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Promoting Learner Autonomy under the Competency Based Approach Implemented in the Algerian High School EFL Textbooks: Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

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ABSTRACT

The aim behind implementing the Competency Based Approach (CBA) in education is to promote the learners' autonomous and self-directed learning strategies and strengthen the learners' mental and intellectual skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This research aims at investigating the effectiveness of this approach in EFL teaching practices in inspiring and motivating Algerian high school EFL learner autonomy. Data were collected through a teachers' questionnaire. The obtained results showed that the Algerian high school educational context does not adequately encourage the application of the CBA principles and the achievement of its goals. Teachers claimed that most high schools do not provide the necessary facilities and equipment to present their lessons according to the CBA framework. They also stated that the EFL curriculum and textbook materials do not reflect the CBA pedagogy and that the CBA efficiency depends on the fruitfulness of the text book teaching materials. Besides, they confirmed that high school EFL textbook materials do not promote learner autonomy; consequently, the Algerian high school educational context of the CBA pedagogy do not promote learner autonomy. This study recommends new reforms in the EFL curriculum, syllabus design, textbooks' teaching/learning materials and teaching methods to enhance and boost learner autonomy through the CBA.

Keywords: Competency Based Approach, learner autonomy, textbook.

INTRODUCTION

English is taught as a foreign language in Algeria. It is introduced to cope with the world and the scientific and technological development and meet the 21st century needs and requirements. However, there is an incongruous relationship between ambition and achievements. The EFL programs did not lead to satisfactory output and learning outcomes. Therefore, the Algerian Ministry of National Education tried to develop and improve the Algerian EFL educational system through adopting the Competency Based Approach (CBA) in 2003. It trained teachers and revised and adapted both the EFL curricula and textbook materials to meet the CBA principles; but, though the government made reforms in its educational system, there are still weaknesses which do not assist to accomplish the CBA goals and principles and promote learner autonomy. This approach has been implemented in Algeria for 19 years without achieving its main goals and principles; therefore, it's high time it reconsidered the educational situation and look for the reasons behind this failure. Is it because of the inadequate training of EFL teachers to present textbook materials according to the CBA principles? Is it because EFL textbook materials do not help teachers to raise the learners' highest levels of thinking and foster their autonomous learning and critical thinking? Or is it because the government does not provide EFL teachers with the necessary pedagogical materials and equipment to foster learners' self-directed learning? It's high time the Algerian authorities found solutions and improve the Algerian educational system to meet the CBA principles and prepare and motivate learners to take charge over their learning inside and outside their classes and thus making critical thinkers who are not easily manipulated.

The CBA is a learner-centred approach which aims at reinforcing and developing the learner responsibility and autonomy in the teaching/ learning process (Errey&Schollaert, 2005). Textbooks are the main source of language learning and teaching programs (Richards, 2001). Nunan (1997) and Reiders (2010) investigated to what extent textbooks promote learner autonomy and found that textbooks provide limited opportunities for students to practise and do not really encourage learner autonomy. Accordingly, if textbook materials lack the necessary supporting features that help teachers to apply the CBA principles, these latter will not promote learner autonomy.

Khaerudin and Chik (2021) argued that the Indonesian textbooks inefficiently support and develop learner autonomy; Kadi (2018) and Gherbia (2020) improved that learner autonomy is not adequately met in the Algerian middle school textbooks; however, though it is not actually perceived in learners' performance, Mezhoud (2020) claimed that the Algerian third year high school textbook "New Prospect" largely acts in accordance with to the CBA principles.

Therefore, this work attempts to investigate the Algerian EFL high school teaching context challenges that hinder autonomous learning. It approves that the ways in which the CBA is put into practice in Algerian high schools do not encourage the development of learner autonomy; they do not help learners to be equipped with the necessary skills and competences to adapt with the quick development of science and technology. It seeks to highlight the importance of revising and adapting EFL textbook materials and providing the necessary tools and equipment that may help teachers to achieve the CBA goals and foster learner autonomy.

