for Islamic and civic education.

Generalisation of artistic education at all levels.

Strengthening the teaching of the Arabic language.

- Promoting and developing the teaching of Tamazight.

- Introduction of French language instruction in the second year of primary education.

- Introduction of English language instruction in the first year of secondary education.

- Preparation and implementation of a literacy strategy for adults.

Generalisation of the use of new information and communication technologies.

Secondly, establishing a renewed system for training and improving the level of pedagogical and administrative supervision.

- Teachers of primary education will undergo three years of training after obtaining the baccalaureate at teacher training and improvement institutes.

Training teachers for middle and secondary education at higher teacher training schools.

- Training secondary technology teachers at the Higher School for Technical Education.

- Reviving the competitive exam for higher education teaching positions (agrégation).

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[1]- Ministry of National Education:The Yearbook, National Center for Educational Documents, Algeria, 2003.
[2]- Ministry of National Education:The Yearbook, National Center for Educational Documents, Algeria, 2003.

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Developing a national plan to improve and elevate the level of supervision.

- Rehabilitation of educational personnel[1].

Third - Comprehensive Reorganization of the Educational System:

- Gradual generalization of pre-school education for children aged 5 years.

- Reduction of the duration of primary education from 6 to 5 years.

- Extension of the duration of middle education from 3 to 4 years.

- Reorganization of post-compulsory education into three branches as follows:

  - General and technological secondary education.

  - Technical and vocational education and training.

  - Higher education.

- Legal recognition of private sector educational institutions[2].

In brief, these are the most significant structured aspects of the educational reform endorsed by the public authorities at the time. Due to the urgent implementation plan, the reform commenced in September 2003, encompassing various stages and levels of education: primary, middle and secondary[3].

As teaching based on the competency approach forms part of the aforementioned reform, it has been studied by many researchers from various perspectives. For example, Dr Ramadan Khattab and Dr Jallab Mebsout from Mohamed Boudiaf University in M'sila presented a paper on the topic at the Pedagogical Vigilance Centre in 2018, titled 'Why and How to Adopt Competency-Based Pedagogy'. Dr Sabri Hdidane and Dr Sharifa Maadene also explored it in a piece of research titled 'An Introduction to Implementing the Competency Approach in the Context of the New Educational Reform in Algeria'. Professor Ahmed Benani, from the Institute of Arts and Languages at the University Centre of Amin Al-Aqel Haj Moussa Akhmouk in Tamanrasset, discussed it in his work, 'The Competency Approach and Its Prospects for Success in the Algerian Educational System', which was published in the 'Social Horizons' journal (Issue 03, 2019). Researcher Alia Ghazal also examined the topic in her study, 'The Reality of Implementing the Competency Approach: A Field Study in the Wilaya of Touggourt', 2021. Furthermore, researchers Dr Mohamed Boualleg and Professor Ben Tunis Tahar conducted a field study titled 'The Competency Approach: Between Theory and Practice in the Algerian Educational System: National Programmes for Educational and Training Research, 'PNR 20', 2014'.

My approach to the study will be different, and I will aim to answer the following questions:

1. Does the introduction of the competency-based approach in Algerian schools realistically lead to an improvement in the educational process?

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[1]- Boubakeur Benbouzid: Educational Reform in Algeria: Stakes and Achievements, Dar al-Qasbah Publishing, Algeria, 2009, pp. 29-30.

[2]- Dr. Hadidan Sabrina and Professor Ma'dan Sharifa: Introduction to the Application of the Competency Approach in Light of the New Educational Reform in Algeria, Journal of Human and Social Sciences, Special Issue, Conference on Competency-Based Training in Education, 2021, pp. 197-199.

[3]- Mohammad al-Salih Hathroubi: Introduction to Teaching with Competencies, Dar al-Huda for Publishing and Printing, Algeria, 2002, p. 97.

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2. Does competency-based teaching enhance the quality of outputs in Algerian schools?

3. Does competency-based teaching improve students' academic results in Algerian schools?

4. Are teachers able to manage teaching effectively using the competency approach?

5. Can teachers apply evaluation methods according to the competency approach?

6. Is there a clear vision for the methodology of responding according to the competency approach?

7. Why have students resorted to private tutoring since this approach was introduced?

8. Why are remedial measures needed at various educational levels to achieve success?

These questions, among others, will be explored in a field research study titled The Competency Approach: Between Strategy and Reality in Algerian Schools: A Theoretical and Empirical Study of Secondary Schools in Constantine'.

First: educational reforms in Algeria.

Educational reform is commonly associated with concepts such as renewal, change, innovation, development and modernisation. Ahmed Hussein Al-Luqani defines it as 'the examination of the existing educational system, including the educational framework and curricula, through evaluative studies, followed by the initiation of a development process in accordance with the requirements of the current phase and future visions for the educational system'[1].

1. Reasons for educational reform:

The inadequacy of existing programmes to keep pace with scientific and knowledge advancements brought about by modern information and communication technologies.

- New social and individual needs that have emerged alongside societal development.

- Results from evaluative studies regarding curricula.

- The evolution of knowledge and scientific and technological progress.

