ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IMPLEMENTATION IN MALIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF OBJECTIVES ATTAINMENT

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Abstract : This research critically examines the implementation of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) in Mali's secondary school system, addressing an acknowledged problem within the educational landscape. The study aims to assess the extent to which the specified CBA objectives have been realized in this context. Using a qualitative research design, the study employs semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. Participants include 50 individuals, comprising secondary school teachers, principals, deputy principals, and education experts with expertise in CBA in Mali. Thematic analysis is applied to the collected data, revealing nuanced findings structured around key themes. The findings underscore the interconnected challenges faced in CBA implementation and emphasize the need for targeted interventions to enhance education quality in this framework.

Keywords: Competency-Based Approach, implementation, Secondary school, Objectives

ÉVALUATION DE L'EFFICACITÉ DE LA MISE EN ŒUVRE DE L'APPROCHE PAR COMPÉTENCES DANS LES ÉCOLES SECONDAIRES MALIENNES : UNE ÉVALUATION COMPLÈTE DE L'ATTEINTE DES OBJECTIFS

Résumé : Cette recherche examine de manière critique la mise en œuvre de l'Approche par Compétence (APC) dans le système scolaire secondaire du Mali, abordant un problème reconnu dans le paysage éducatif. L'étude vise à évaluer dans quelle mesure les objectifs spécifiés de l'APC ont été réalisés dans ce contexte. Utilisant une conception de recherche qualitative, l'étude utilise des entretiens semi-structurés comme principal outil de collecte de données. Les participants comprennent 50 individus, notamment des enseignants du secondaire, des directeurs, des directeurs adjoints et des experts de l'éducation en APC au Mali. Une analyse thématique est appliquée aux données collectées, révélant des résultats nuancés structurés autour des thèmes clés. Les résultats soulignent les défis interconnectés rencontrés dans la mise en œuvre de l'APC et mettent en avant la nécessité d'interventions ciblées pour améliorer la qualité de l'éducation dans ce cadre.

Mots-clés : Approche Par Compétence, mise en œuvre, lycée, objectives, implémentation

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Introduction

The Competency-Based Approach focuses on what learners should achieve with language. Thus, it was introduced in the context of teaching English as a second language to assist immigrants in the USA who plan to work there (Richards and Rodgers 1986, 141).

The idea of competencies is fundamental in this approach, with various interpretations. Richards and Rodgers (2001, 145) denote that competence is the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour needed to perform real-world tasks effectively.

Proponents defend the implementation of CBA by arguing that if a student can complete fill-in-the-blank exercises in a language arts test but struggle to compose a coherent letter to a friend or potential employer, or can perform decimal and percent multiplication in a math test but cannot calculate sales tax, it indicates a significant misalignment in the student's education (Richards and Rodgers, Salvin 2001).

The adoption of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) in Malian secondary schools represents a significant educational reform. This research delves into the implementation of CBA, seeking to evaluate the extent to which its objectives have been realized. As Malian educators and policymakers navigate the complexities of transforming the educational landscape, it is imperative to scrutinize the impact of CBA on teaching and learning outcomes. By undertaking this evaluation, the study aims to contribute to valuable insights that can inform future educational policies and practices in Mali.

Internationally, competency-based education has gained prominence as a transformative pedagogical approach. In the United States, the pioneering work of Bloom (1968) and his taxonomy of educational objectives have influenced the conceptualization of competencies. The American education system's shift towards outcomes-based education, as discussed by Spady (1994), has implications for understanding the broader context of competency-based approaches.

Implementing competency-based education is not without challenges. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) highlight the difficulties in assessing higher-order cognitive skills, posing a challenge for competency-based assessment. Additionally, researchers like Stiggins (2002) underscore the importance of aligning assessments with intended learning outcomes in competency-based systems.

Specifically within the African educational landscape, one of the notable studies is that of Bocoum et al. (2009), focused on the primary level. Its aim was to examine the correlation between the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) and educational quality as measured by academic performance. The study found that training teachers in the CBA significantly improves student academic results.

Traore & Sidibé (2019) conducted a study on the challenges learning French based on the Competency-Based Approach at Abdoul Karim Camara Dit Cabral High School in Segou. Their study revealed various difficulties, including a misunderstanding of the pedagogical discourse, the search for ideas, the formulation of hypotheses to solve problems, and indiscipline among students. Among teachers, some lack professionalism, there are issues in dividing students into small groups, and challenges in managing time for activities. Additionally, there is a lack of suitable teaching resources.

In Mali, the secondary school curriculum identifies three core competencies:
- ✓ Competency 1: comprehend and utilize English in diverse scenarios.
- ✓ Competency 2: Read various forms of texts.
- ✓ Competency 3: Craft various forms of texts.

