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HOW UNIVERSAL ARE APPROACHES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IN TOGO

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Abstract: This study investigates the universality of the Competency-Based Approach in English as a Foreign Language teaching and learning in Togo. It argues that no matter the worldwide acceptance of a teaching approach, it cannot be blindly applied to every language learning situation because of the socio-cultural differences that may exist between learners from various age groups and different communities. The analysis of the quantitative and classroom observation data collected from 18 secondary school teachers and 235 school students selected from five (5) schools in Lomé, the capital city of Togo, shows firstly that though the Competency-Based Approach plays a relevant role in promoting learners' problem-solving capacity, the use of this single approach is limitative. Secondly, it demonstrates that the success of a particular teaching approach in a socio-cultural context does not guarantee the same success in another context. Consequently, an eclectic use of approaches on the basis of socio-cultural factors is preferable because of the complementarity that may exist between them.

Keywords: difference, universality, Competency-Based Approach, complementarity, socio-cultural background, educational level

DANS QUELLE MESURE LES APPROCHES EN ENSEIGNEMENT DES LANGUES SONT-ELLES UNIVERSELLES ? UNE ÉTUDE DE CAS DE L'APPROCHE PAR COMPÉTENCES AU TOGO

Résumé: Cette étude examine l'universalité de l'approche par compétence dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de l'anglais langue étrangère au Togo. Elle soutient que, malgré le fait qu'une approche pédagogique soit universellement utilisée, elle ne devrait pas être appliquée à l'aveuglette en raison des différences socioculturelles qui peuvent exister entre les apprenants de différentes classes d'âge et de différentes communautés. L'analyse des données quantitatives et des observations recueillies auprès de 18 enseignants du secondaire et de 235 élèves sélectionnés dans cinq (5) établissements scolaires de Lomé, la capitale du Togo, montre tout d'abord que, bien que l'approche par compétence joue un rôle important dans le développement des apprenants à résoudre des problèmes, l'utilisation exclusive de cette approche est limitative. Deuxièmement, elle démontre que le succès d'une approche pédagogique particulière dans un contexte socioculturel ne garantit pas le même succès dans un autre contexte. Par conséquent, un usage éclectique des approches en fonction des facteurs socioculturels est préférable en raison de la complémentarité qui peut exister entre elles.

Mots-clés : différence, universalité, approche par compétences, complémentarité, contexte socioculturel, niveau d'éducation

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Introduction

Language teaching has very often been modelled and carried out through the use of various methods, beliefs, ideologies or principles (Bernstein et al., 2023; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Depending on the trend in language teaching, a specific approach and or method is used to reach the teaching objective. Researches have been undertaken, and symposiums, summits and conferences are being organised all over the world to identify the most appropriate approach that suits well the challenges language teaching and learning is facing (Virtual English Language Teaching Summit 2023 International Conference).

One of "the most widely referred" book that deals with approaches and methods in language teaching and learning is Richards and Rodgers' (2001). According to these scholars, "the history of language teaching has been characterized by a search for more effective ways of teaching second or foreign languages" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. viii). Richards and Rodges believe that many language knowledge issues have been discussed for more than a century for, "the teaching profession is continually exploring new options for addressing these and other basic issues and the effectiveness of different instructional strategies and methods in the classroom" (p. viii). Through their investigation, different reforms (methods and approaches) that have taken place in language teaching have been highlighted because teaching and learning is evolving.

In line with reflections about changes in the educational domain, the Togolese educational system has witnessed various reforms, plans and policies from independence to date. These changes aimed to improve the quality of the teaching and learning activities and to ensure that the programmes better meet the needs of learners by preparing them to participate in the future development of their community. Among the innovative actions are the Education reform (1975), The National Action Plan for Education for All (1991), The *Etats Généraux de l'Education* (May 1992), The National Action Plan for Education for All (August 2005), The Education Sector Plan 2010-2020, The Education Sector Plan 2014-2025, and The Education Sector Plan 2020-2030. All these plans and reforms intended to improve the whole educational system. However, no matter the educational system, the success of a plan or reform depends mainly on the teaching method and the classroom practices.

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With regard to the above plans and reforms, the teaching and learning system in Togo moved from the Objective-Based learning or Outcome-Based education to the Competency-Based Approach. Indeed, the government of Togo (West Africa) through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education introduced the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) that is supposed to focus on what learners can do with language in a real-life situation as opposed to the Objective-Based Approach that develops a full set of hierarchical objectives and effective test bank items according to these objectives, teaches and assesses the course according to the lesson objectives, and performs post-course follow-ups. The CBA is thus adopted for the teaching and learning of every core subject at the primary and secondary education level in Togo.