- The need to integrate new trends in education and training.

2. Stages of Reform After Independence:

A. First stage (1962–1970): characterised by achieving universal schooling at primary level and Arabising its programmes[2].

B. Second stage (1970–1980): Focused on reforming content, emphasising internal education and curricula, and restructuring the system. This resulted in the establishment of the nine-year basic school in 1976[3].

C. Third Stage (1980–1990): This stage was marked by the establishment of the basic school as a foundational institution for nine years, incorporating principles of democracy, free and compulsory education, Arabisation and inclusivity[4].

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[1]- Ministry of National Education:The Yearbook, National Center for Educational Documents, Algeria, 2003.
[2]- Ministry of National Education:The Yearbook, National Center for Educational Documents, Algeria, 2003.
[3]- Lakhdar Zarouk: Techniques of Educational Action and the Competency Approach, Dar Houma, Algeria, 2003, p. 33.
[4]- Khair al-Din Hani:The Competency-Based Teaching Approach, Ibna Printing Press, Algeria, 2005, p. 53.

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D. Fourth Stage (1990–2002): This stage featured attempts to improve and streamline curricula, the introduction of English in basic education, and the emergence of the competency concept within the Algerian system in 2002. The competency approach was implemented from the 2003/2004 academic year onwards[1].

Second: Theoretical Foundations of Competency-Based Education.

1. Philosophical/Educational Foundation:

The philosophy of education provides a framework of reference for all educational policies adopted by society, guiding and organising its educational system. This involves planning educational curricula and pedagogical approaches that are designed to achieve the objectives of specific programmes. Every educational reform should address the challenges of the era and enable social and economic development, allowing individuals/learners to integrate effectively into society and adapt to its pressures and demands.

The competency approach provides a philosophical perspective on various educational trends and the principles underpinning educational reform. The competency approach can be said to place learners at the heart of modern educational philosophy by fostering their personalities and enabling them to learn throughout their lives. This philosophy is based on the principle of 'learning how to learn'. Furthermore, this educational approach provides individuals with the opportunity to acquire values, skills, abilities and competencies in a practical way, qualifying them for integration into professional life and linking their personality with their ability to adapt to external environments at every stage of their education.

2. Psychological foundation:

Many researchers — if not all — believe that the competency-based education approach is based on constructivist cognitive theory, as outlined by Jean Piaget. This theory is based on several assumptions and hypotheses, the most important of which is that the self is active in its interaction with the environment, subjecting what it receives to processes of understanding, interpretation and perception. Furthermore, every new learning experience builds on cognitive structures formed based on previously acquired concepts[2].

While constructivist theory rejects the idea that learning can be explained solely by the stimulus-response relationship, as behaviourism asserts, constructivists argue that an individual's behaviour is governed by their knowledge and cognitive structures, which significantly influence how they deal with situations that give rise to behaviour. Consequently, constructivists assert that the behavioural theory's explanation of learning is inadequate for elucidating how learning occurs. Several key determinants, such as prior knowledge, influence learning by helping individuals engage with educational situations from which knowledge is acquired[3].

3. Economic Foundation:

Technological advancement has clearly led to new human needs, a culture of competition in professional environments and new consumer behaviours. These changes have contributed to the emergence of the concept of 'competency', which has given rise to new training and educational techniques. These changes necessitate competencies that ensure sustainability over time and in different contexts.

Thus, the competency approach has emerged as a pedagogical method in industrialised countries, fundamentally aiming to alter the behaviours of learners and trainers, as well as the management styles of training institutions. This

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[1]- Abd al-Karim Gharib:Competency Strategies and Methods of Evaluating Their Quality, Casablanca, Morocco, al-Najah al-Jadida Printing Press, 2003, p. 17.

[2]- al-Tumi Abd al-Rahman: Competencies: A Systemic Approach, Oujda, Morocco, al-Hilal Publications, 2003, p. 25.

[3]- Mohammad al-Raji:Educational Competencies. Casablanca, Morocco, Ramsis Publications, 2007, p. 79.

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enables individuals to acquire the practical knowledge and abilities needed to optimally utilise and mobilise knowledge in professional contexts, facilitating their integration into professional environments.

The economic foundations of the competency approach can therefore be traced to the following:[1]

- The context of production institutions and consumer demands/quality of production.

- Work organisation methods, such as individual and group training.

- Job instability.

Proactive management involves anticipating developments and future foresight.

Individuals with competencies will inevitably use them to ensure quality performance and production.

Ultimately, the goal of competency-based education is to prepare individuals to perform one or more functions, enabling them to earn a living through an appropriate profession.

Third - The Concept of Competency: Linguistically and Terminologically:

1. Linguistic Definition:

According to the dictionary "Lisan al-Arab al-Muheet": (كفء) means counterpart or equal. The term (كفاءة) is a source derived from the verb (يكفي), meaning to perform a task. When one says 'the man is capable,' it implies he has undertaken the responsibility.[2]"

In the "Matn al-Lugha" dictionary by Ahmed Reda, the verb "kafa" indicates that 'he fulfilled the matter with competency' (كفاءة): he performed it and undertook it; hence, he is capable (كُفاة ج). Competency refers to what satisfies a need and achieves a goal.