Thus, under 'competency 1', it is elaborated that oral communication pertains to addressing a specific issue or discussing a particular topic or a real-life scenario that the instructor introduces. These are challenges tackled in group settings (MEN, 2000).

As for 'competency 2', it centers on honing reading abilities. Accordingly, the reading materials should be varied, ranging from newspaper articles, letters, and ads to novels and both descriptive and narrative pieces (MEN, 2000).

In order to develop this competence, students are given many reading activities. 'After reading the text, the learner must be able to answer questions: True/False statements, Multiple-choice Questions, Literal Questions and Inferential Questions' (MEN, 2013).

'Competency 3' focuses on mastering the art of writing. This skill is honed through tasks such as composing essays, letters, postcards, and filling out forms. These tasks all incorporate communicative exercises. Thus, introducing, presenting, or reinforcing syllabus components like vocabulary, grammar, function, reading, and writing are always paired with communication-focused activities (MEN, 2000).

Teachers are offered the subsequent instructional exercises for this aim:
- ✓ Read the provided sentences and share your point of view. Afterwards discuss with the person next to you.
- ✓ Imagine it is the first day back at school and you encounter a friend. Both of you are curious about each other's vacations. Engage in a conversation about it.
- ✓ Organise the given sentences chronologically.
- ✓ Prioritize the following military ranks: regiment, peloton, battalion, army, company.
- ✓ Review the given report and fill in the accompanying chart.
- ✓ Identify terms that resonate with the theme of 'family'.
- ✓ Pair the images with their corresponding descriptions.
- ✓ Associate each term with its proper definition (MEN, 2000).

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Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of competency-based approaches have been proposed. Spady (1994) introduces the concept of "outcome-based education audits," emphasizing the continuous evaluation of educational programs to ensure alignment with intended outcomes. Such evaluation strategies may prove valuable in assessing the success of CBA in Malian schools.

Training is pivotal for an effective implementation of a method. The role of teacher training in successful CBA implementation is a recurring theme in the literature. Darling-Hammond (2017) discusses the importance of professional development in equipping teachers with the skills necessary for competency-based instruction. This perspective aligns with the challenges identified in the proposed study regarding the lack of teacher training in Malian secondary schools.

Despite the wealth of literature on competency-based education, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how these principles manifest in the Malian context. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a focused evaluation of the implementation of CBA in Malian secondary schools, considering the unique challenges and opportunities within the local educational landscape.

By synthesizing these key works, the literature review establishes a foundation for the proposed research, framing the study within the broader discourse on competency-based education while highlighting the specific contributions, it aims to make tothe understanding of CBA in Malian secondary schools.

The research question guiding this investigation is: To what extent has the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) achieved its intended objectives during implementation in Malian secondary schools? ; And what are the implications for the ongoing enhancement of the educational system in Mali? It is hypothesized that the successful implementation of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) in Mali's secondary school system is positively correlated with the realization of its specified objectives. The objective of this research is then to evaluate the extent to which the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) has achieved its intended objectives in Malian secondary schools and to identify implications for enhancing the educational system in Mali.

1. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate the implementation of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) in Malian secondary schools. Qualitative research is deemed appropriate for its ability to capture the nuanced perspectives of educators and stakeholders involved in the CBA implementation process. A semi-structured interview approach is employed to gather rich, in-depth data regarding the participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges associated with CBA.

The participants in this study consist of key stakeholders within the Malian secondary school system, including secondary school teachers, principals, deputy

principals, and education experts with a specialization in Competency-Based Approach (CBA) in Mali. A purposive sampling technique is utilized to ensure representation from diverse geographical regions and school settings, considering the potential variations in CBA implementation.

A total of 50 participants are selected for semi-structured interviews to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives regarding CBA implementation. The sample size is determined based on the principle of data saturation, where new information ceases to emerge, ensuring that the study captures a diverse range of experiences and challenges.

Data is collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility and depth in exploring participants' experiences with CBA. An interview protocol is developed, encompassing open-ended questions that probe into participants' perceptions of CBA objectives, challenges faced during implementation, and recommendations for improvement. Interviews are conducted in person or through virtual platforms, depending on the preferences and availability of participants.

Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the collected data. The analysis process involves coding, categorizing, and interpreting the interview transcripts to distill key findings related to CBA objectives, challenges, implementation issues, and recommendations.

This robust qualitative approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the implementation of the Competency-Based Approach in Malian secondary schools, providing valuable insights into the complexities and potential improvements within the educational landscape.

2. Results

This section presents the findings based on the various themes identified through thematic analysis of the data. This is done to understand the perspectives of interviewees regarding the implementation and success of CBA at the secondary school in Mali.

