

**EFL LEARNER ASSESSMENT: PRINCIPLES AND IMPLICATIONS IN THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH USED IN SOME SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BENIN**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present exploratory mixed-methods research seeks to investigate learner assessment experiences within the Competency-based Approach. It first highlighted the implications of this assessment in the English Language Education (ELE) process. It then identified how this assessment is carried out in some secondary schools in the Republic of Benin. A literature search, semi-structured interview questionnaires, and classroom observations were used to gather quantitative and qualitative data for this study to achieve its objectives. 120 junior high school English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners of 9th grade and 15 of their teachers were then interviewed on their perceptions and beliefs of the educational value of the assessment techniques adopted in the context of the Competency-based Approach (CBA). The findings have shown that assessment is, in general, a critical component of teaching and learning a foreign language. In particular, it requires some techniques that seem not to be well adopted by EFL teachers in the Competency-based Approach. They also indicated that Beninese EFL teachers and learners consider Competency-based Approach Education as not appropriate for their educational system due to the cost of its requirements. This issue would be the reason why the implementation of its evaluation techniques would be problematic. However, some relevant suggestions and recommendations were made to solve the various problems that hamper its performance.

**Keywords:** CBA, assessment, EFL teaching, secondary school Education.

**1. Introduction to the Study**

The present study revolves around two objectives. It aims at (1) exploring the implications of the assessment activities in general in EFL classes and (2) identifying the way these activities are achieved in the context of the Competency-based Approach (CBA).

Competency-based Education (CBE) enables students to acquire skills or competencies independently of their surroundings. This approach is designed to accommodate students of varying abilities and improve academic achievement. However, it is a significant cause of teacher issues. Due to practical constraints, EFL instructors still use the traditional teaching technique and do not entirely apply the Competency-based Approach (CBA). Language instructors in Benin believe their educational system is not ready for this new approach. They believe this because they encounter many challenges, such as lacking qualified trainers to train new EFL teachers.

Moreover, learners do not like researching on their own before going to class. This situation hinders the application of the principles of the Competency-based Approach (CBA). According to McGuire (2017, n.p.), CBA is built on five fundamental principles. These are \_\_ 1) building a comprehensive set of competencies, 2) progressing through the subject from mastery, 3) specifying learning objectives, 4) tailoring educational assistance, and 5) optimising assessment techniques (as observed in *Competency-based Education: Principles and Design*, 2017, n.p.). Unfortunately, there is reason to believe that most instructors consider the fifth concept of these principles (assessing learners) as a daunting task throughout the implementation of this teaching method. Therefore, they resort to the traditional way of teaching and its assessment technique that requires only paper and pencil in examinations or tests. These tests often consist of true/false, matching, or multiple-choice questions. They are simple to score, but they only assess the discrete application of knowledge, information, or memorised material at a lower level of thinking than other types of examinations. Furthermore, this type of assessment offers little indication of what learners can do with their target language in language learning.

Unlike traditional assessment techniques, competency-based assessments require learners to use their abilities in real-life situations. Therefore, to be well equipped for the audience and the context or environment in which they operate, students need to carry out specific activities, such as individual presentations, group discussions, or different types of performances that can improve their competencies (LinguaFolio-NCSSFL, n.d.). These distinctive features make this type of assessment challenging to implement most of the time, leading teachers to revert to the more straightforward conventional approach.

The conventional classroom evaluation approach is based on erroneous assumptions and each solution to alleviate these challenges seems more detrimental than the underlying problem. They

place no constraints on teaching or assessing competencies. This method instead assumes that sampling and statistical techniques can provide a quality result. Therefore, the comparison is between rigorous and detailed competency development and assessment management throughout the competency-based teaching and assessment process.

As English language instructors are constantly striving to enhance the efficiency of their teaching techniques, the only way to determine how well learners are doing is through thorough assessment. Since the traditional assessment method does not adequately assess learners' language competence, it is, therefore, advisable to use a new evaluation system, that of the Competency-based Approach. The current research seeks to enhance the educational value of the competency-based assessment method by shedding light on its principles and implications.

This research work addresses two different research questions:

- What are the implications of an assessment in EFL classes?
- How is learner assessment conducted in the Competency-based Approach?

This study is significant because it places a premium on learner evaluation within the new approach to language Education framework. Assessment is very beneficial since it gives feedback to learners; this enables them to understand where they are excelling and where they are failing. Therefore, instructors and students may collaborate to address the shortcomings.

## **2. Literature Review**

This part of the research work has to do with the literature related to the issue under investigation. After defining the terms Assessment, Competence, Competency, and Competency-based Education, it highlighted the way competencies could be taught and assessed before ending by bringing forward the point of the practice of Competency-based Education in secondary schools and some of its implications.

### **2.1 Definition and Different Types of Assessment**

#### **2.1.1 What is meant by assessment?**

Quansah (2018) introduced the word *assessment* as "[...] one of the critical components of classroom instruction" (p. 21). Jones (2005), discussing the term *assessment* "[...] as part of classroom activities [...]" (p.4), pointed out it "[...] is a fundamental process required to promote learning and ultimately achievement" (Jones, 2005, p.4). In addition, he mentioned that before learning can occur, learners must know and comprehend the following (2005, p.4):

(1)What is the purpose of the learning experience? (2) Why should they study it? (3) How far are they from the goal? (4) How can they succeed?

The overarching goal of *assessment* is developing the learner's performance and achievement (CCRSB<sup>1</sup>, 2013, p.5). This term is usually viewed as an ongoing method of collecting information on students' abilities and accomplishments (CCRSB, 2013, p.5). Similarly, Palomba and Banta (1999, p. 4) defined it as "[...] the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken [to improve] student learning and development".

Assessment in a classroom or any other context of instruction offers valuable information about the scope and scale of learner performance. It entails more than just assigning grades. It is concerned with tracking the development of student academic performances. Angelo and Cross (1993, p.4) believed classroom assessment is a method used to evaluate what learners are learning and how effectively they are learning it. They highlighted that lesson planning is a collaborative process that involves both the instructor and the students in such context. According to Harris and Hodges (1995, p. 12), "Assessment is the gathering of information about learners [to] make temporary decisions about instruction" (As observed in Mezeske and Mezeske, 2007, p.3).

### ***2.1.1 Different types of assessment***

From the perspective of many researchers, such as Bhasin (2018), there are several types of assessment (Summative, Formative, Evaluative, Diagnostic, Norm-referenced tests, Performance-based, Selective response, Criterion-referenced, Written and Oral, etc.). However, as observed in CCRSB (2013, p.7), classroom assessment is usually split into three types: assessment for learning (*Formative Assessment*), assessment of learning (*Summative Assessment*), and assessment as learning. Assessment for learning is the most common kind of assessment in the classroom.