Though Competency-based Approach is said to be a valuable vehicle through which a system can impart its learners with skills, knowledge and values that will help them fit in the global village which is characterized by advancing technology (UNESCO, 2015), it raises the issue of the universal use of this approach in the Togolese educational system. In other words, this study aims at finding out how universal is this approach in the teaching of different subjects (mathematics, history and geography, physics, French, English, science

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and technology), different language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to learners from different cultures, age groups, capacity of understanding, and learning styles with which they enter classrooms. The objective of this study is therefore to investigate the universality of the Competency-based Approach especially in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Togo. As Imperial (2025) calls for rethinking of global Englishes because "the global English language education market is still deeply entrenched in colonial and racial capitalism" (p. 328), this study calls for the rethinking of the use of approaches in English language teaching. The main research question is to what extent is the Competency-Based Approach universal and contextually appropriate for the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Togo? Three specific questions arise from this question. 1. How is the Competency-Based Approach implemented in English as a Foreign Language classroom in Togo? 2. What challenges do teachers and learners encounter in implementing the Competency-Based Approach in EFL teaching in Togo? 3. Do teachers and learners perceive the Competency-Based Approach as equally appropriate for different categories of EFL learners in Togo? From these questions, three main hypotheses are formulated. Firstly, the Competency-Based Approach is not universally applicable in Togolese EFL classrooms because its effectiveness and appropriateness vary according to learners' sociocultural backgrounds, age, language proficiency, cognitive abilities, and learning styles. Secondly, there is no significant relationship between the extent to which teachers implement CBA principles and learners' communicative competence in English. Thirdly the effectiveness of CBA differs significantly across learners with different levels of English proficiency. This study is structured into three main sections. The first section presents the different approaches used in language teaching. After this presentation, it discusses the methodology. Finally, it presents the results of the collected data, analyses them and discusses them.

1. Approaches in Language Teaching and Learning and Overview of English Language in Togo

Teaching is always carried out through the use of approaches. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), an approach refers to "theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching" (p. 20). In other words, an approach is a set of mutually related assumptions dealing with the kind of teaching and learning and the different plans in order to help learners know the subject and by extension a language. The systematic presentation of language material based on the selected approaches have been introduced into second and foreign language teaching and learning worldwide. Though terms such as method, technique, style, and strategy are used in language teaching and learning, this study focusses on approaches. This section deals with the review of major approaches designed for the teaching of second and foreign languages and then presents the different approaches used in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Togo.

1.1 Approaches in Second and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

The contribution of languages to the development of communities has led many scholars to investigate ways and means that can help improve their teaching and learning (Gang & Xiaochun, 2015; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In this regard, approaches have been developed throughout ages. Because of controversies that have been observed throughout history,

methods and approaches such as the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching method, the Audiolingual Method, the Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, the Community Language Learning, the Suggestopedia, the Cooperative Language Learning, the Content-Based Instruction, the Task-Based Language Teaching, the Communicative Language Teaching and the Natural Approach have been developed and implemented. According to Richards (2006, p.6), these methods and approaches can be grouped into three major phases: the traditional approaches, the classic communicative language teaching approaches and the current communicative language teaching approaches. Because of space matter, the current literature review will bridge only some traditional methods to current communicative approaches.

In an anthology of current approaches, issues, and practices, Richards and Renandya (2002) have shown that the teaching of English to speakers of other languages requires, on the one hand, a clear understanding of the field of second and/or foreign language teaching and, on the other hand, the knowledge of the different teaching principles and classroom activities which teachers can refer to in their work. According to the contributors to this anthology, these activities include approaches to teaching English at different educational level, lesson planning and classroom management, curriculum and materials development, teaching pronunciation, grammar, reading, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary skills (Ellis, 2002; Field, 2002; Nation, 2002; Nunan, 2002), assessing students (Hingle & Linington, 2002), the use of computers and other technology in teaching (Warschauer & Whittaker, 2002) as well as professional development or teacher training.

In the same vein, Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. viii) opine that "the teaching of any subject matter is usually based on an analysis of the nature of the subject itself and the application of teaching and learning principles drawn from research and theory in educational psychology." Hence, teaching a second or a foreign language requires an adequate knowledge of the language, and specialized techniques and strategies so as to help learners develop necessary language skills. As time goes on, teaching and learning approaches have been evolving. Richards and Rodgers (1986, p. vii) acknowledge a plethora of approaches and methods in the contemporary second and foreign language teaching. They posit that "invention of new classroom practices and approaches to designing language programs and materials reflects a commitment to finding more efficient and more effective ways of teaching languages" (Richards & Rodgers 1986, p. vii). The continual pursuit of the best language teaching techniques and methods has led to the development of several key approaches and principles.