From the meanings presented in "Lisan al-Arab" and "Matn al-Lugha," it is clear that the term competency denotes "the ability to perform a certain task.[3]"

However, the second dictionary adds to the meaning of "competency" the aspect of fulfilling needs and achieving goals. Notably, these references agree on giving the term "kuf" the meaning of counterpart or equal, while "kafa" denotes equality. 2. Lexical definition:

A. Definition from the Larousse Encyclopaedia:

'A set of measures, capabilities and specific dispositions that enable individuals to control and use a language in concrete situations.' The authors of this dictionary argue that it is difficult to conduct an empirical study on competency, as its definition can only be established through observing an individual's performance in real situations. Competence, as a quality, is attributed to anyone who has a thorough understanding of a subject or discipline, or who knows their work well and is prepared to perform their job effectively and comprehensively.[4]

B. Definition from Robert's Dictionary:

[1]- Ibn Manzur:The Comprehensive Tongue of the Arabs, Beirut, Volume 5, Dar Lisan al-Arab, 1st ed., word "كفا," 1961.
[2]- Ahmed Reda:The Body of the Arabic Language, Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, Volume 5, "kafi ", 1st ed., 1960.
[3]- Leroux, A.: Geography Through Problems, Paris, 3rd ed., Hartman, 2004.
[4]- Paul Robert: Alphabetical and Analogical Dictionary of the French Language, PUF Publishing, 1970.

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The term 'kuf' signifies the ability to judge something based on in-depth knowledge of a subject. An individual who can perform a task is termed 'kuf', which denotes someone who is knowledgeable and qualified. In the same dictionary, the word 'competency' indicates deep knowledge that grants the right to judge and make decisions, and also refers to capability and quality. The antonyms of 'competency' in Robert's Dictionary are 'incompetence' and 'ignorance'[1].

3. The concept of competency in educational dictionaries:

A. Definition from the Dictionary of Educational Science Terms:

This dictionary does not provide a definition of 'competency' except in relation to the communicative process. According to the authors of this dictionary, communicative competency translates to an individual's ability to use language rules in a social context to achieve their communicative goals with others.

B. Definition from the Encyclopedia of Education and Training:

'It is a characteristic of positive individuals that enables them to demonstrate their ability to perform certain tasks.[2]' The author notes that competencies are diverse, distinguishing between general competencies, also known as transferable competencies, which allow individuals to accomplish various tasks, and specific competencies, which are applicable only in specific situations. Some competencies facilitate learning and problem solving, while others help to establish social relationships and understanding. Competencies can be based on knowledge (savoir-savant), skills (savoir-faire) or behavioural norms (savoir-etre)[3].

C. Definition by François Renal and Alain Régnier:

For these researchers, competency represents "a collection of possible behaviors (affective, cognitive, and psychomotor) that enable an individual to engage in an activity, often considered a complex activity.[4]"

D. Definition by Philippe Perrenoud:

This researcher views competency as "an individual's ability to activate different cognitive resources to face a specific type of situation.[5]" Perrenoud identifies four essential aspects of competency:

1. Competencies are not knowledge or skills or attitudes in themselves, but they integrate and coordinate all these elements.

2. The activation of these resources has meaning only within a specific situation; each educational/learning situation is characterized by its unique features compared to others.

3. The expression of competency involves complex mental processes, including cognitive structures that enable the identification of tasks that suit the proposed situation.

4. Competency is built through training processes and is also developed spontaneously through the daily transitions of practitioners from one situation to another[1].

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[1]- Champy, F. and Others:Encyclopedic Dictionary of Education and Training, Paris, Nathan Publishing, 1994, p. 65.
[2]- Champy, F. and Others:Encyclopedic Dictionary of Education and Training, Paris, Nathan Publishing, 1994, p. 65.
[3]- François Reynal and Alain, R.:Dictionary of Concepts: Key to Pedagogy, Paris, ESF Publishing, 2nd ed., 1997, p. 76.
[4]- al-Tumi Abd al-Rahman, Muluk Muhammad:The Competency Approach: Curriculum Construction and Learning Planning, Oujda, Morocco, al-Hilal Publications, 1st ed., 2003, pp. 73-74.
[5]- al-Tumi Abd al-Rahman, Moulouk Muhammad:The Competency Approach: Curriculum Construction and Learning Planning, Oujda, Morocco, al-Hilal Publications, 1st ed., 2003, p. 24.

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E. Definition by Le Boturff:

In his book "De la compétence," this researcher concludes that competency is the knowledge of good conduct ("Savoir-Faire"). Thus, competency for this researcher equates to an individual's ability to choose the appropriate solution to problems they face. However, good conduct requires knowledge of how to mobilize and utilize acquired knowledge, skills, behaviors, and abilities at the right time and in the right situation to achieve suitable outcomes[2].