In view of this, this research discusses the ineffectiveness of the Algerian CBA practices in developing learner autonomy in the Algerian high school EFL teaching/learning process through investigating the following research questions:

1. Are Algerian high school EFL teachers aware of the CBA principals and apply them in their classes?
2. Are the CBA assumptions reflected in the Algerian high school EFL textbooks?
3. Do Algerian high schools provide EFL teachers with facilities and equipment that serve the CBA application?
4. Does the CBA framework offered in the Algerian high school textbooks promote learner autonomy?

2. The Competency Based Approach

The Competency Based Approach is not a new concept. It was first introduced in the United States of America in the late 1960s and then it was developed to be used in its professional educational programs in 1970s. It was adopted by the United Kingdom, Germany and other countries in the 1980s, in

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Australia in the 1990s, and in Algeria in 2003. It was initiated from the behaviourist models of human psychology during the 1950s.

The Competency Based Approach is used as an educational strategy that focuses on the learning outcomes and achievement without considering the time and efforts needed to accomplish them (Nickse, 1981). It is concerned with the measurable and applied knowledge, skills and abilities and incorporates teachers' instructions which intend to foster deeper and broader understanding (Chelli, 2010). In other words, it places emphases on the learners' mastery of the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities that enable them to behave and interact, accordingly, in real life situations outside their schools. It is interested in competence and competency. Competence is an internal and external system of mental structures and abilities which includes knowledge, cognitive skills and social behavioural components; for example, attitudes and emotions needed for an effective completion of an activity in a particular context (DeSeCo, in Chelli, 2010); however, competency is described as

a set of behaviours based on the effective mobilization of a range of resources. The set of behaviours refers to the capacity to use appropriately a variety of resources both internal and external, in particular learning acquired in school or in everyday life. The concept of resources refers not only to everything that students have learned at school, but also to their experiences, skills, interests, etc...Students may rely on many resources, such as their classmates, their teacher, documentation... (The Quebec Education Programme, p. 4, quoted in Chelli, 2010)

In view of that, DeSeCo (2002; quoted in Labanova and Shunin, 2008, pp. 54-75) distinguished six key competencies:

- **Autonomous competence:** It is related to the ability to process and to transfer knowledge as well as the ability to construct knowledge and judgments.

-Interactive competence: It involves the ability to use communicative tools and personal resources in an effective way in order to keep up with the modern requirements of the society.

-Social competence: It is the ability of the learner to integrate and to function effectively and independently within complex socially heterogeneous groups.

-Linguistic competence: It includes grammatical, lexical, semantic, phonological, and orthographic competences.

-Strategic competence: It is a system of knowledge and skills that help the learner to solve unexpected situations (communicative problems).

-Pragmatic competence: It involves the knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language's linguistic resources.

Competency-based education emphasises on the learning outcomes. It seeks to meet what the learners are expected to do instead of what they are expected to learn. It represents an educational movement that supports defining educational goals in outlined measurable descriptions of knowledge, skills and behaviours students should acquire at the end of a course of study (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Moreover, CBA's stresses the importance of providing learners and teachers with supports and facilities to expand learning opportunities and achieve the learning objectives; therefore, adequate learning/teaching resources and equipment (computer laboratories, data shows, videos, Internet daily access, etc.) become necessary in the teaching/ learning process. Nonetheless, though the CBA is adopted in many countries and schools, these necessary resources are missing or not adequately provided. Consequently, teachers and learners meet daily hindrances in the teaching/ learning process (Hauck & Jackson, 2005)

3. Autonomy

The term "autonomy" is derived from the Greek word "Autonomia", "auto" means "self" and "nomous" means "law"; so, autonomy means "self-law". Autonomy is the independence of the learners to decide about their own learning materials and strategies that may help them to meet their needs. It is "the capacity to take control of one's own learning" (Benson, 2001, p.47). It is

the responsibility of the learner to choose what and how to learn and in which circumstances and select the learning materials they need without the contribution of any teacher or institution (Dickinson, 1987). In short, the term autonomy can be detected in five situations (Benson & Voller, 1997, p. 2):

- for situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

In other words, autonomy can be explained as the self-rearrangement of the learners' learning process outside the schools and institutions.