One of the traditional and classical language teaching approach is the Grammar-Translation Approach (Gang & Xiaochun, 2015; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 2011). Grammar-translation approach is a teaching method that prioritises translation from the students' mother tongue into the target language and vice versa (Jebahi, 2022, Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Larsen-Freeman (2000, p. 11), the Grammar-translation approach "was used for the purpose of helping students read and appreciate foreign language literature." In this approach, students' success depends mainly on their capacity to memorize long lists of vocabulary and detailed grammar formats and rules. Indeed, Grammar Translation favours accuracy over fluency and tends to favour the development of reading and writing skills instead of communicative or speaking skills (Richards & Rodgers 2001, p. 6). Though this method had been popular in the past, it was criticized

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because it does not prepare students with communication skills in a second or foreign language through the speaking instruction method.

As far as the Direct Method is concerned, "its principles have been applied by language teachers for many years" (Larsen-Freeman 2000, p. 23). This method emerged during the late 19th and early 20th century due to failure of the Grammar-translation approach to meet language learners' communicative needs and is based on naturalistic principles in language learning. Learners in the direct method do not practice translation nor use their native languages in class but are encouraged to think in the target language. For this purpose, students work out inductively grammar concepts by practicing the language and by building up their exposure to it. Standard classroom techniques for this approach include "question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes" (Richards & Rodgers 2001, p. 12), conversation, reading aloud, writing and student self-correction.

Another key approach in language teaching is the Situational Language Teaching method. The Situational Language Teaching method is also known as Oral Approach and was introduced to enable students to communicate mainly orally in the foreign language by creating specific and vivid situations according to teaching contents. Language learning in this approach results from understanding the situation depicted in the picture sequences and from the following verbal interaction between the teacher and the learner (Wenrong, 2018). Pittman (1963, pp. 155-156) posits that "Our method will […] be situational. The situation will be controlled carefully to teach the new language material […] in such a way that there can be no doubt in the learner's mind of the meaning of what he hears." One key note is that the teacher is the authority in the classroom. While grammar is taught and learnt inductively, vocabulary is introduced following frequency lists in the situational language teaching approach. Consequently, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 42), "structures are always taught within sentences, and vocabulary is chosen according to how well it enables sentence patterns to be taught."

The review of current approaches in this study focusses mainly on the Communicative Language Teaching, the Content-Based instruction and the Task-Based Language Teaching. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a teaching approach that aims at achieving communicative rather than grammatical competence through learner interaction (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2002). Indeed, the fundamental idea behind Communicative Language Teaching is to improve students' communicative language skills. According to Richards (2006, p. 2), "Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom." Definitely, Communicative Language Teaching encourages real-life meaningful plans that require a wide variety of activities and purposeful tasks. Classroom activities in this approach include modelling, repetition, pair and group work so as to help students develop communicative competencies which focus on real-world situations and allow learners to practice language in context and content rather than to be concentrated on grammatical rules and structure (Richards & Rodgers 2001).

As far as the Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is concerned, it is one of the current language teaching approaches in which the teaching is organized around the content. CBI moves away from traditional and alternative language learning approaches and focuses on content to practice language skills. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 219-217), three main models to CBI have been developed: Theme-based language instruction,

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Sheltered content instruction and Adjunct language instruction. While theme-based language instruction deals with language learning around a central theme (e.g., pollution, women's rights, marketing), sheltered model of instruction refers to content courses taught in the second language by a content area specialist and the adjunct language instruction that is a model in which students simultaneously engage in a language course and a content course (Snow, 2001). According to Larson-Freeman (2011, p.154), the special contribution of content-based instruction is that "it is not exclusively a language program, but instead it integrates the learning of language with the learning of some other content."

One last approach taken into account in this literature review is the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The Task-Based Language Teaching was originally developed in order to offer an alternative for teachers who are interested in creating a more student-centered environment in their classroom (D. Willis & J. Willis, 2007). In a task-based language teaching class, the lesson is based on the completion of a core task and its presentation (Ellis, 2017; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Ellis (2017, p. 118), task-based teaching considers "three sets of variables: (1) task design variables, (2) task implementation variables, and (3) aspects of the language use resulting from the performance of tasks." Task-Based Language Teaching refers therefore to the teaching approach that is based on the use of tasks as the key unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. A close look at these different approaches indicate that they are not mutually exclusive.