F. Definition by Louis Dineau:

"Competency is considered a set of knowledge (Savoirs), practical knowledge (SAVOIRS-Faire), and behavioral knowledge (Savoirs être) that allows for the appropriate performance of a role, function, or activity.[3]"

G. Pierre Gélis's definition:

This researcher defines competency as 'a system of conceptual (mental) and skill-based (scientific) knowledge organised in procedural frameworks that enable individuals to actively and effectively identify and solve tasks or problems within a given context'[4]. This definition highlights the importance of knowledge, while also affirming the need for individuals to use their personalities to solve problems, specifically by intending and purposely solving issues using their competencies.

H. Definition by Xavier Rogiers:

Competency is the potential to implicitly mobilise a cohesive set of resources (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to solve a specific category of situations or problems. According to this definition, someone can be judged as competent not only because they possess a set of achievements and resources, but also when they can effectively mobilise various resources and achievements to solve a specific problem. Therefore, when discussing competency according to Rogiers, it is necessary to consider resources, including knowledge (savoirs) and performance-based knowledge (savoirs faire), for effective conduct. According to this researcher, these resources are based on what learners acquire in school, where resources are the subject of organised learning, whether through traditional methods or problem-based didactic situations that place the learner at the centre. Other resources, such as personal experiences and material tools (images, devices, documents, etc.)[5], also contribute to the mobilisation process.

Based on Xavier Rogiers' definition of competency, we conclude that it necessitates the following:

1. The learner possesses scientific knowledge and methodological skills related to the subject's content.

2. The learner adopts attitudes and perspectives that enable them to exhibit appropriate behaviours towards themselves and their environment.

3. The learner practises and develops their competency by acquiring new knowledge.

From the above, we can conclude that the competency approach is theoretically founded in various fields, including educational philosophy, particularly utilitarian and personality-development philosophies aimed at enabling integration into human society. The approach is also based on psychological foundations, including cognitive and social

[1]- al-Tumi Abd al-Rahman, Moulouk Mohammad:The Competency Approach: Curriculum Construction and Learning Planning, Oujda, Morocco, al-Hilal Publications, 1st ed., 2003, p. 23.
[2]- François Reynal and Alain, R.:Dictionary of Concepts: Key to Pedagogy, Paris, ESF Publishing, 2nd ed., 1997, p. 76.
[3]- Mohammad al-Duraij: Competencies in Education, Casablanca, Morocco, Ramsis Publications, 2000, p. 28.
[4]- Xavier Rogers:An Integration Pedagogy: Competency and Integration of Acquired Knowledge in Teaching, Brussels, De Boeck Publishing, 2000, p. 55.
[5]- Le Gendre, R.: Current Dictionary of Education, Brussels, Eska, De Boeck Publishing, 1993, p. 1184.

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psychological theories developed by Jean Piaget, Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. Additionally, the approach has an economic foundation, emphasising the necessity of equipping individuals to face increasingly complex daily issues due to technological advancement and the spread of competitive and consumerist thinking.

It is clear that the competency approach is also based on the criticisms that researchers have directed at goal-oriented pedagogy.

Through our linguistic and terminological exploration of the concept of competency in dictionaries, we have concluded that competency is the practical expression of an individual's ability to activate different cognitive resources in order to confront specific situations. Thus, it denotes an individual's ability to make sound decisions and select appropriate solutions to problems. However, competency requires individuals to master a system of cognitive and practical skills that allow them to apply these to procedural frameworks, enabling them to identify and solve problematic tasks effectively. While knowledge is essential for competency, so too is the individual's personality, encompassing all its mental, physical, psychological and emotional components, being present in the problematic situation.

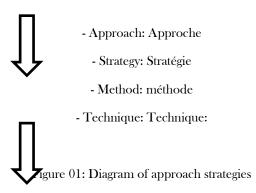### Fourth: Teaching Strategies According to the Competency Approach:

Since the integration of competency-based teaching into the educational system reforms in 2003, as clarified by Framework Law No. 04-08 on 23 January 2008, it is important to note that the competency approach requires initial learning experiences. Xavier Rogiers refers to these as 'Les apprentissages de ressources et/ou ponctuels'.

These consist of the basic knowledge specific to each subject that students learn during each trimester of the academic year. During this period, teachers can use any pedagogical method or technique they deem suitable for facilitating learning, including traditional methods such as rote learning. This information has been gleaned from his contributions to various conferences.

The differences with the previous approach are that competencies are only achieved, realised or implemented through specific situations, the most important of which are problem-based and integrative, referred to as strategies. These are indeed the strategies for achieving competencies, and I will define some related terms within this context.

1. Concept of Approach ('Approche'):

In pedagogical and didactic terms, this refers to a theoretical basis consisting of a set of principles on which curricula, educational strategies, and evaluation strategies are built. Within the educational process, the approach helps determine strategies and practical teaching procedures. The approach relies on a strategy or a number of strategies. It is a theoretical direction, while a strategy is a method of intervention or practice, as stated by Renald Legendre.

- Approach: Approche

- Strategy: Stratégie

- Method: méthode

- Technique: Technique:

Figure 01: Diagram of approach strategies

2. The concept of strategy:

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'Strategie' refers to a well-designed general plan that includes organised procedures aimed at achieving a defined goal. A pedagogical strategy encompasses teaching and learning strategies, noting that the latter pertains to the learner and the former to the teacher's activities relating to the subject and student[1].