According to CCRSB (2013, p.7), *Summative assessment* helps to measure a student's achievement after receiving instructions. *Formative assessments* are designed to engage students and assist them in accomplishing their objectives. It is used in the classroom to assess learners' abilities. Regarding the *assessment as learning*, it is "[...] a mega-cognitive process in which students take ownership for improving their own learning" (CCRSB, 2013, p.7). However,

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<sup>1</sup> Chignecto Central Region School Board

*written evaluations* have traditionally been one of the most often used summative assessment techniques in educational settings.

## **2.2 Definition of the terms Competence, Competency, and Competency-based Education**

### **2.2.1 Competence vs Competency**

According to Kianna (2018, n.p.), the terms *competence* and *competency* have an unusual connection with one another. At first glance, they appear to imply the same thing, and their dictionary meanings are strikingly close. Nevertheless, they are often employed in distinct situations. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 1989) describes competency as “the ability to deal with a subject, and as the ‘sufficiency of qualification’ (As observed in Axley, 2008, p.216). On the other hand, the online *English Oxford Living Dictionaries* (2016) defined *competence* as “the ability to do something successfully or efficiently” (As observed in Haddouchane *et al.* 2017, p.3). In other words, the term *competence* describes the state of being competent to do a task, whereas *competency* refers to a collection of abilities or qualities. In linguistics, *competency* refers to having an innate understanding of how a language functions. The aim of being fluent in a language is also to achieve competence in that language.

Indeed, the concept of *competence* is not that simple to define. As pointed out by Nickse and McClure (1981), “[...] obviously, this is not an easy topic to address, because no one answer [to the question ‘what is competence?’] will be universally acceptable” (p.1). Nowadays, this concept and “[...] its evaluation have become an important issue in both the theory and practice of general Education around the globe” (Straka, 2004, p.267).

Chickering and Claxton (1981 cited in Nickse and McClure, 1981, pp.5-6) suggested four fundamental principles to define the concept of *competence*. These refer to “[...] (1) the significance [of the] situations and contexts that shape ‘competent’ responses [...]; (2) the perceptual and biological characteristics that delimit them; (3) the importance of employing diverse learning styles to achieve competence; and (4) the motivational nature of competence itself” (1981, pp.5-6).

To sum up, as observed in Kianna (2018), *competencies* are the abilities that a person has to meet a particular demand. *Competence* is defined as a person’s total ability to meet the criteria of a job. It may also refer to a stable source of income, but this is not something that is often seen nowadays, and the two terms have somewhat different technical definitions.

### **2.2.2 Competency-based Education**

To define the term Competency-based Education, Nickse and McClure (1981, p.10) referred to Corcoran (1976, pp. 4-5). They argued, "The Competency-based Approach begins with the definition of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successful performance in a particular role." They added that when competence is justified based on practical terms, it becomes the foundation for awarding credentials (1981, p.10). In other words, Nickse and McClure (1981, p.59) explained that Competency-based Education is a multifaceted movement that spans at least three significant educational settings [elementary and secondary schools, adult and postsecondary Education, and out-of-school programmes]. According to them, these settings and their curricula are very different. Minimum competence assessment is a logical and systematic reaction to a broad public demand for [...] economically efficient, socially uniform, responsible, and conventional [programmes].

To summarise, many practitioners of the Competency-based Approach (CBA) believe that implementing this idea in Education has numerous challenges, including costs and difficulty in evaluating its effectiveness. Therefore, it is proper to bring to light some aspects that are supposed to facilitate its use.

### **2.3 The teaching and assessment of Competency-based Approach (CBA)**

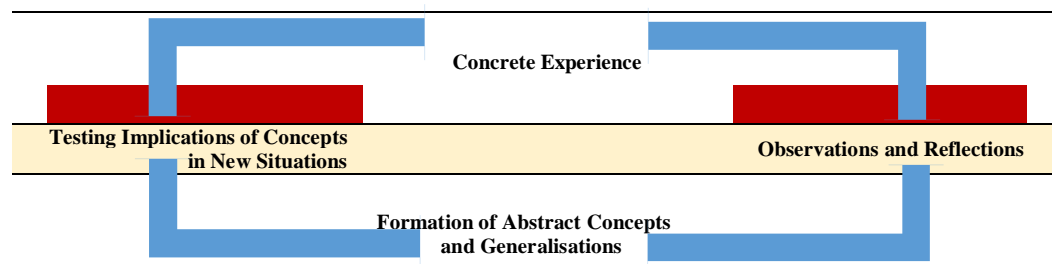
Many research studies such as the one of Boritz and Carnaghan (2003, p.8) underline that "[...] there is [minimal] empirical evidence about the efficacy of Competency-based Approaches compared with the [effectiveness] of more traditional Education methods, despite several decades of experimentation with Competency-based Education". Simply put, the difficulties related to the effective implementation of the Competency-based Approach in educational contexts lead many of its practitioners to move away from such an approach towards the old teaching system that employs traditional Education methods.

To be successful in the teaching of a subject, whether it is an academic or vocational one, based on the use of the Competency-based Approach, the following principles discussed by Nickse and McClure (1981, pp.11-12) and that underlie the expression and the development of competence, should be observed. The CBA's user should know that:

- *Competence is internal and external, situational, and personal.* It means that the levels and qualities of competence may change from a situation to another. They depend on the conditions and contexts in which they are required (Nickse and McClure, 1981, pp.11-12).
- *Competence is limited by a person's perceptions, neurological system, and character:* ability to receive and discriminate wrong stimuli, sustain attention to selected stimuli; analytically order incentives according to the problem at hand; reorganise relevant stimuli

and apply to the issue at hand; and continually censor proposed ordering of stimuli in light of new information (Nickse and McClure, 1981, p. 13).

- *Achieving competence requires diverse learning styles.* Based on the four-stage cycle (see **Figure 1**) elaborated by Kolb (1980), we can similarly identify four kinds of aptitudes that an effective student needs to have, and that are presented in **Table 1** below (Nickse and McClure, 1981, p. 16).
- *Competence itself is a motivational force.* It means that the present principle has to do with some elements of personality development. It implies that we need a good reason to use competence or struggle to practice an ability (Nickse and McClure, 1981, p.19).