However, the term "learner autonomy" refers to the learners' ability to make choices about their learning process. It is "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning--a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991, p. 4). Moreover, an autonomous learner is the one who can independently select aims and put goals; choose learning materials, methods, tasks and exercises and set the norms of evaluation (ibid).

4. Textbooks

Textbooks are collections of teaching/learning materials designed to increase the learners' knowledge and experience in the teaching/learning process. They are resources to achieve the learning aims and objectives in keeping with the learners' needs (Cunningsworth, 1995). "The textbook is an almost universal element of teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aids projects have been set up to produce them in countries... No teaching/learning situation; it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook" (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994, p.135). In short, textbooks afford the basic course materials required in the teaching/learning process.

5. Methodology

To explore the research questions, a descriptive analytical research method is used and a teachers' questionnaire is employed as a gathering data tool. Twenty Algerian high school EFL teachers were randomly selected to

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participate in the present research. The questionnaire is arranged in three sections: Section one deals with general information (two questions), section two tackles the CBA framework in the Algerian context (6 questions) and section three is devoted to textbook materials and learner autonomy (9 questions).

6. Data Analysis

6.1. Section One: General Information

The first section of the questionnaire congregates general information about the participants (gender and years of experience in the field).

Table one below represents the participants' gender.

Table 1.Teachers' Gender

Gender	Males	08	40%
	Females	12	60%
Total		20	100%

As indicated in table one above, the majority of teachers participated in the study are females (60%) and only 40% are males.

The results obtained concerning the participants teaching experience are presented in table two below.

Table 2. Teachers' Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	0-5 years	5-10 years	10-20 years	More than 20 years	Total
Number of teachers	5	4	7	4	20
Percentage	25%	20%	35%	20%	100%

Table two shows that 35% of teachers had a teaching experience between 10-20 years, 25% had less teaching experience (less than five years), 20% had a teaching experience between 5-10 years, and the last 20% of teachers had a teaching experience more than twenty years. These results indicate that most of the teachers participated in the questionnaire have a good experience in teaching. They are aware of the CBA principles and their

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application in the Algerian EFL teaching situations, as they experienced textbook teaching materials and their effectiveness on the learner autonomy.

6.2. Section Two: The CBA Framework in the Algerian Context

Section tow of the questionnaire is devoted to investigate the application of the CBA in the Algerian high school education.

Question 3: Are you aware of the CBA principles?

Table 3. Teachers' Awareness of the CBA Principles

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	16	4	20
Percentage	80%	20%	100%

Table three demonstrated that the majority of teachers (80%) believed that they are aware of the CBA principles and 20% of them claimed that they are not. This result intends that some teachers were not adequately trained and prepared to teach English according to the CBA framework. That is, EFL teachers need to be well-trained about the CBA concepts and practices to be able to achieve its aims and objectives in their classrooms' environment.

Question 4: Do you employ the CBA in teaching English?

Table 4. Teachers' Application of the CBA in Teaching English

Option	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Total
Teachers	4	10	5	1	20
Percentage	20%	50%	25%	5%	100%

According to table four above, teachers' practices in the framework of the CBA are not the same. 50% of teachers claimed they often employed the CBA in their classes, 25% of them claimed they sometimes did, 20% claimed they always did and 5% stated that they rarely use this approach. These results can be explained by either the inappropriateness of presenting some lessons according to the CBA pedagogy or by the challenges and issues EFL teachers

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face while adopting the CBA principles in their teaching practices such as the crowded classes and the lack of equipment in some high schools.

Question 5: Is the effectiveness of the CBA depending on the teaching/ learning materials?

Table 5. Teachers' Attitudes towards the Accordance of the Teaching/ Learning Materials and the CBA Efficiency

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	17	3	20
Percentage	85%	15%	100%

According to the results illustrated in table five above, teachers had different attitudes towards the accordance of the teaching/ learning materials and the efficacy of the CBA in the teaching/ learning process. 80% of teachers agreed that the teaching/ learning materials used in EFL classes decide the effectiveness of the CBA in the teaching/learning process; however, 15% of them did not share the same opinion. Consequently, it can be concluded that the efficiency of the CBA in the teaching/ learning process counts on the teaching/ learning materials used by EFL teachers.