1.2 An Overview of English Language Teaching in Togo

In Togo (West Africa), English language came into contact with local populations through western merchants during the 1800s (Lange, 1991). The first merchants to settle down along the Atlantic coast founded schools where their children and some of the indigenous population received instruction in English. It was later on that the missionaries, who followed the merchants, established and shaped the educational system of the Togoland where the main languages of instruction were Ewe and English. According to Lawrance (2000, p. 490) "English was taught by Protestant missionaries both to spread Christianity and encourage local marketization for subsequent exploitation by the underwriters of missions." As a result, before the colonisation period, the Togolese costal population was already introduced to English and could function in this language and had a knowledge of the English culture and practices.

Since the introduction of English language in Togo, its teaching and learning went through ups and downs during the different colonial periods. In fact, under the domination of Germany, the first public schools in Togo were created and English language was used as the medium of instruction. Afeli (2003) thinks that many reasons justify the use of English in the Togolese missionary schools under the German colonisation. For him, English was used in schools because it was the first western language to be introduced as medium of instruction before the arrival of German colonisers. The second major reason is the fact that at the beginning of German domination, Germans were not interested in the educational development of Togo. Though the German administration wanted later to change the linguistic situation by imposing German language, it was not successful because English was already displaying a great prestige and had a great audience. According to Lawrance (2001, p. 524), "though English was never the official language of the greater part of Togo, it was even before the colonial period and remained throughout the mandate

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period the most important vehicular language." So, English continued to be taught even if no formal and legal text regulated its teaching on a French speaking land.

After independences and particularly with the advent of the educational reform of 1975, English language has been officially declared a compulsory language from Form One of the Secondary School to the university level. Due to its importance in the international communication, English language continued to be taught as a subject at the secondary school level before being taken at the university like a speciality or being studied as a language for specific purposes in the departments and schools other than the department of English. Accordingly, Essizewa (2013, p. 81) says, "Today, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is taught in all faculties, schools, and institutions of higher education in Togo." Furthermore, in the Togolese secondary schools, English has become one of the most important languages in the teaching curricula. The main purpose of its teaching according to Togolese educational authorities is to enable students to listen to, understand, speak, read and write the authentic and contemporary language of everyday communication.

Through the reform of 1975, Togo adopted the Content Based Approach in the implementation of English language. The application of this teaching approach was based on the traditional teacher-centered method that viewed students as 'empty vessels' who were waiting to be filled with new knowledge. In this approach, the teacher was considered as the knowledge or information owner and he could donate or transmit it to the learner who was a receiver. Due to the fact the Content Based Approach was unable to transmit knowledge of practical things and was limited to theoretical aspects, the Objective Based Approach (OBA) was introduced in the Togolese education in 1989. The shift from the Content Based Approach to Objective Based Approach favoured the shift from teacher centered to learner centered method that focussed on practical things. Despite the fragmentation of knowledge into small pieces and the isolation of objectives in this approach, some limitations in learners' capacity to solve significant problems and respond to challenges of labour market, a new approach, the Competency Based Approach was introduced in Togo in 2003. The move from the Objective-based Approach (OBA) to the Competency Based Language Approach aimed at improving the quality of teaching by putting the student at the centre of learning. The present study aims at examining the universality of CBA.

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2. Methodology

The methodology for the data collection and analysis was designed in such a way that necessary information about the general use of the Competency-Based Language Approach can be obtained from the teaching of English as a foreign language. For this purpose, a mixed data collection method made up of a questionnaire and classrooms observation was used. The questionnaire was administered to a total of 18 English teachers and 235 secondary school students selected from five (5) schools in Lomé, the capital city of Togo. Lomé was chosen not only because it is the capital city of Togo but mainly because I live there and many of my former students are English language teachers. These former students were very helpful in the data collection process.

Both the teacher and the student questionnaires were designed for the purpose of this study. The questionnaires were adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) method and the Likert scale where respondents were asked to react to 10 statements such as 'CBA is the only approach used in teaching subjects in the secondary school in Togo.' Hence, participants had to express their opinion by choosing

among either 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' or Yes, No and I do not know. These statements were designed to unveil the participants' opinion about the universality of the competency-based approach in English language teaching. Classroom observations were also carried out through the help of a classroom observation checklist in order to complement the questionnaires with genuine information about the use of Competency-based approach as the sole theory in the English language teaching. The data were processed with the use of SPSS 21 (Statistical Package for the Social Science 21) program. This method helped in the calculation of percentages and cross-tabulation of variables. In survey data, SPSS is most often used to process quantitative data, in particular questionnaire data.