**Fig. 1** Experiential Learning Model

**Source:** Kolb, A. D. (1980). Student Learning Styles and Disciplinary Learning Environments: Diverse Pathways for Growth’ in The Modern American College, ed Arthur W Chickering (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.). [Retrieved from Nickse and McClure (1981, p.17)]

**Table 1: Kinds of Abilities Learners Need**

Ability	Description	Emphasis
Concrete Experience (CE)	The learner becomes fully involved in the new experience	Peeling
Reflective Observation (RO)	The learner observes and reflects on the experience from different perspectives	Observing
Abstract Conceptualization (AC)	The learner creates concepts that integrate observations into sound theories	Conceptualizing
Active Experience (AE)	The learner uses the theories to solve problems and make decisions	Applying

**Source:** Retrieved from Nickse and McClure (1981, p.17)

Overall, the abovementioned four principles help describe the large-scale concept that the term competence represents and then set the basis for teaching and assessment in any Education. Indeed, one of the significant problems related to the implementation of the CBA in secondary schools has to do with its assessment method. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that evaluating learners based on the instruction they received or their competence in a specific field is the CBA's teacher's pet peeve. Therefore, the latter must find appropriate solutions to overcome this issue. There are several fundamental considerations that the CBA's instructor must consider to assess a role-based performance effectively. As suggested by Schalock (1976, p.32) quoted in Nickse and McClure (1981, pp.156-159), the *validity* and *credibility* of the evaluation instrument and the meaningfulness of the description roles must be considered. They added that the *criteria* or standards must be referred to, making sure that the learner assessed has reached the considered objectives or not. Moreover, they highlighted that the *trustworthiness* and the *usefulness* of the information gathered and the *feasibility* of implementing the assessment strategies used in the CBA program have to be considered. In addition to these principles, Schalock (1976, p.57), quoted in Nickse and McClure (1981, pp.159-165), also highlighted the importance of observing realistic timelines when assessing a CBA program.

#### **2.4 The practice of Competency-based Education in secondary schools and some of its implications**

There are several fundamental considerations that the CBA's instructor must take into account to be effective in assessing a role-based performance (McClure, 1981, pp.52-57):

- *The Choice of Competencies* [identifying the essential competencies for the intended program (McClure, 1981, p.52)]
- *The Choice of Instructional Coordinates: Time and Place* (require competencies that deal with “problem-solving, personal initiative, and social skills in connection with life-roles that are broader than those of student [...]” (Nickse and McClure, 1981, p.56))
- *The Choice of Test Types* [Brickell, 1978 cited in Nickse and McClure (1981, pp.56-57), highlighted four types of measuring device to be used to evaluate a learner's level of competence: (1) Paper and pencil tests in the classroom; (2) School products and performances; (3) Simulated performance situations set up in the schoolhouse to resemble those in later school or on the job; (4) Actual performance situations in later school or on the job]



- *The Choice of Standards* [Should learners be evaluated based on standard norms or their aptitude to meet a pre-established minimum achievement level? (1981, p.57)]
- *The Choice of Certification* [way competence’s certification will be recorded and to whom it will be reported (McClure, 1981, p.57)]

Besides, the CBA’s program makes the instructor “[...] organise instruction in such a way that a learner’s competence is enhanced, generalised, and made permanent” (McClure, 1981, p.77). The effectiveness of a CBA program lies in the role that students have to play towards its objectives, its ability to make them practice repeatedly, and stimulate self-oriented improvement among them. The following four types of classroom activities are advisable to develop motivation (the fundamental element to produce competence) among learners: “role-playing, simulation, problem-solving, and assignments outside the school” (Nickse and McClure, 1981, p.78). The CBA has multiple faces, and some of these can be identified through its objectives in a secondary school context. Thomson (1981, in Nickse and McClure, 1981, p.180) has illustrated the twenty-five (25) different possible goals for any Competency-based Education through the matrix presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Potential Objectives for Competency-based Education**

Content Objectives Social Purposes		a	b	c	d	e
		Basic skills’ achievement	Basic skills’ application	Subject content achievement	Life role achievement	Life role application
1	Diagnosis/Remediation	Obj. 1a	Obj. 1b	Obj. 1c	Obj. 1d	Obj. 1e
2	Course Achievement	Obj. 2a	Obj. 2b	Obj. 2c	Obj. 2d	Obj. 2e
3	Grade Promotion	Obj. 3a	Obj. 3b	Obj. 3c	Obj. 3d	Obj. 3e
4	Graduation Diploma	Obj. 4a	Obj. 4b	Obj. 4c	Obj. 4d	Obj. 4e
5	Adult Proficiency	Obj. 5a	Obj. 5b	Obj. 5c	Obj. 5d	Obj. 5e

**Source:** Adapted from Nickse and McClure (1981, p.181)

The implications that will result from the effective implementation of such a system, as argued by Thomson (1981) quoted in Nickse and McClure (1981, p.182), could lead to a significant “restructuring of secondary schools [...]”. It will make the instruction easier and allow learners to continue their studies in different learning settings or fields. It will also make instructors quickly diagnose learners’ problems and suggest possible solutions to help them facilitate instruction.

**3. Methodology of the Study**

This section is concerned with the research methods, population, and sampling. It has to do with the instruments used to collect data, the techniques adopted to gather those data, and the procedures used to analyse them. Given the nature of the different objectives of this study, a mixed-method approach was adopted.

### 3.1 Research Design

To examine the implications of an assessment in EFL classes and scrutinise how it is conducted in the Competency-based Approach, quantitative and qualitative data have been collected concurrently through literature search, semi-structured interview questionnaires, and classroom observations. The inferences obtained from the crosschecking of the different quantitative data analyses were compared with those derived from the crosschecking of the various qualitative data analyses for integration.

### 3.2 Population and Sampling

The primarily concerned with this study are teachers and students, who are the educational system’s leading actors. That is why the present study is based on their beliefs about the issue under investigation.

One hundred twenty (120) junior high school EFL learners of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and fifteen (15) of their EFL teachers were randomly selected from two different General Educational Institutions (*CEG Abomey-calavi* and *Complexe Scolaire Ste Félicité* of Godomey) located in two distinct regions of Benin. They were administered a semi-structured interview questionnaire regarding their perceptions and beliefs about the competency-based assessment issue. The choice of these two general Education secondary schools can be explained by the fact that they are, among others, some of the high schools where the researcher teaches EFL.

**Table 3: Number of EFL Learners and Instructors Involved in the survey**

Participants	Gender	High Schools		Total
		CEG Abomey-calavi	CSS Félicité	
EFL Learners	Males	47	31	78
	Females	26	16	42
<b>Total</b>		<b>73</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>120</b>
EFL Instructors	Males	4	7	11
	Females	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>

### **3.3 Data Collection Instruments**

The different data were collected through literature search, semi-structured interview questionnaires, and classroom observations. The various respondents (EFL learners and teachers) were probed regarding their perceptions and beliefs about the competency-based assessment.