Question 6: Are the CBA assumptions and principles reflected in the Algerian High School EFL textbook teaching materials?

Table 6. Teachers' Attitudes towards the Reflection of the CBA Assumptions and Principles in the Algerian EFL High School Textbook Teaching Materials

Option	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Total
Teachers	1	3	9	7	20
Percentage	5%	15%	45%	35%	100%

Table six designates that 45% of teachers claimed that textbook teaching materials sometimes fit the CBA assumptions and principles; nevertheless, 35% of teachers claimed that these teaching materials rarely do. In addition, 15% of teachers claimed that textbook materials often reflect the CBA and 5% affirmed that textbook teaching materials always suit the CBA expectations.

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These results indicate that not all textbook materials serve to meet the aims and objectives of the CBA and improve the quality of learning. Therefore, they need to be focused on to bring about development and promote modern and innovative methods to enhance the application of the CBA and improve the system of education.

Question 7. Do you think that the Algerian high school EFL curriculum and textbook materials fit the CBA pedagogy?

Table 7. Teachers' Attitudes towards the Suitability of the Algerian High School EFL Curriculum and Textbook Teaching Materials for the CBA Pedagogy

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	7	12	20
Percentage	35%	65%	100%

As indicated in table seven, 65% of teachers confirmed that Algerian high school EFL curriculum and textbook materials do not suit the CBA pedagogy and 35% of them affirmed the appropriateness of EFL curriculum and textbook materials to achieve the CBA expectations. These data necessitates revising the pertinent correlation between the EFL curriculum and text book materials and the objectives of the CBA pedagogy.

Question 8: Do the high schools you work in provide you with facilities and equipment that serve the CBA application?

Table 8. High Schools' Facilities and Equipment That Serve the CBA Application

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	6	14	20
Percentage	30%	70%	100%

The interest of this question is to underline the role of schools' facilities and equipment in the application of the CBA principles and the achievement of the learning objectives. The obtained results showed that the majority of Algerian high school teachers of English with 70% avowed that their schools do not provide the necessary equipment and facilities that enable them to

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present their teaching materials according to the CBA methods that encourage critical thinking and learner autonomy. Many schools in Algerian are still suffering from the lack of the equipment required to present an effective teaching material which cope with the technological development and the challenges of the 21st century. However, 30% of teachers were satisfied with the materials and facilities provided in their schools.

6.3. Section Three: Textbook Materials and Learner Autonomy

This section of the questionnaire is intended to investigate whether Algerian high school EFL textbook materials motivate and develop learner autonomy as intended in the CBA framework. It adopts Nunan's (2003) nine steps to introduce learner autonomy as a model of analysis.

Question 9: Do textbooks make instruction goals clear to learner?

Table 09. Teachers' Attitudes towards the Clarity of Textbook Materials' Instruction Goals for Learners

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	18	2	20
Percentage	90%	10%	100%

Table nine revealed that the majority of teachers (90%) affirmed that the textbook make instruction goals clear to learner. The instruction goals are clearly stated in the three levels of the high school textbooks: first, second, and third year; they are indicated at the beginning of these textbooks in the book map as they are described at the beginning of each unit in the unit preview. The other 10% of teachers didn't agree about the intelligibility of textbooks' instruction goals for learners. May be, they are novice and not familiar with all the aspects of the high school textbooks.

Question 10: Do textbooks allow learners to create their own goals?

Table 10. Teachers' Attitudes towards Allowing Learners' Creation of their Own Goals by Textbooks

Option	Yes	No	Total
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Teachers	0	20	20
Percentage	0%	100%	100%

According to the results illustrated in table ten above, all the teachers' views, with 100%, approved that learners are not allowed to create their own learning goals. This is because of two main reasons: first, high school textbook designers explicitly declared instruction goals in textbooks; second, only teachers are allowed to adapt textbook materials or design their owns and thus create their own instructional goals. In the teaching/ learning process, teachers provide learners with learning experiences and guide them to achieve the planned learning objectives; nevertheless, learners follow the teachers' instructions and do the required tasks and activities.