A strategy is a clear, goal-oriented plan related to the content of an educational subject. The concept of strategy is a relatively recent addition to the field of education and is more commonly used in military life, where an understanding of the quantitative and qualitative expectations and probabilities required for military tactics is essential[2].

3. Concept of Method: 'méthode'

A method consists of a set of appropriate techniques organised according to a set of rules, aiming to achieve a specific goal[3]. It is a theoretical and practical framework designed to accomplish a particular objective[4].

We conclude that a method is distinguished from others that do not adhere to the same principles by the rules and principles that govern it. According to Legendre, a pedagogical method is a collection of techniques organised in a specific way to achieve one or more educational goals. It employs various techniques and utilises resources to reach these educational objectives.

4. The difference between strategy and method:

A strategy is broader and more comprehensive than a method, and precedes it in the preparation process. This means that the strategy dictates the type of method or methods to be used. According to military terminology, the strategy is akin to tactics, while the method serves as the technique that allows the realisation of tactics.

5. The problematic situation as a strategy for achieving competencies:

The ability to solve problems is one of the most prominent manifestations of human thinking and a component of what we call intelligence. This process is highly regarded in terms of human intelligence and is an essential trait for everyone to face the challenges encountered in daily life, in all its dimensions and forms — especially those related to study and training. This ability is a developmental goal expected of learners, as it is neither coincidental nor hereditary. It is also an integral part of the educational and training process. Therefore, teachers should enhance the educational process to enable all students to face problematic situations in their academic and daily lives calmly and rationally. This will not only help them to confront these situations, but also cultivate their ability to solve current and future academic and life problems[5].

The ability to solve problems has become a characteristic of the outcomes of modern education, necessitated by the spread of the competency approach worldwide over the past two decades. For instance, France adopted this approach in 1991, and Quebec did so in 2000[6].

Thus, the goal of education is to develop competencies and capable individuals rather than individuals filled with information and knowledge without the ability to apply them when needed. A competent individual recognizes the types of problems they encounter, devises a strategy to solve them, follows a plan, and evaluates the results achieved with simplicity. This problem-solving method or problematic situation has become essential for achieving and embodying competencies among students.

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[1]- Mohammad al-Sabir: Teaching Strategy, Casablanca, Morocco, Dar Qurtuba for Printing and Publishing, 2000, pp. 7-8.
[2]- Same reference.
[3]- Same reference.
[4]- Lise Poriers Proulx: Problem Solving, Brussels, De Boeck Publishing, 1999, p. 17.
[5]- Bernard Rey et al.Evaluation of Competencies in School, Brussels, De Boeck Publishing, 2nd ed., 2006, p. 156.
[6]- Le Gendre, R.: Current Dictionary of Education, Brussels, Eska, De Boeck Publishing, 1993, p. 1019.

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This situation is one of the facets through which the competency pedagogy is manifested and realized. It represents a challenge for the student, where the solution is not readily available from the outset, but they can follow specific procedural steps and mobilize their knowledge to reach a solution to the complexity involved.

The situation must be meaningful and significant for the learner, meaning it should stem from their lived reality and simultaneously spark their interest. A student who does not find a topic engaging will not perceive it as a problem, similar to the ignorant individual, as the ignorant person does not face any problems, as expressed by Birehier.

Stimulating interest means motivating the student toward the learning process within the given situation, making the problem their own[1].

This is what it means to place the learner at the center and core of the learning process, making them a participating and active element in building knowledge. The problematic situation is not a ready-made question or a predetermined outcome; rather, it is a constructed situation integrated into the learning process, serving as a means of learning and a strategy based on student participation in knowledge construction. Its distinction lies in being related to self-formation, characterized by dynamism and placing the student at the heart of the problem, facing barriers to overcome, starting from raising questions to destabilizing representations and formulating explanatory hypotheses.

The problematic situation is complex, requiring more than one action or procedure. It is not unfamiliar to students; rather, it is significant to them based on their strategies, skills and abilities, as well as their raw knowledge and how they apply it to find solutions[2].

Legendre distinguishes between the 'puzzle' (enigme) problematic situation, which confuses the learner, and the 'necessary' (crise) problematic situation, which the learner must overcome. Mirieu considers it a new representation of the modern, competency-based educational process[3].

The problematic situation enables the development of competencies and marks the beginning of the educational process. It is one of the pillars of the competency approach. If achieving competency requires activity, then this activity must occur within the context of the problematic situation, establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the existence of each is justified by the other.

A. Characteristics of the problematic situation, according to Jean-Pierre Astolfi:

1. The problematic situation is organised around a clearly defined problem that students must overcome, either collectively or individually.

2. It revolves around a real-life issue, enabling students to study and understand its various aspects.

3. The situation includes a puzzle that engages learners and stimulates their desire to solve it, prompting them to make every effort to decipher it.

4. Solutions to the problem are not readily accessible to students from the outset, encouraging them to engage in individual or collective activity to find a solution.

5. The problematic situation is a challenging scenario that requires learners to draw on their diverse prior knowledge and understanding to devise a solution.