The questionnaire administered to the 120 learners consists of seven items, while the questionnaire administered to the sample of 15 teachers includes nine items. Each of these helps to examine the perceptions and beliefs of the different participants regarding the frequency of conducting an assessment, the types of evaluation adopted in Beninese EFL classrooms. In addition, they explore whether they (EFL teachers) like evaluating their students or they (EFL learners) dislike being assessed on the instructions taught to them. They also allow determining the duration of an assessment, the period during which it takes place, its impact on learners, instructors teaching quality, and whether teachers explain the reason why they conduct an assessment among their students or not. Moreover, they helped examine the need to assess EFL learners when dealing with the CBA and explore how this assessment must be completed in such a context and the contribution of the Competency-based Approach to teaching and learning.

### **3.4 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Two secondary schools [General Education Secondary School of Abomey-Calavi (CEG Abomey-Calavi) and Complexe Scolaire Ste Félicité de Godomey (CSS Félicité)] were selected to gather data. Before starting this research, a meeting with the different secondary school headmasters was held. With their help, a schedule of meetings with the two groups of respondents was drawn up. Thus, following the administrative processes of these institutions, the two particular questionnaires were immediately administered to EFL students and their teachers. The inductive content analysis method popularised by Bogdan and Biklen (1992, pp.70-72) was employed to analyse the various data gathered through the literature search, semi-structured interview questionnaires, and classroom observations. It deals with a thorough description, analysis, and interpretation of data through data reduction and data coding strategies.

## **4. Findings of the Study**

This section of the research work presents instructors' and students' thorough responses to the research questions and the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

### **4.1 Presentation of the Findings**

#### **4.1.1 Why do teachers assess their learners?**

**4.1.1.1 Analysis of Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire**

**Table 4: Presentation Analysis and Interpretation of the First Series of Data**

	<b>PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FIRST SERIES OF DATA</b>
<b>Data Analysis N°1</b>	Based on the data illustrated in <b>Figure 2</b> below, it can be noticed that <b>53.34%</b> of the respondents understand what an assessment is as they define it as a procedure teachers use to collect information about learners' performance. <b>33.33%</b> of those respondents take it as a process that helps teachers know how well they perform. Moreover, later on, only <b>13.33%</b> of teachers define it as a process of assigning grades to students.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These results suggest that most of the teachers investigated perceive the assessment in CBA Education as an instrumental process that is crucial for developing the learners' academic performance.
<b>Data Analysis N°2</b>	As presented and illustrated in <b>Figure 3</b> below, many teachers perceived assessment as a fundamental teaching and learning attitude, though they confessed that it is difficult to achieve. <b>20%</b> of them admitted that they find their students' learning assessment relatively easy and essential to carry out in an EFL teaching process. However, <b>13.33%</b> of them contended that we could do without assessing learners though it is sometimes helpful to refer to this teaching attitude.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These outcomes suggest that learner assessment is critical in any teaching process even though its achievement is not easy because of the reliability and validity issues that it raises.
<b>Data Analysis N°3</b>	Based on the data illustrated in <b>Figure 4</b> below, we noticed that <b>33.33%</b> of teachers evaluate the academic performance of their learners both after and before the course took place. While <b>20%</b> of them argued that they assess their students when dealing with their EFL instruction, <b>13.34%</b> admitted that they do it whenever they have no answer to their questions addressed to their learners.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These results suggest that EFL teachers do not follow a pedagogical standard regarding conditions and the right moment to assess learners. This situation may negatively affect the learners' performance.
<b>Data Analysis N°4</b>	As displayed in <b>Figure 5</b> below, the primary purpose of conducting an assessment is clarified by <b>33.33%</b> of teachers who consider evaluating their students to know their weaknesses and strengths regarding a given competence or instruction.
<b>Interpretation</b>	This result suggests that the significant purpose of an assessment is to determine whether a learner has some competencies or acquired the notions related to a specific teaching or not.
<b>Data Analysis N°5</b>	Data illustrated in <b>Figure 6</b> below show that all teachers ( <b>100%</b> ) evaluate learners according to some development criteria.
<b>Interpretation</b>	This outcome suggests that in a CBA Education, one of the purposes of learners' assessment is performance development.
<b>Data Analysis N°6</b>	<b>Figure 7</b> shows that although <b>40%</b> of instructors considered the CBA unsuitable for our educational system, another 40% believe its implementation requires modern equipment. However, <b>20%</b> of them stated it helps instructors identify teaching-related issues.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These findings indicate that the CBA may help teachers assess their teaching and identify areas for improvement.