Question 11: Do textbook materials encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom?

Table 11.Teachers' Attitudes towards Textbook Materials Reinforcement to Learners' Use of Their Second Language outside the Classroom

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	9	11	20
Percentage	45%	55%	100%

Table 11 shows that 55% of teachers claimed that high school textbooks do not encourage learners to use their second language outside the classroom; however, 45% of them believed that they do. The contradiction in teachers' opinions concerning encouraging learners to use English outside the classroom via textbook materials is undoubtedly due to the lack and insufficiency of teaching materials which really help learners to use English outside the classroom.

Question 12: Do textbook materials raise awareness of learning processes?

Table 12.Teachers' Attitudes Concerning Textbook Materials' Awareness Rising of Learning Processes

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	13	7	20

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Percentage	65%	35%	100%
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The findings indicated in table 12 above shows that 65% of high school teachers participated in the study claimed that textbook materials raise awareness of the learning processes and 35% of them contrasted this claim. Textbooks make their learning goals clear for learners; therefore, it can be concluded that they involve learners in the learning process and raise their awareness about.

Question 13:Do textbook materials help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies?

Table 13.Teachers' Attitudes towards Textbook Materials Role in Identifying the Learners' Preferred Styles and Strategies

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	6	14	20
Percentage	30%	70%	100%

Table 13 displays that most of the teachers (70%) affirmed that textbook materials do not help learners identify their own preferred styles and strategies; nonetheless, 30% of them stated the opposite.

Question 14:Do textbook materials encourage learner choice?

Table 14.Teachers' Attitudes towards Textbook Materials Inspiration to Learners' Choice

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	20	00	20
Percentage	100%	0%	100%

Teachers' answers to question 14 show that all of them believed thattextbook materials encourage learner choice. Learners' choices in high school textbook materials can be illustrated in selecting the wright answer, the

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addressees they are writing to or speaking with, or their project topics and their groups in doing research.

Question 15:Do textbook materials allow learners to generate their own tasks?

Table 15.Teachers' Attitudes towards Allowing Learners' to Generate Their Own Tasks by Textbooks

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	0	20	20
Percentage	0%	100%	100%

Table 15 above shows that high school EFL teachers participated in this investigation approved with 100% that textbook materials do not allow learners to generate their own tasks since tasks are already provided in the textbook.

Question 16:Do textbook materials encourage learners to become teachers?

Table 16.Teachers' Attitudes towards Encouraging Learners to Become Teachers by Textbook Materials

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	0	20	20
Percentage	0%	100%	100%

According to table 16 above, the whole teachers with 100% affirmed that textbook materials do not encourage learners to become teachers.

Question 17:Do textbook materials encourage learners to become researchers?

Table 17.Teachers' Attitudes towards Encouraging Learners to Become Researchers by Textbook Materials

Option	Yes	No	Total
Teachers	20	0	20
Percentage	100%	0%	100%

The findings presented in table 17 confirmed that high school textbook materials encourage learners to become researchers. This is remarked in the research projects given at the end of each unit in the textbook where learners are requested to make a research.

7. Discussion of the Results

The present study is an attempt to investigate the role of the CBA in promoting learners' autonomy in the Algerian high school EFL textbook materials. The obtained results are of a paramount importance. With regard to the teachers' views in responding to the questionnaire, the research questions are answered.

Teachers' responses to Q3 and Q4 avowed that most Algerian high school EFL teachers are aware of the CBA principles and try to apply it in their teaching contexts. These results provide answers for the first research question.

Teachers' responses to Q5, Q6 and Q7 asserted the importance of teaching materials to achieve the CBA objectives, that is, the effectiveness and the realisation of the CBA objectives in enhancing learning and developing the learners' critical thinking. They also affirmed that not all textbook materials reflect the CBA principles and confirmed that the Algerian high EFL curriculum and textbook materials partially fit the CBA pedagogy and expectations. Thus, the second research question is answered.