6. It is aligned with the student's level so as not to become a source of discouragement.

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[1]- Abd al-Rahim al-Haroushi: Pedagogy of Competencies, Paris, Nathan Publishing, 2002, p. 119.
[2]- PH. Mirieu:Yes, but How, Paris, 17th ed.; ESF Publisher, 2007, p. 98.
[3]- G. De Vecchi and N.C. Magnaldi:Living Real Problems, Paris, Hachette Publishing, 2002, p. 33.

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7. The problematic situation enables learners to anticipate outcomes, construct hypotheses and plans, and guide the search for a solution.

B. Conditions required for the problematic situation

According to Gérard de Vecchi and Nicole Gramona Magaldi:

Numerous educational and curricular writings provide examples of problematic situations, which are often not truly representative. They may be open-ended problems that do not always serve as effective educational situations for building competencies. To avoid these errors, De Vecchi and Magaldi have defined the following conditions:

1. This situation is problematic and should be directed towards students of a specific level. It will not be suitable for students who are younger or older than this level.

2. The situation must be significant and meaningful to the learner and address their concerns; otherwise, its purpose is lost.

3. It should present an obstacle or puzzle that can be overcome and solved through various activities undertaken by the student based on given instructions.

4. The situation must stimulate students' curiosity and motivation, and encourage them to ask questions.

5. It should be a complex, reality-based scenario with multiple acceptable answers and various possible solutions.

6. The situation should lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, such as a concept, term, law, rule or competency[1].

C. Elements and components of the problematic situation:

The problematic situation consists of essential elements, which are:

A. Support:

Support includes the material elements provided to learners. These are:

- Context: This refers to the environment in which the competency is practised, which may be familial, professional, social or political.

Information, also called resources, includes all the data that the learner will use during the task, such as cognitive information, language systems, rules and concepts.

B. Task:

The task refers to what is required of the learner. Ideally, the task will contain questions that allow the learner to express their opinion and take the initiative. In problem-based learning, the concept of the task is central to the extent that Rogers speaks of the complex task as a synonym for the problematic situation.

C. Instructions:

These consist of a set of guidelines provided to the learner to assist them in performing their task, such as using a dictionary, adhering to a specific number of lines, employing examples, etc.

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[1]- Le Gendre, R.:Current Dictionary of Education, Brussels, Eska, De Boeck Publishing, 1993, p. 212.

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D. Functions of the Problematic Situation:

Several key educational functions of the problematic situation can be identified:

1. Didactic Function:

This involves building the knowledge that the student acquires through their active engagement in the learning process by confronting a situation without having the solution from the start, whether in a collective activity where students assist each other and express their viewpoints, or in an individual activity.

2. Integrative function:

One of the defining features of competencies is their ability to facilitate the integration of learning. Some refer to competency pedagogy as integrative pedagogy; this is Rogers' solution. Competency is not just knowledge or ability, but the application of both to solve a given problem. Integration refers to an individual's ability to activate and utilise their diverse knowledge and psychological capacities from various subjects to solve complex situations[1].

It also represents the process learners undergo when they enrich their prior knowledge with new information, linking previous materials without discarding them and restructuring them according to their internal representations and frameworks. Learners then apply this knowledge to new situations for effective processing[2].

Thus, integration is not a cumulative situation, but rather an ongoing process of construction and reconstruction aimed at developing competencies.

3. Assessment function:

According to experts (Chabot, Xavier Rogiers and André), problem-based learning is the best framework for measuring a learner's ability to solve problems and navigate complex situations by applying learning in various contexts. Success in solving new problems, especially those similar to previous ones belonging to the same category or family of situations, serves as a definitive indicator of competency.

6. Integrative Situation as a Strategy for Achieving Competency:

The integrative situation (Situation d'Intégration) is one way of operationalising competencies. It is a pedagogical methodology that integrates knowledge from different subjects by gathering and merging related or diverse learning content to solve a problem, study a topic or develop a skill[3].

This pedagogy aims to mobilise and organise the learner's diverse knowledge for use in complex and intricate situations, known as integrative situations[4]. An integrative situation requires a variety of theoretical and practical preliminary knowledge and a complex, intricate situation that requires the learner to find a solution, mobilising the knowledge they believe will help them reach it. Integration always occurs within a problem situation and is an internal, individual process. No one can integrate on behalf of another, but they can assist and guide. The integration itself must occur personally.

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[1]- Xavier Rogers: Practical Integration of Competencies and Pedagogical Integration, Brussels, De Boeck Publishing, 2010, p. 39.

[2]- Le Gendre, R.: Current Dictionary of Education, Brussels, Eska, De Boeck Publishing, 1993, p. 970.

[3]- Same reference as above, p. 736.

[4]- Xavier Rogers: Practical Integration of Competencies and Pedagogical Integration, Brussels, De Boeck Publishing, 2010, p. 245.

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In this context, teachers can provide exercises, suggest summaries or refer to situations. They can also propose scenarios requiring solutions, but cannot integrate on behalf of the learner, who must perform the integration themselves[1].