3. Results and Discussions

The teacher and student survey data and the classroom observation strongly challenge the universality and exclusivity of the Competency-Based Approach in Togolese schools. However, the primary objective of the teaching of any subject in a formal education is to confer upon learners the necessary knowledge and skills for their present and future life needs. Accordingly, Frederiksen (1984, p. 363) states, "the primary missions of educational institutions, from elementary to graduate and professional schools, are to impart knowledge and to teach cognitive skills." In this regard, the use of the most appropriate approach or a complementarity in the use of approaches is necessary to help learners. This section presents and analyse respondents' opinion about the use of CBA in the teaching of different core subjects and about the use of the same approach in the teaching of different activity in English as a foreign language. It then discusses the results through the previous findings.

Table 1: Teacher respondent perception of the universality of Competency-Based Approach

N°	Questionnaire items	Yes		No	I don't know	
1	CBA is the only teaching approach attested in the primary and secondary schools in Togo	0%		100%	0%	
2	There exist many other approaches in foreign language teaching	83.3%		0%	17.6%	
3	CBA is the only approach that helps English learners solve problems in their real-life	SD	D	N	A	SA
		22.2%	22.2%	5.5%	33.3%	16.6%
4	I use only the CBA to transmit knowledge	16.6%	33.3%	16.6%	27.7%	5.5%
5	CBA the best approach in teaching pronunciation	11.1%	50%	5.5%	16.6%	11.1%
6	CBA the best approach in teaching vocabulary	16.6%	50%	0%	22.2%	11.1%
7	CBA the best approach in teaching grammar	16.6%	50%	0%	22.2%	11.1%
8	I use the CBA because it is the only approach that helps improve student's listening and speaking skill	61.1%	11.1%	11.1%	16.6%	0%
9	I use the CBA because it is the only approach that helps improve student's reading skill	61.1%	16.6%	5.5%	11.1%	0%
10	I use the CBA because it is the only approach that helps improve student's writing skill	61.1%	16.6%	5.5%	11.1%	0%

Key: SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

In the process of finding out the approach in use in the Togolese educational system, respondents had to say their mind about the CBA in Statement 1. All teacher respondents (100%) agreed that CBA is the only teaching approach attested in primary and

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secondary schools in Togo. This unanimous response clearly indicates that they are aware of the official curricular orientations. More explicitly, six core subjects are currently taught in Togolese junior secondary schools. The six core subjects are French, English, Mathematics, Physics-Chemistry and technology, Earth and Life Science, and History and Geography. The above result implies that teachers adopt the same teaching stages while teaching any of the six core subjects.

However, this perception is challenged by the high level of agreement (83.3%) that many other approaches exist in foreign language teaching according to the results in Statement 2. Teachers recognize the coexistence of multiple pedagogical traditions rather than a strict adherence to a single, universal approach. The approaches cited namely Grammar-Translation, Direct Method, Audiolingual, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Content-Based Instruction reflect a hybrid methodological ecology, where teachers sometimes selectively combine approaches based on instructional needs. In the same line, a strong majority of student respondents (78.7%) agreed that teachers give them rules to be learnt. This finding points to the continued dominance of rule-based and teacher-centered instruction which are characteristic of traditional approaches rather than CBA.

Table 2: Student respondent perception of the universality of Competency-Based Approach

N°	**Questionnaire items**	Yes		No	I don't know	
11	The teacher always presents us a learning situation before we start vocabulary lessons	20.8 %		0 %	79.1%	
12	The teacher always presents us a learning situation before we start grammar lessons	54.4%		39.1%	10.6%	
13	The teacher always presents us a learning situation before we start pronunciation lessons	7.6 %		84.2%	2.9%	
14	The teacher recalls the instruction so as to elicit the emission of hypotheses	SD	D	N	A	SA
		42.5%	31.9%	5.1%	9.7%	2.1%
15	We always work in pairs or groups	24.6 %	30.6%	1.7%	24.2%	10.6%
16	The teacher always goes round the groups to help and encourage us	24.6 %	30.6%	1.7 %	24.2%	10.6%
17	The teacher gives us tasks where we apply the new knowledge	42.5%	21.2%	19.1%	10.6%	2.1%
18	The teacher gives us rules to be learnt	4.2%	8.5%	4.2%	31.9%	46.8%
19	The teacher lets us give our answers or solutions to the problems.	0%	15.0%	4.2%	53.1%	27.6%
20	The teacher tells us to use what we already know to come up with solutions	4.2%	11.5%	5.5%	46.8%	31.9%