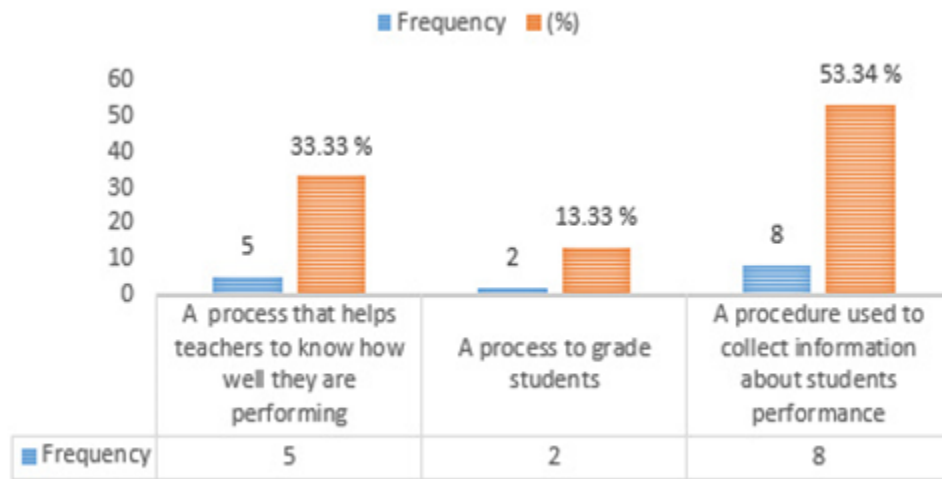


Figure 2: Illustration of the Meaning of Assessment According to Teachers

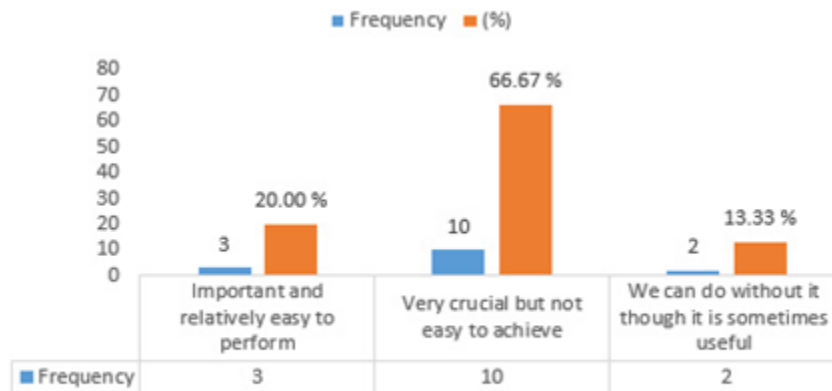


Figure 3: Illustration of the Teacher's Perception of Assessment

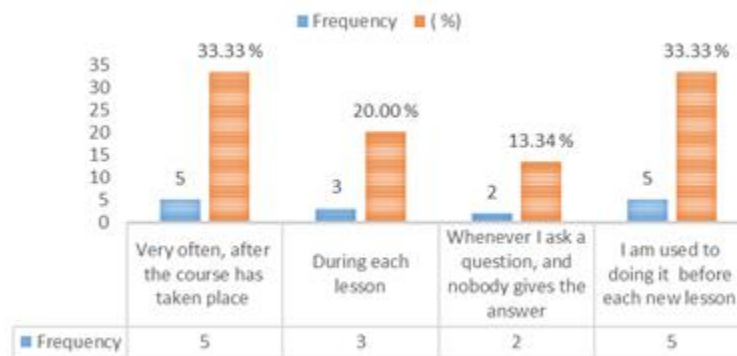


Figure 4: Illustration of the Teachers' Frequency of Assessment

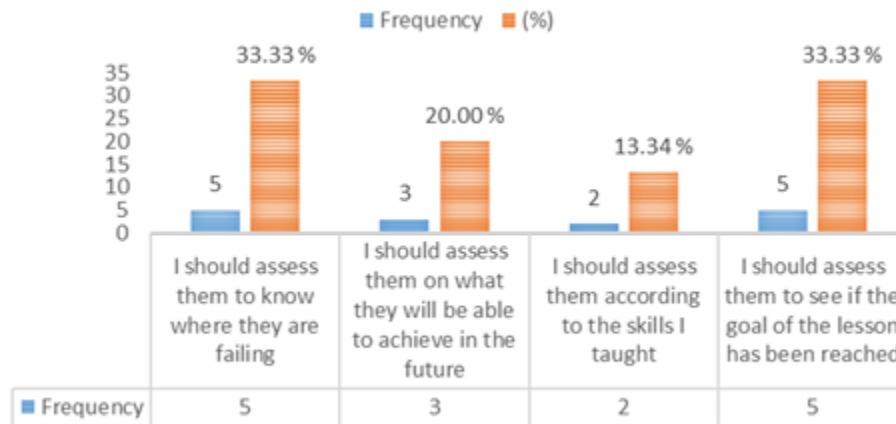


Figure 5: Illustration of the Purpose of Assessment in CBA



Figure 6: Illustration of the criteria of Assessment According to CBA

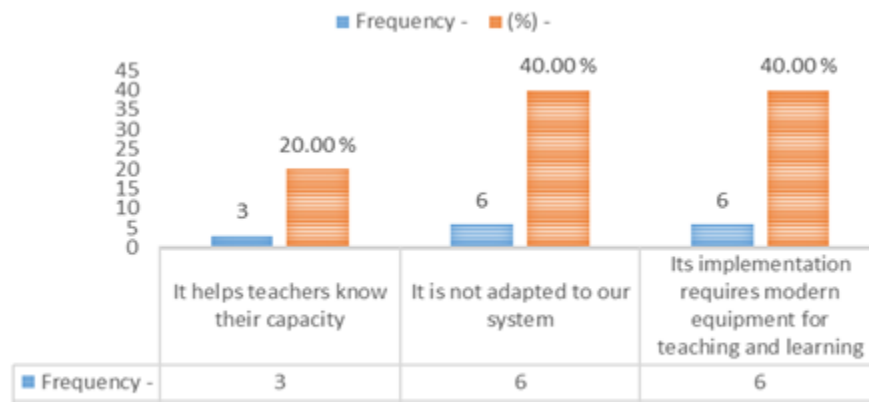


Figure 7: Illustration of the Contribution of CBA to Teachers

4.1.1.2 Analysis of Learners' Responses to the Questionnaire

Table 5: Presentation Analysis and Interpretation of the Second Series of Data

PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SECOND SERIES OF DATA	
<b>Data Analysis N°7</b>	According to some learners respondents (41.67 %), assessment is a set of measures performed by their EFL instructors at the end of the year to determine their academic achievement. 33.33% of them regard the concept of assessment as an activity that their teachers use to check their competencies. As for 25% of them, this concept is a knowledge-controlling activity.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These results suggest that learners regard the concept of assessment as a pedagogical attitude that helps control their knowledge in a specific field.
<b>Data Analysis N°8</b>	From the data displayed and illustrated in <b>Figure 9</b> below, it can be noticed that most of the EFL learners (75%) probed have a positive attitude towards their target language assessment, whereas 25% of them have developed some negative feelings towards it.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These outcomes propose that students are sometimes afraid of being assessed though most of them enjoy experiencing it.
<b>Data Analysis N°9</b>	As illustrated in <b>Figure 10</b> below, 75% of respondents believed their assessment as a pedagogical tool that helps estimate whether they deserve moving to a new class, an upper learning level, or not. Only 25% mentioned one of its significant inconveniences on some learners. They claim it would create anxiety in the students being assessed.
<b>Interpretation</b>	Apart from its use as a knowledge barometer, these findings suggest it causes severe stress in learners.
<b>Data Analysis N°10</b>	Based on the outcomes illustrated in <b>Figure 11</b> below, 50% of the learners considered that evaluating their English language acquisition helps them considerably improve this target language. 33.33% of them contended that this teaching or learning attitude positively affects their academic performance. However, very few of them (16.66%) pretended that this pedagogical tool does not affect them.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These outcomes suggest that even learners themselves know that assessing their performance on the English language acquisition affects them positively. This situation is likely to reduce the degree of anxiety some may experience whenever they have to be evaluated on their knowledge.

