

2. Reasons for adopting a competency-based approach

- The adoption of a competency-based approach is based on world-wide research that highlights the importance of the links between learning and context of use, thus help the learners make learning meaningful.
- Since the emphasis is on the learner's social and personal development, the aim of this approach is to make him reinvest his knowledge when performing tasks at school level as well as at social and professional level.
- The programme based on that approach has been conceived with the purpose of ensuring viable (workable, feasible) learning.

3. Objectives

Although the competency-based approach is a novelty, its objectives are not new. Actually, educationalists have always been interested in developing general 'know-how' processes and in fixing knowledge acquired in class. This approach enables the learner to develop his capacity to think and act according to a vision of the world that he will construct gradually.

4. View of learning

- Centered on the development of competencies, learning is favoured in complex and meaningful situations.
- The programme determines learning that will call upon intellectual procedures and attitudes such as respect for differences, co-operation and team work.
- Communication in this programme is a priority that takes into consideration the latest developments in the field of second/foreign language teaching, the Communicative Approach and cognitive psychology.
- This programme is learner-centered and focuses on the construction of the learner's knowledge. It aims at developing competences that are as essential for the learner of the new century. These competences are the ability to interact orally, the ability to process oral and written texts and the ability to write texts.

5. Pedagogical implications

Making school acquisition viable and sustainable: The school must help the learner give sense to knowledge acquired in class and teach him how to make beneficial and relevant use of it.

Developing the teaching process of the learner: The emphasis put on the development of competencies makes it impossible to focus exclusively on acquiring disciplinary knowledge. It also enhances the development of thinking processes necessary for assimilating them and using them in real life.

Presenting learning contents in relation to the needs of the learners: The learner must grasp the usefulness of the resources he develops in relation to the problems he meets in everyday life. This approach makes it possible to link the development of personal resources and the meaningful situations which call for these resources.

Choosing a personalized pedagogy: To facilitate the development of the learner's competences, it will be necessary to rely on the resources he already possesses: intellectual, social and affective that have to be exploited, developed and enriched. To achieve this aim, various pedagogical approaches will be preferred, keeping individual differences in mind.

6. Characteristics of the approach

It is **action-oriented** in that it directs language learning to the acquisition of know-how capacities in the form of functions and skills. These will allow the learner to become an effective /competent language user in real-life situations outside the classroom.

It is a **problem solving approach** in that it places learners in situations that check/test their capacity to overcome obstacles and problems. Languages are learned more effectively and lastingly when they are used to solve problems through hypothesis testing. Problems make the learners think and they learn by thinking. They word their thinking in English while solving the problems.

It is **social-constructivist** in that it regards learning as occurring through social interaction with other people. In other words learning is not conceived of as the transmission of predetermined knowledge and know-how to be reproduced **in-vitro** (i.e. only within the pages of the copybook or the walls of the classroom), but as a creative use of newly-constructed knowledge through the process of social interaction with other learners.

Finally and most importantly, the Competency-Based Approach is a **cognitive approach**. It is indebted to Bloom's taxonomy (Taxonomy of Educational Objectives). Bloom has claimed that all educational objectives can be classified as 'cognitive' (related to information) and 'affective' (related to attitudes, values and emotions) or 'psychomotor' (related to bodily movements). He said that cognitive objectives form a hierarchy by which the learner must achieve lower order objectives before s/he can achieve higher ones.

Higher order

Evaluation 6	Learner sets a value on the new information
Synthesis 5	Learner builds new knowledge from diverse elements
Analysis 4	Learner analyses information by separating information into parts for better understanding
Application 3	Learner applies knowledge to new situations
Comprehension 2	Learner understands information
Knowledge 1	Learner recalls knowledge

Lower order

Bloom's hierarchical model of cognitive thinking is illustrated in the importance that the Competency-Based Approach gives to the mobilization of knowledge and skills, their gradual integration at higher levels (from level 1 to level 2 in the table above), their application to new situations of learning or use, the generation of new knowledge and skills and finally the evaluation of the process and product of thinking. This is the ideal route towards the acquisition of the competency of know-how-to-act. For instance, a learner will need to know a principle before s/he can apply it. S/he should be able to cut it into smaller fragments and relate it to other principles (analysis) before s/he can summarize it and draw conclusions, and thus evaluate it.

The affective domain is equally important in the achievement of competency. Bloom organizes the learner's affections in a hierarchical order illustrated in the table below:

Higher order

Internalizing values	Learner makes hi/her own consistent system
Organization	Learner organizes information
Valuing	Learner attaches values to particular objects and behaviours
Responding	Learner participates actively in classroom activities
Receiving	Learner shows willingness to attend to classroom activities

Lower order

The importance the affective domain appears more clearly in the adoption of **the pedagogy of the project**. The realization of the project together with the psychomotor domain lead to the internalization of such values as autonomy, creativity, initiative and responsibility.

7. Comparing and contrasting CBA to previous approaches

CBA	Previous approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learners are active partners in the learning process; they are responsible and productive. ▪ Learners deduce meaning. ▪ Learners research information for project outside the classroom. ▪ Most interaction is learner to learner through pair and small group work. ▪ Learners have greater responsibility in deciding what they will do and how they will do it. ▪ Assessment is shared between teacher and learner. That is, there is more self- and peer-assessment. That assessment is for the product/the result and for the process; how that result was obtained. ▪ Learners acquire skills to use and apply knowledge about language, not only language skills but also social skills, research skills, critical thinking and decision making skills, computer skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The teacher is a fountain of knowledge who spoonfeeds the learners. ▪ The teacher gives little opportunity to learners to determine meaning. ▪ Use of English is restricted to classroom interaction between teacher and learners. ▪ Most interaction is teacher to learner and vice-versa. ▪ The teacher decides what learners will do and how they will do it. ▪ The teacher is the one who assesses and that assessment focuses on the product; what learners produce. ▪ Learners learn about language; they acquire knowledge about language, but not skills to use it.

8. What is project work, and how does it fit in the Competency-Based Approach

One of the most distinctive features of the competency-Based Approach is integration of project work as part of learning strategy. This approach seeks to make the attainment of objectives visible, i.e., concrete through the realization of projects in selected domains of instruction. In fact, fixing specific learning competencies will remain a far reaching dream (as in the case of the traditional objective-based approaches) if the outcome is not visible and measurable.

Project work makes learning more meaningful. It also makes co-operative learning a concrete reality and opens up entirely new avenues for action, interaction and the construction of new knowledge. In short, it is only through carrying out project work that the basic principles of the Competency-Based Approach can be made concrete.

9. The advantages of doing projects

- Projects encourage cooperation and sharing
- They promote learner independence
- Project is topic-based
- It involves research/questionnaire
- They lead to a presentation
- They involve different skills
- They may be very creative and include artwork
- They cater for different learning styles and personalities
- They require the use of all language skills