2.1. Theme 1: Objectives of CBA

The objectives of Competency-Based Approach (CBA) in Mali are outlined as aiming to improve the educational system through participative approaches. This includes providing quality teaching based on comprehension, minimizing school exclusions, and ensuring the success of the mass of students. The student-centered nature of CBA is emphasized, focusing on developing competencies rather than traditional content-based learning.

The emphasis on comprehension and student-centered learning aligns with modern educational philosophies that prioritize practical skills and understanding over rote memorization. The objectives reflect a desire to create an inclusive and adaptable educational environment.

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2.2. Theme 2: Challenges in achieving CBA objectives

Several challenges are identified, including a lack of adequate materials, large class sizes, and insufficient time for subjects, low student levels, and a lack of training. These challenges are seen as hindrances to the effective implementation of CBA.

The challenges highlighted are common issues faced by education systems globally. Large class sizes and insufficient resources can hinder personalized learning experiences, which are crucial for competency-based approaches. The need for specific materials underscores the importance of tailored resources for effective implementation.

2.3. Theme 3: Implementation issues

Respondents express concerns about the poor implementation of CBA, attributing it to a lack of training for teachers and a shortage of didactic materials. The inconsistency in applying CBA across subjects is also noted.

Lack of training and materials is a common barrier to the successful implementation of any educational approach. Teachers need adequate preparation to implement new methods effectively. The inconsistency in applying CBA across subjects suggests a need for standardized training and implementation practices.

2.4. Theme 4: Recommendations for improvement

To address the identified challenges, the respondents propose training for all teachers, provision of adequate materials, and the reduction of class sizes. These recommendations aim to enhance the quality of teaching and learning under the CBA.

The proposed solutions align with recognized best practices in education. Training for teachers is crucial for successful implementation, and smaller class sizes can facilitate more personalized learning experiences. Adequate materials are essential for creating engaging lesson plans and ensuring that students have access to relevant information.

2.5. Theme 5: Call for action

Respondents suggest that school authorities take the initiative to identify individuals lacking training and provide necessary training. Proactive measures are seen as imperative for enhancing the quality of education.

The call to action underscores the need for leadership and administrative support. Identifying and addressing gaps in teacher training is a proactive step toward overcoming implementation challenges. It acknowledges that the responsibility for successful implementation extends beyond individual teachers.

3. Discussion

The challenges identified, such as the lack of adequate materials, large class sizes, insufficient time for subjects, low student levels, and a lack of training, are not unique to Mali but are prevalent issues faced by education systems globally. Large class sizes and limited resources undermine personalized learning experiences, which are essential for the success of competency-based approaches. The need for specific materials highlights the importance of tailored resources for effective implementation, indicating a gap that must be addressed to realize the objectives of CBA fully.

Furthermore, the poor implementation of CBA, attributed to a lack of training for teachers and inconsistent application across subjects, underscores the critical role of teacher preparation and standardized practices. Lack of training and materials remain a significant barrier to the successful adoption of any educational approach. Therefore, investing in comprehensive training programs and ensuring the availability of didactic materials are essential steps towards overcoming implementation challenges and fostering a conducive learning environment.

In response to these challenges, recommendations put forth by the respondents include providing training for all teachers, provisioning adequate materials, and reducing class sizes. These solutions align with established best practices in education and are essential for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning under the CBA framework. Training for teachers is imperative for the successful implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches, while smaller class sizes enable more personalized instruction. Adequate materials play a crucial role in facilitating engaging lesson plans and ensuring equitable access to educational resources for all students.

Moreover, the call for action urges school authorities to take proactive measures in identifying and addressing gaps in teacher training, emphasizing the importance of leadership and administrative support in driving educational reform initiatives. By assuming responsibility for facilitating teacher development and ensuring the availability of resources, school authorities can create an enabling environment for the successful implementation of CBA.

In a word, the findings of this research shed light on the complex dynamics surrounding the implementation and success of CBA at a secondary school in Mali. While the objectives of CBA align with modern educational philosophies, several challenges hinder its effective implementation. However, by addressing these challenges through comprehensive training programs, provision of adequate resources, and proactive leadership, it is possible to enhance the quality of teaching and learning under the CBA framework, thereby realizing its transformative potential in the Malian educational context.

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Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights in the perspectives of stakeholders regarding the implementation and success of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) at a secondary school in Mali. Through thematic analysis, the study identified key themes related to the objectives of CBA, challenges in achieving these objectives, implementation issues, recommendations for improvement, and a call for action. It reveals a nuanced perspective on CBA in Mali, highlighting both its potential benefits and the challenges in its effective implementation. Addressing issues such as training, resource provision, and class size are crucial for realizing the objectives of CBA and improving the overall educational landscape in Mali. The data emphasizes the interconnectedness of various factors in achieving successful educational reforms.

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