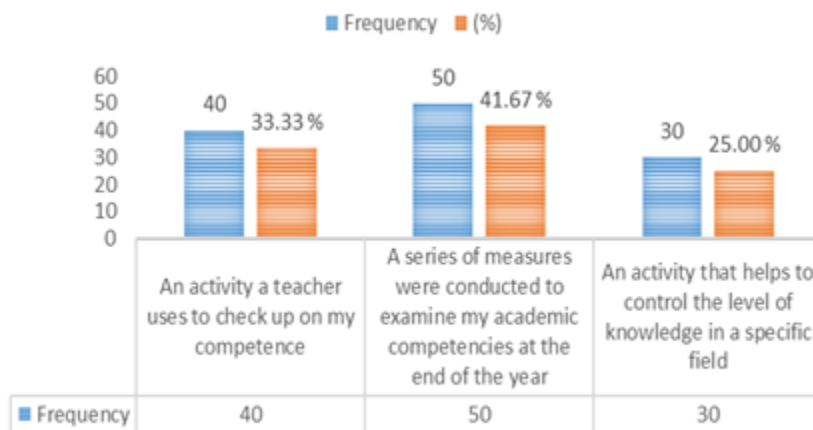


Figure 8: Illustration of students' perception of assessment

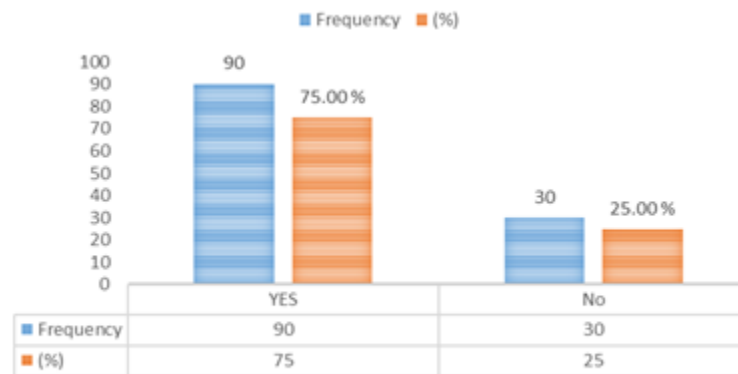


Figure 9: Illustration of students' attitude towards assessment

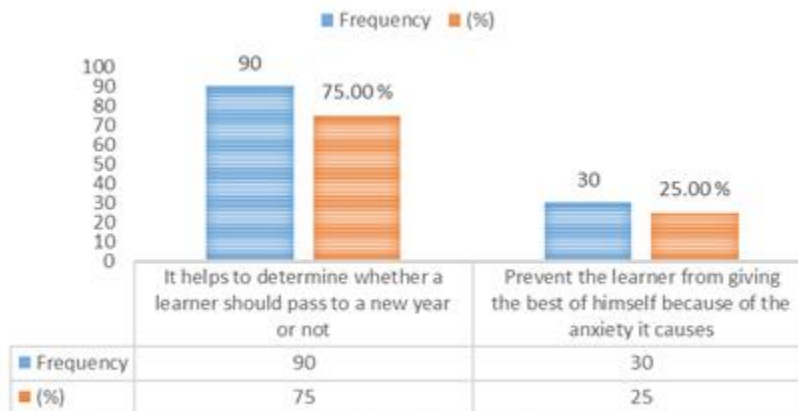


Figure 10: Illustration of students' beliefs of the importance of assessment

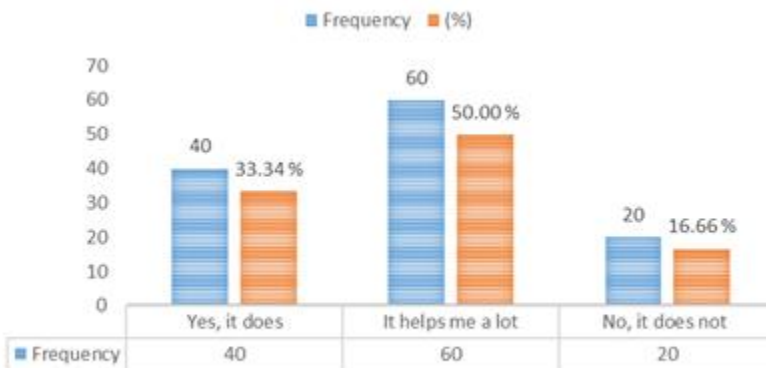


Figure 11: Illustration of the impact of assessment on students

Inference N°1



Based on the cross-analysis of the data collected from the different respondents' beliefs illustrated above, the following can be suggested.

- ✚ Teachers assess their learners:
  - To know the ones who are failing;
  - To understand what they will be able to do in the future;
  - To find out if they have mastered the content of the lesson;
  - To determine if the objectives of a class lesson have been reached.
- ✚ The respondents view assessment as:
  - A process that helps teachers to know how well they are performing (**33.33%**);
  - An approach to grade students (**13.33%**);
  - A procedure used to collect information about students' performance (**53.34%**).

**4.1.2 How is Learner Assessment Conducted in Beninese EFL Classes in CBA Context?**

*4.1.2.1 Analysis of Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire*

**Table 6: Presentation Analysis and Interpretation of the Third Series of Data**

	<b>PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE THIRD SERIES OF DATA</b>
<b>Data Analysis N°11</b>	<b>Figure 12</b> illustrates the way teachers conduct the assessment in their CBA class. Therefore, it shows that <b>40%</b> of teachers use English tests to assess their learners, while <b>26.66%</b> use both lessons' feedback and some quizzes for assessment. Only <b>6.68%</b> of them evaluate their student's through homework assignments.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These outcomes tend to suggest that there is no standard for the assessment of learners in the CBA.
<b>Data Analysis N°12</b>	As displayed and illustrated in <b>Figure 13</b> , teachers adopt different types of assessments. <b>33.34%</b> of the respondents emphasise <i>diagnostic evaluation</i> , while <b>26.66%</b> refer to <i>interim</i> and <i>formative evaluation</i> . Only <b>13.34%</b> of them consider <i>summative evaluation</i> .
<b>Interpretation</b>	These outcomes suggest that one of the best ways to evaluate learners seems to be through <i>diagnostic assessments</i> .