Fifth - Educational Assessment and Its Place in the Competency Approach:

Educational assessment is closely linked to educational objectives, as it encompasses the processes through which one can determine the extent to which the objectives of the educational process have been achieved over a specific educational period, as well as what has been accomplished and what has not.

Assessment is more comprehensive than measurement, as it utilizes measurement tools such as psychological and achievement tests, along with other informal means like observations, interviews, records, and cards. Thus, educational assessment becomes "an educational process carried out periodically by the educator to identify strengths to reinforce and weaknesses to address.[2]"

This process is not limited to students' academic results; it also includes all components of the educational process, such as teacher effectiveness, curricula, teaching methods, and instructional materials[3].

From this, we conclude that educational assessment is a comprehensive educational process, primarily aimed at judging the components of the educational process. It is an indispensable tool for any serious educational system focused on ensuring the achievement of its objectives and its integrity.

Philippe Perrenoud states regarding competency assessment: "No one can claim that providing learners with knowledge alone is sufficient to enable them to perform a profession or task. Performing any job or task requires mastering abilities and competencies that allow individuals to mobilize their knowledge and apply it in professional situations or to solve problems requiring a solution.[4]"

Here, we see that presenting knowledge to learners as a final product (Produit-Fini) to be memorized and recalled during exams does not prepare them for life, nor does it enable them to discover the importance of knowledge in practical life. However, what we observe is that many teaching methods in our schools have not yet reached the levels that allow learners to discover the second nature of knowledge—this nature being the recognition of knowledge as a means rather than an end, aimed at discovering the relationship between school knowledge and its various practical applications.

Thus, assessment in the competency approach is defined by the following points:

- Collecting data using assessment tools to determine the learner's ability to mobilize school knowledge and apply it to the required tasks.

- Gathering data to assess the learner's development of cognitive, psychological, motor, and emotional functions and their transfer to practical fields.

- Collecting data on the learner's ability to learn how to learn and to think.

[1]- Lakhal Lakhdar:Fundamentals of Teaching with Competencies, Dyar al-Maghrib, al-Nour Printing Press, 2009, p. 186.
[2]- Lakhal Lakhdar: Fundamentals of Teaching with Competencies, Dyar al-Maghrib, al-Nour Printing Press, 2009, p. 195.
[3]- Philippe Perrenoud, translated by Abd al-Karim Gharib and al-Hassan Bouchaklaoui:Building Competencies, Casablanca, Morocco, al-Najah al-Jadida Printing Press, 2004, p. 138.
[4]- Mohammad Buallak:Assessment According to the Competency Approach*, Journal of Studies, Amar Thaliji University, al-Aghwat, Algeria, 2006, p. 125.

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- Discovering the relationship between school knowledge and its various applications.

Therefore, three types of assessment are outlined:

1. Diagnostic Assessment:

Conducted at the beginning of the educational process, aimed at identifying the baseline competencies of students before moving on to subsequent learning.

2. Formative Assessment:

This should enable the learner to understand their progress in acquiring the desired competency, identify the types of difficulties encountered, and gauge their control over the gradual processes constituting the learning unit—whether concerning knowledge or performance. Its goal is to assist students in learning, specifically developing the competencies outlined in the curriculum.

3. Summative or Certifying Assessment:

This is a procedure aimed at judging the degree of learning achieved according to the program's objectives, relying on methodological procedures that facilitate appropriate decisions regarding the learner's progression to the next level or recognition of their competencies in a specific area ("certificate"). It can also be referred to as certifying assessment, as it allows us to determine whether students have truly acquired the desired competencies.

Sixth - Practical Challenges of the Competency Approach:

Through the survey conducted in high schools directed at secondary education teachers, and based on my participatory observation as a guidance and counseling consultant for a quarter of a century in various high schools, along with the results of studies and research I supervised, I arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Lack of Training for Secondary Education Teachers: There is insufficient training for secondary education teachers in the competency approach.

2. Ineffectiveness of Training Courses: The training courses have not been effective, as the adoption of this approach remains fraught with ambiguity and deficiencies, while the scientific content presented in the training was not at the required level and was presented in a boring manner (60%).

3. Inadequate Curriculum Content: The content of the current educational curricula does not align with the actual level of students.

4. Need for Adjustments in Teaching Hours: There is a necessity to modify the teaching hours and the number of lessons and units included, by eliminating some lessons and units that do not serve the curriculum and lead to its overload, exceeding the educational level of students, while also reducing the hours that lead to boredom and excessive fatigue.

5. Insufficient educational resources:

The current educational resources are not fit for purpose when it comes to delivering lessons based on the competency approach.

6. Lack of educational tools: There is a shortage of tools such as computer equipment, laboratories, workshops and language teaching labs equipped with audiovisual materials, projectors, etc., which would facilitate the delivery of

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lessons using active pedagogical approaches such as integrative pedagogy, project-based learning, error-based pedagogy, problem-solving pedagogy and play pedagogy.

7. Non-functional classrooms:

Classrooms are not functional. They require modifications, such as changing the arrangement of desks and varying seating styles from time to time.