Key: SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree N = Neutral A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree

Moreover, as far as learner engagement and interaction is concerned, participants' responses related to hypothesis formation, group work, teacher support, and task-based application show predominantly negative or very weak positive trends. Indeed, over 74% of students disagreed that teachers recall instructions to elicit hypotheses, more than half disagreed that they always work in pairs or groups and over 63% disagreed that they are given tasks to apply new knowledge. Such results indicate limited implementation of learner-centered and collaborative practices, which are central to CBA. At the same time, students reported some positive elements aligned with constructivist principles, such as being allowed to propose solutions and draw on prior knowledge.

According to Nkwetisama (2012, p. 522), the CBA lesson stage calls firstly for the discovery (presentation of the problem-solving situation), secondly for the research (individually or in groups seek solution(s) to problem) where hypotheses are put forth and analysed, thirdly for the comparison and validation of findings or results, fourthly for the institutionalisation and formulating the new knowledge (generalisation), fifthly for the consolidation (application), sixthly for the partial integration activities and lastly for the remediation activities if there are cases of incomprehension. The institution of the CBA in Togo requires therefore a strict respect of the CBA lesson stages. However, these practices appear isolated in the different observed classrooms rather than systematic. According to Oloda et al.

> "There is no one 'right' method for teaching a particular concept in mathematics. Obviously, not all methods are appropriate for all levels and content areas. An instructional method comprises the principles and methods used for instruction. Commonly used teaching methods in mathematics includes [sic] but not limited to: lecture method, inductive method, deductive method, discovery method, laboratory and problem-solving method." (Oloda et al. 2024:104).

It is obvious that Oloda et al. (2024) contend the use of any pre-determined single approach in teaching mathematics because not all methods fit all contexts, levels and teaching activities. Indeed, the levels in education depend mainly on the educational policy of each country. In Togo, a West African country, where this study is carried out, the official primary school entrance age is 6. The Togolese educational system is structured in such a way that the primary school cycle lasts six years. Hence, the official ages for primary school cycle are 6 to 11. While the junior secondary school lasts four years and the official ages span from 12 to 15, the senior secondary school lasts three years and the official ages cover 16 to 18. For all these levels, the CBA is the single approach adopted for the instruction of every core subject. Though no approach is used blindly without analysing the context, applying a single approach to these different age groups and cultural groups may be harmful to the learners waiting to receive the appropriate knowledge according to their age, level of education, and social background.

Moreover, talking about the instruction in physics, Maera (2016, p. 11) argues that "there is a range of methods to use and one has to make a choice of the appropriate method based on some factors." These factors include the effective method, the objective of the lesson, the class size, the resource availability, the entry behaviour of learners and the teacher preferences or styles. For a teaching to meet these factors, it appears important not only to be learner-centred and to facilitate learner's understanding through questioning but also to determine the instructional objective, to consider the number of learners, to take into account the available resources, to check on the learners' ability and to choose the approach in which the teacher feels comfortable (Maera, 2016). Accordingly, the choice of either a Lecture Method, an Inductive Method, a Deductive Method, a Discovery Method or a Laboratory Method (Oloda et al., 2024) in the teaching of any scientific content needs to abide by the aforementioned factors. From the above analysis, teaching both mathematics and physics cannot be effective if approaches are not diversified. From the same perspective, the teaching of other core subjects such as French, History and Geography, and Life and earth Science should not be dominated by only one method. Consequently, an observation and evaluation of the teaching context and the relevant needs of the learner

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should guide the choice of a teaching approach. In this study, context includes not only the teaching geographical area where the teaching is taking place but also the learners' cultural background, age and educational level.

The main goal in the teaching of a foreign language is to equip learners with necessary and adequate communicative tools for daily life exchanges. Referring to foreign languages, Moeller and Catalano (2015) posit that the

> "Study of another language allows the individual to communicate effectively and creatively and to participate in real life situations through the language of the authentic culture itself. Learning another language provides access into a perspective other than one's own, increases the ability to see connections across content areas, and promotes an interdisciplinary perspective while gaining intercultural understandings." (p. 327)

With regard to data collected on language skills, teacher respondents largely rejected the idea that CBA is the best approach for teaching pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. In all three language components, 50% disagreed, while only about one-third expressed agreement. These results suggest that teachers perceive structural aspects of language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) as better addressed through more form-focused approaches, such as Grammar-Translation, Audiolingualism or Direct Method.