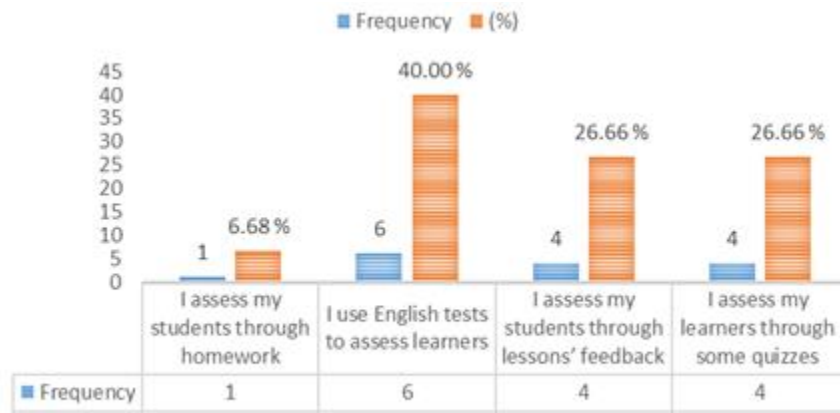


Figure 12: Illustration of the ways of conducting an assessment

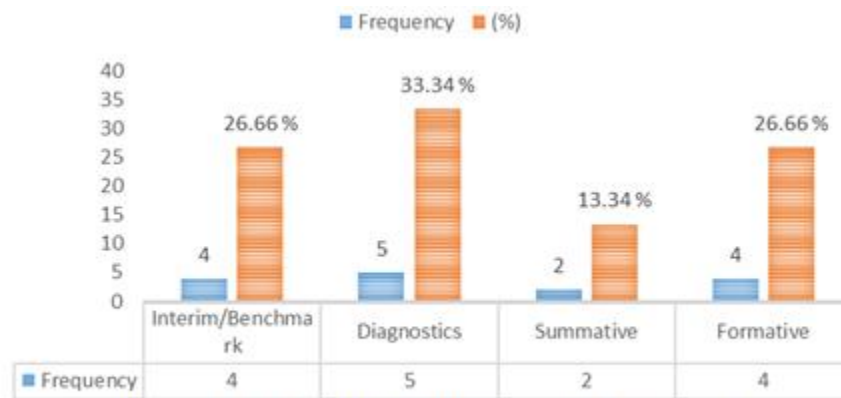


Figure 13: Illustration of the types of assessment

4.1.2.2 Analysis of Learners' Responses to the Questionnaire

For the sake of triangulation, data were also collected through four classroom observations. Table 7 below provides a summary of the different results obtained after analysing and interpreting the fifth data set.

Table 7: Presentation Analysis and Interpretation of the Fourth Series of Data

PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FOURTH SERIES OF DATA	
Data Analysis N°13	Figure 14 shows that 41.67% of learners declared that their EFL teachers always assess their performance in the English language. Another 41.67% of them stated that they are sometimes evaluated about their performance in their target language. Only 20% of them, contrary to their mates, asserted that their EFL teachers rarely assess them on their language performance.
Interpretation	These results propose that EFL learners are often evaluated based on their instruction

	or background knowledge.
<b>Data Analysis N°14</b>	It is clearly illustrated in <b>Figure 15</b> that most learners ( <b>66.66%</b> ) asserted they are evaluated only when they cannot answer the teacher’s question regarding a previous lesson. Only a few ( <b>16.67%</b> ) argued that they experience it before a new class lesson starts. A similar ratio of those learners asserted that their language instructors usually assess them during and after class.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These outcomes suggest that learners are generally assessed unexpectedly. Consequently, this may increase their poor performance in such an activity.
<b>Data Analysis N°15</b>	As clearly illustrated in <b>Figure 16</b> below, most of the students ( <b>83.33%</b> ) asserted to be often assisted by their teachers. In contrast, few of them considered that they were punished for not understanding the instructions.
<b>Interpretation</b>	These outcomes propose that most EFL learners expect a lot from their language instructors, and it is only through an assessment that their limits could be known and improved afterwards, thanks to the help of their teachers.

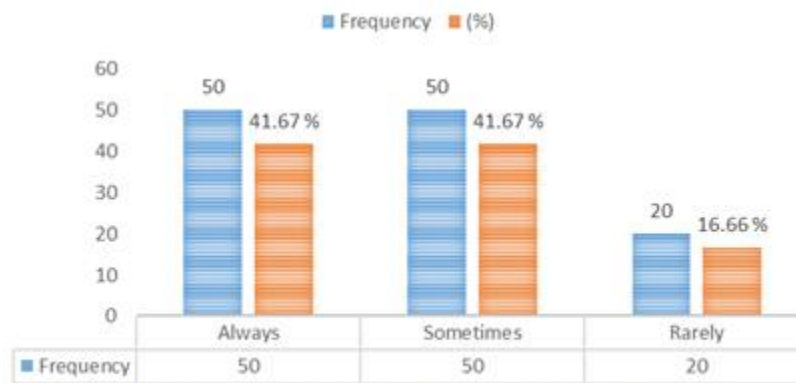
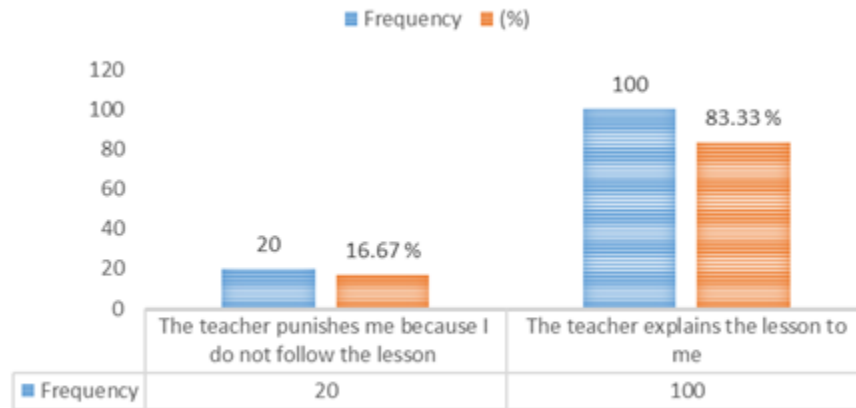


Figure 14: Illustration of the rate of students' assessment



15: Illustration of the Period of Assessment



**Figure 16: Illustration of the EFL learners' beliefs on Teachers assistance**

### **Inference N°2**

Based on the cross-analysis of the data collected from the different respondents' beliefs illustrated above, the following can be suggested.

- ✚ Assessment is conducted through:
  - Homework, lesson feedback, and quizzes.
- ✚ The period of assessment is usually:
  - After the course, during the lesson;
  - When I ask a question and nobody answers;
  - Before the lesson.

### **4.1.3 Cross-analysis of the Data Gathered from the Different Classroom Observations**

For the sake of triangulation, data were also collected through four classroom observations. The two classroom observations showed that students from both research sites had a similar approach towards evaluating their English language acquisition and academic achievement in the English language curriculum. However, learners from the secondary school of Abomey-calavi appeared to experience more anxiety than those from the Complexe Scolaire Ste Félicité of Godomey. This outcome may be due to the teaching experience of the language instructors from the two different secondary schools. The Sainte Félicité school complex learners looked older and more experienced than any of the other 9th grade students at the general education school in Abomey-Calavi. This scenario is unusual because private schools such as the Complexe Scolaire Sainte Félicité of Godomey enroll younger students than public high schools like the CEG Abomey-calavi. In addition, the latter is a secondary school that is older than the first one. Briefly, the different results obtained from the classroom observations supplemented those of the individual

semi-structured interviews. These results suggest that learner assessment is the barometer of the teaching process.

#### **4.2 Summary of the Cross-analysis of the different Data Collected**

The cross-analysis of inferences N°1 and N°2 and that from the classroom observation revealed that most of the learners and their language instructors probed considered that the concept of assessment in the CBA is the gauge of language acquisition or any other instruction delivered. After looking at what all teachers investigated said about the Competency-based Approaches, the following inferences can be suggested.