8. Overcrowding in classrooms: Overcrowding prevents teachers from delivering lessons using the competency approach or considering individual differences, which leads to reduced comprehension and understanding among students. A prime example can be seen in the high schools located in the new city of Ali Mengli.

9. Lack of parental cooperation: Some parents do not cooperate with teachers in resolving issues affecting their children (55%).

10. Economic and social support:

Most teachers agreed that adopting the competency approach requires parents to have a good level of economic, social and cultural support in order to provide the necessary assistance for their children to achieve the desired academic performance. Unfortunately, this is not available to a significant proportion of parents.

11. Implementation issues: Despite the existence of evaluation networks based on the competency approach, its implementation is plagued by many imbalances, the most significant of which are:

- Most teachers expressed that continuous assessment is ineffective in calculating students' grades, as it can inflate grades or lead to unfairness due to subjective criteria from some teachers, based on my participation in departmental councils over many years.

- Most teachers noted that the evaluation of projects for scientific subjects and the reading score for literary subjects are beneficial for students in calculating their grades.

- Most teachers indicated that the current assessment methods lead to grade inflation for students (65%).

- Many teachers neglect diagnostic assessment due to time constraints and the large number of lessons and educational units in the curriculum (70%).

- Most teachers reported that constructing test questions using the competency approach remains unclear (55%).

- Most teachers believe that students still do not have a clear understanding of how to respond according to the competency approach (60%).

- Many teachers indicated that educational interventions improve students' academic results; however, the density of programs and teaching hours prevents them from applying it effectively (75%).

Most teachers believe that incorporating recovery strategies at all levels of education improves students' academic results in terms of both quantity and quality (70%).

- A majority of teachers confirmed that recovery strategies lead to a greater number of underperforming students succeeding (80%).

- Most teachers did not support the idea of incorporating recovery strategies in secondary education.

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- Many teachers attributed the lack of comprehension and low performance among students to the adoption of the competency approach despite its shortcomings (70%).

Most teachers clarified that students' reliance on private tutoring throughout the week is due to foundational weaknesses resulting from educational reforms being implemented without adequate preparation (60%).

- Most teachers indicated that the competency approach has not been successful in practice.

- Many teachers confirmed that the number of students achieving passing grades has increased since the implementation of competency-based teaching.

- Most teachers stated that graduates produced under the competency approach are no better than those produced under previous approaches (55%).

- Most teachers expressed dissatisfaction with competency-based teaching (55%).

- Many teachers confirmed that the theoretical framework of the competency approach contains valuable scientific theories and ideas, but its practical application has been unsuccessful for the aforementioned reasons (65%).

Seventh - Suggestions to Overcome the Practical Challenges of the Competency Approach:

1. Training for Educational Inspectors: It is essential to train educational inspectors (secondary education inspectors) in the competency approach so that they can, in turn, train secondary education teachers in this teaching method.

2. Reviewing Curriculum Content:

There is a need to reconsider the content of the current educational curricula across various subjects at the secondary education level.

3. Adjusting Educational Units and Lessons: Modifications are necessary regarding educational units and lessons due to the density of programs and their mismatch with the allotted teaching hours at the secondary level.

4. Providing Necessary Resources:

It is crucial to provide the necessary material resources to implement this approach effectively in practice.

5. Addressing Overcrowding: Solutions must be found for the issue of overcrowding, as it poses a significant barrier to applying the competency approach, which requires a much smaller class size. Currently, we are teaching an average of 45 students per classroom.

6. Improving Parents' Socioeconomic Status: Enhancing the economic, social, and cultural level of parents is necessary to enable them to assist their children in achieving the required academic performance through this approach.

7. Updating Assessment Networks:

The currently adopted educational assessment networks need to be modified and updated to ensure fairness for students.

8. Training teachers on assessment implementation:

It is imperative to provide teachers with training on how to implement assessment networks, in order to prevent subjective assessment from overshadowing objective evaluation.

9. Providing students with training on answering methodologies:

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Students should benefit from training in answering methodologies across various subjects to clarify their understanding, as there is still some confusion and ambiguity.

10. Eliminating recovery strategies:

Recovery strategies should be abolished as they are a waste of time and effort and improve academic results in terms of quantity rather than quality.

11. Involving Educational Researchers in Reforms:

Educational researchers should be involved in reforms undertaken by the education system. While the theoretical proposal of this approach was sound, most teachers have confirmed that its practical application has been unsuccessful and has faced numerous obstacles over the past twenty years.

Conclusion:

We conclude that the competency approach is rich and ambitious in its theoretical and strategic aspects. However, its implementation in practice reveals significant challenges imposed by this approach, representing a development towards the flourishing and advancement of the educational system.

This necessitates serious and continuous training for teachers and inspectors to keep pace with the approach's demands, as well as the renewal, improvement and updating of educational assessment methods to make them more effective and efficient. Additionally, it is essential to update inspectors' and teachers' knowledge of how to realise the set goals and translate them into competencies manifested in graduates' characteristics. This fosters self-directed learning among students and continuous interaction with all components of the educational process.

For the implemented modifications to be effective within the educational field, learners — students — must always be at the centre of the educational process, taking into account their needs and the nature of the society in which they were raised and its requirements.

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