Teachers' responses to Q8 affirmed that the majority of Algerian high schools do not provide the necessary equipment and facilities that help teachers to apply the CBA teaching methods, and this the answer of the third research question.

Teachers' responses to the third section of the questionnaire (Q9-Q17) provide answers to the fourth research question: Do the CBA framework offered in the Algerian EFL textbooks promote learner autonomy? The CBA is adopted in the Algerian educational system to develop the teaching practices and enhance the learning process through increasing learner autonomy and critical thinking which is based on problem solving. Questions (Q9-Q17) intended to investigate whether learner autonomy is well introduced in the Algerian high school EFL textbooks.

The obtained results showed that Algerian EFL textbook materials do not involve all the nine steps of introducing learner autonomy suggested by

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Nunan (2003). On the one hand, teachers' responses to Q9, Q12, Q14, and Q17 confirmed that steps one, four, six and nine are reflected in the Algerian high school text book materials in terms of making instruction goals clear to learners, raising awareness of learning processes, encouraging learner choice, and encouraging learners to become researchers as it is confirmed by Bourennane, Ferhaoui and Bader (2021) who proved that Problem Based Learning is reflected in the third year Algerian scientific stream project research works.

On the other hand, teachers' responses to Q10, Q11, Q13, Q15, and Q16 asserted that steps two, three, five, seven and eight are not reflected in the Algerian high school text book materials. Learners are not allowed to create their own materials or generate their own tasks; they are not helped to find their own preferred styles and strategies; and they are not encouraged to be teachers. Besides, concerning textbook materials that encourage learners to use English outside the classroom, they are few and insufficient.

The aim behind teaching English is to produce successful users of that language, but textbook materials do not serve to achieve this objective as it is confirmed by many researchers. For instance, Dendene (2013) proved that pragmatic involvement provided in high school textbooks is mostly implicit and that the minimal explicit linguistic forms used for the realisation of speech acts presented in the textbooks are fairly restricted in the relevant contextual and cultural factors which may not help learners to use English in real life situations; Ait Aissa (2016) claimed that high school textbooks' cultural input is not sufficient to encourage the learners to use the language outside the classroom; Hamidi and Bouhass (2018) confirmed that the third year textbook 'New Prospects' does not provide learners with sufficient authentic language that may help them to use English in real life situations outside the classroom; Hadda and Heyahoom (2020) investigated the grammatical input in the same textbook (third year textbook) and claimed that the textbook is overloaded and does not enable the learners to practice grammar in context.

In short, the CBA framework offered in the Algerian EFL textbooks does not promote and encourage learner autonomy. Algerian high school EFL teachers are aware of the CBA teaching methods and the importance of developing autonomous learning to produce critical thinkers and aware and competent practitioners of English; but, the Algerian teaching context and high school EFL curriculum and textbook materials demotivate them to use the CBA teaching pedagogy and reduce the achievement of its goals as they do not

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develop learner autonomy. Therefore, the researcher recommends the authorities to provide Algerian educational institutions with the required facilities and equipment in the teaching/ learning process. She also recommends the revision and adaptation of the EFL curriculum, syllabus design, textbooks' teaching/learning materials and teaching methods to fit the CBA pedagogy and achieve its goals which will improve learner autonomy and critical thinking.

8. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to investigate whether the Algerian high school educational context of the CBA pedagogy promote learner autonomy. A teachers' questionnaire was used as a means of research in collecting data. Through the estimation of the data obtained, two main results were found. First, the research findings proved that the Algerian teaching environment and the high school EFL curriculum and teaching materials do not reflect the CBA pedagogy. Teachers face some issues and obstacles that discourage them to apply the CBA teaching methods such as: lack of equipment and facilities and the disagreement of the EFL curriculum and textbook teaching materials with the goals of the CBA. Second, textbook teaching materials do not promote learner autonomy which is a main goal of the CBA pedagogy. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Algerian highschooleducationalcontext of the CBA pedagogy do not promotelearnerautonomy.

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