Similarly, strong disagreement dominates responses concerning CBA as the only approach for improving listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For instance, 84% of teacher respondents disagreed that CBA alone improves listening and speaking, reading, or writing skills their real-life activities. This result clearly indicates that teachers view language competence as multi-dimensional, requiring diverse methodological inputs. Seeing foreign language from this angle, the language teacher is expected to find out the appropriate teaching ways and means that can reinforce the work of each student in the learning process so to come up with problem-solving capacity and creativity skills in carrying out their present and future activities.

However, teacher respondents reported their use of the CBA to transmit the English language knowledge to their students. Indeed, 100% of the respondents admitted their use of the CBA while teaching English. The analysis of these results proves that despite respondents' knowledge of a wide range of teaching approaches, they are required to limit themselves to only one in the implementation of their objectives. The use of a single approach despite the respondents' confession of the existence of other efficient and effective approaches carries an idea of obligation in the choice of approaches in English language teaching in Togo. The use of an approach that is not based on conviction is harmful to the learning system.

As far as statements with reference to the teaching of pronunciation, lexical items and grammatical notions are concerned, 100% of the participants confessed that the CBA is not the only approach that can enable an effective teaching of these linguistic domains. Indeed, the three major linguistic domains in a second or foreign language teaching and learning are vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. When language learners are poor in one of these domains, their communicative activities – written or oral - will be poor (Nation & Newton 2009).

To start, "Pronunciation includes the articulation of individual sounds and the distinctive features of sounds like voicing and aspiration, voice-setting features, and stress

and intonation" (Nation & Newton 2009, p. 76). For communicative purposes, pronunciation plays a key role in the sense that a proper and accurate pronunciation ensures clarity and intelligibility in the articulated message, trust and confidence from native speakers, and social integration of the speaker into the host society. In the teaching of pronunciation, Bainbridge and O'Shea (2010) found that there exists a variety of activities offered to the language teacher. These activities "follow a set structure that can be used often by the same teacher […]. They can also be very easily adapted to any age group or language level. They also allow students of varying language levels to perform at their own level, speak often and listen for purpose to the words of others" (Bainbridge & O'Shea 2010, p. 190). In the same line, Zouaidi (2024, p. 39) claims that "the current pool of approaches that have been tuned in over the years are still being adopted either by a focus on content or a focus on form. The teacher can use the approach that best suits the needs of the students and go from there. These methods and approaches can help teachers today use whatever their learners need as they adopt an interdisciplinary approach." According to Zouaidi, the choice of an approach in pronunciation teaching should match to learners' needs. This suggests that before selecting a particular pronunciation approach, language teachers have to identify their "learners' preferred learning style (visual, auditory or kinesthetic)" (Zouaidi 2024, p. 38). With this regard, the most important thing cannot be the 'what' or 'why' pronunciation activity but the 'how' it can be implemented because pronunciation can be affected by "the age of the learner, the learner's first language, the learner's current stage of proficiency development, the experience and attitudes of the learner, and the conditions for teaching and learning" (Nation & Newton 2009, p. 78).

The analysis of the results show that questionnaire respondents have also identified that different ways of teaching pronunciation can be adopted. However, classroom observations revealed that pronunciation activities are neglected in English language teaching in Togo. Indeed, during the classroom observations, very few pronunciation activities were observed in English language teaching and these pronunciations were mainly carried out as feedbacks to erroneous pronunciations. There was no specific course scheduled for the sake of pronunciation activity. The absence of pronunciation activity may be justified by the fact that teachers lack knowledge of the importance and the teaching of this linguistic domain. Of interest, deep research is needed in order to elucidate the reasons why the teaching of this important linguistic domain is so neglected.

Another linguistic domain that was covered by this study on the universality of CBA is the teaching of vocabulary. Vocabulary is known to be one of the most fundamental components of language expression. There is no effective communication in a foreign language without a vast knowledge of vocabulary or with a limited vocabulary. According to statement (6), every respondent claimed that CBA is not the only effective approach in the teaching of foreign lexical items. Let us recall that Togo has adopted the CBA in the educational system and henceforth every teaching activity should be carried out through this approach irrespective to students' and teachers' identity and irrespective to the courses. A careful look at the development of some approaches in language teaching and learning reveal that while Grammar-Translation prioritised vocabulary teaching through the translation of lexical items, the Direct Method supported that vocabulary can be undoubtedly acquired through interactions during the lesson (Richard & Rodgers, 2001).

On the other hand, the Communicative Approach puts an accent on functions of language use calling for active modes of learning that includes pair and group works, and which offers communicative activity to language learners from early stage. In this learning

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approach, errors are a natural part of the learning process. It therefore focusses on fluency over accuracy and encourages language learners to communicate their opinions using the linguistic resources available to them. Consequently, vocabulary has been assigned a second-zone role and is mainly taught as a support for functional language use. A close look at vocabulary in CBA proves also that it is left to the second-class domain. For, as Ketabi and Shahraki (2011) say of vocabulary teaching and learning in CBA, it is done through "incidental learning which is acquiring vocabulary through other communicative skills such as listening, reading, speaking, or writing" (p. 739). Despite the promotion of the vocabulary teaching and learning in the CBA through incidental learning, classroom observations show that some English teachers fall into the teaching of vocabulary through translation.

In addition, teacher respondents were asked to give their opinion about the teaching of grammar in the CBA. Defined as "a set of rules, dependent upon the form of speaking and writing intended, which structure the sequence within and between words" (Burrows 2014, p. 7), grammar is considered as one of the core aspects in everyday communication and an "awareness raising" (Gerngross et al. 2006, p.6) activity in the sense that learners' grammar knowledge re-organises itself in response to new discoveries. The results of respondents' opinion showed that no approach is self-sufficient in transmitting grammatical knowledge. The fact that Gerngross et al. (2006, p. 5) remark that "we have tried to include a wide range of techniques which you can draw on when teaching grammar points" justifies plainly the existence of a plethora of approaches that can be successfully used in the teaching of grammar lessons. According to Thornbury (1999), grammar can be taught from rules (deductive approach), examples (inductive approach), and through texts and contexts. While the "deductive approach starts with the presentation of a rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied," the "inductive approach starts with some examples from which a rule is inferred" (Thornbury 1999, p. 29). With the introduction of a new approach in the Togolese educational system, grammar which was previously systematically taught as a language tool is supposed to be integrated into a more practical and holistic teaching approach that puts the learner at the heart of problem-solving situations. Meanwhile, the classroom observations showed that teachers mixed different approaches (inductive and deductive) when teaching grammar even though they claim to use CBA. This may be justified by the time constraints, the large number of students in the classrooms and the lack of adequate teaching resources.

Statements (8), (9) and (10) on the development of listening and speaking, reading, and writing skills through the CBA were the last aspects of the questionnaire. Listening and speaking are put together because according to Nation and Newton (2009, p. 37) "listening is the natural precursor to speaking" and "the early stages of language development in a person's first language (and in naturalistic acquisition of other languages) are dependent on listening." Here too, the respondents found that the listening and speaking skills cannot be developed independently from the three linguistic domains (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation). In fact, according to classroom observations, apart from writing activity where learners were directed through guided writings at low level, there was no purely teaching activity dedicated to either listening or speaking. However, concerning the reading, it was not a well-organised teaching activity but rather a means to teach vocabulary, grammar and through which erroneous pronunciation could be corrected. There is no doubt that neither the classroom observations nor the survey results showed the universal use of CBA in English language teaching. From the analysis and the discussions

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of the above results, it appears that "integrating diverse teaching methods is essential for creating a dynamic learning environment that caters to different learning styles and needs" (Okpara 2024, p. 21).

Conclusion

This study aims at raising awareness of the need to rethink the use of Competency-Based Approach as the only attested approach in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Togo (West Africa). Through the survey data collected from 18 English language teachers, 235 students and classrooms observations in five junior secondary schools in Lomé - the capital city of Togo -, the study has found that the implementation of CBA is facing some challenges with reference to time management, teaching activities, students' age and educational level, students' socio-cultural background, and teachers' competency. It has also shown that the worldwide acceptance of an approach does not confer it a self-sufficient role so as to be blindly applied in every context. From these findings, it is important to say that the research is not simply a call for rethinking the use of CBA. Instead, it is an appeal for action from diverse political and educational stakeholders to English teachers for an eclectic use of approaches in the teaching of English as a foreign language. For this purpose, a profound analysis of the teaching environment, teaching activities, learners' age, educational level and need, and teacher's ability becomes a requirement. The promotion of a complementarity between and among approaches can therefore be encouraged to help develop students' critical thinking, problem-solving ability, and communicative capacity.

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