The Competency-based Approach is more appropriate for the workplace than for school Education. In the first context, workers' competencies are required to achieve a specific goal. In the second context, the focus is not on particular skills but on general knowledge to help students acquire competence in particular fields. In addition, some teachers contended that this approach is not suitable for our educational system because we lack pedagogical and material resources in our schools.

### **5. Discussion of the Findings**

The present part of the research work discusses the implication of the assessment process in EFL classes and the theories of its achievement in the context of the Competency-based Approach (CBA). Given the various observations inferred from the different results of the present study, as presented above, it can be suggested that the issue of assessment is crucial for developing the competence of the EFL learner.

#### **5.1 Implications of learner assessment in EFL classes in Benin**

The outcomes of the present research work suggest that the significant purpose of an assessment is to determine whether a learner has some competencies or acquired the notions related to a specific teaching or not. They revealed that language instructors assess their learners to know whether they are progressing in learning their target language and determine which class lesson objectives are already achieved. Moreover, these results have shown that EFL learners are aware of the benefit of assessing their academic performance, though they fear the way their language teachers implement this assessment.

These findings supplement those of Jones (2005, p.4), who noted that learner assessment is a critical process that must take place to enhance learning and, ultimately, achievement. They help to contend, as CCRSB (2013, p.5), that the ultimate aim of an assessment is to improve the overall performance and achievement of the learner (CCRSB, 2013, p.5). Thanks to them, as

Cross (1993, p.4), we believe that classroom assessment is a technique for evaluating what students are learning and how well they are learning it. Consequently, assessment in EFL classes implies that students' mental learning problems are related to their cognitive capacities, psychomotor skills, and learning outcomes that connect principle to practice.

## **5.2 Learner Assessment in the context of the Competency-based Approach in Benin**

According to the present research findings, there is no standard for evaluating EFL learners in the CBA. According to its results, diagnostic assessments seem to be one of the most effective methods for assessing learners. Furthermore, these findings have revealed that learner assessment is frequently based on their instruction or background knowledge in Beninese EFL classes. They have shown that this assessment occurs unexpectedly or typically when the teacher asks a question, and no one answers. Sometimes, it is before the next lesson or during the instruction of the day, or immediately after the course. These results fully reflect the notions of assessment in the context of CBA as discussed by CCRSB (2013, p.7).

According to most Competency-based Education designers, a Competency-based Approach aims to help people succeed in their social environment as independent persons to grow (Nickse and McClure, 1981, p.74). Therefore, as pinpointed by Nickse and McClure (1981, pp.74-75), to achieve this objective through the implementation of a CBA's program, the following requirements are compulsory. (1) The uniqueness of the competency; (2) The dissection of its anatomy; (3) The selection of educational instruments for each of the competency's constituents; (4) The development of a repertoire of teaching techniques to enable instructors to approach specific objectives most effectively; and (5) The consideration of interdisciplinary functions to facilitate the competency's reinforcement. Moreover, the instructor using a CBA should consider (6) the assessment of learners' competency as they progress in their studies; (7) the impact of the out of school experiences on the competency; and (8) the development of consistent competency assessment processes to ensure variety in the evaluation's techniques and the interpretation of their outcomes.

Therefore, the significant implication of an assessment in a CBA context has to do with the socialisation of learners. They can from now on organise themselves in society. Thanks to CBA's program, students are put at the centre of every activity and guided by their teachers to achieve them properly. Consequently, this raises the issue of emotional troubles that impedes the development of learners' performance.

Other implications of assessing learners in the Education of a CBA include the development of their academic performance. Although most instructors do not use a universal standard of

assessment, and the test used may not be reliable or valid (Schalock, 1976, p.32), there is evidence to believe that this pedagogical approach is critical for student development. On the other hand, the fact that this assessment is not always carried out regularly and that the learners being assessed are not always informed in advance can have a negative impact on their performance. Giving them an assessment test by surprise or without any preparation can lead to test anxiety. For this reason, most of the language instructors surveyed consider diagnostic assessments to be the best way to assess their students.

As discussed in TeachThought-Staff (2019, n.p), we can identify six (06) common types of learning assessment. However, only four of them have been addressed in the present research paper. The first one, the *diagnostic evaluation* (also known as a pre-assessment), refers to evaluating learners' strengths, flaws, weaknesses, background knowledge, and skills before teaching. The second one, the *formative assessment*, has to do basically with evaluating learners' performance when dealing with a lecture or whenever the latter have been given teaching. It can occur more often during Education or when an instruction is ongoing. This type of assessment helps to examine whether students are focused (present-minded) or not (absent-minded). The third type of learning evaluation is known as a *summative assessment*. As the name suggests, it estimates learners' global achievement at the end of a teaching or an academic year. This form of evaluation helps educators to determine whether a learner can graduate for a degree or simply pass to an upper class or not. The fourth one, known as *interim or benchmark assessment*, helps teachers be informed about their learners' performance after a given time interval. This evaluation usually occurs at the end of a term or grading period. In other words, this type of evaluation can predict those summative assessments that are generally achieved at the end of an academic year.

Roughly, the objectives of learner assessment in CBA Education are manifold. It helps develop proficiency or talent among them and allows teachers to self-evaluate their teachings to identify their limits and struggle to improve them. In other words, CBA provides for examining learners' basic abilities and determining whether they have acquired concepts relevant to specific teaching. Moreover, this assessment is generally done through *diagnostic* and *formative* assessments. However, language educators, due to specific administrative requirements, often refer to *interim* and *summative* assessments to examine the overall academic performance of their learners and decide whether they deserve to progress in their studies (move to the next grade) or not.

Although sometimes a source of anxiety for learners, assessment can be regarded as the barometer of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, learners' understanding of the importance of assessing their competencies in a given field could help them reduce the degree of

anxiety they may experience when being evaluated. Thus, teachers are responsible for supporting their students in all learning situations and doing their best to provide them with a flexible learning environment through CBA, even if they lack the financial resources required to implement this teaching approach successfully.

Most language teachers interviewed believe that the CBA is more suitable for the workplace than school instruction. According to them, instead of teaching general knowledge, it focuses on the individual's unique competencies to achieve a goal. In addition, secondary schools do not have the resources to implement this new method. This situation has a significant effect on the assessment of learner performance.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation was carried out in two secondary Education schools located in two different regions of the Republic of Benin. The research project is organised around the junior high school EFL learners of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This work focuses on the assessment of learners in the context of the Competency-based Approach (CBA).

To assess learners' competence in EFL, teachers have to refer to their performance in this target language that can be measured through different types of evaluations such as *formative* and *summative*. It implies that there is a difference between the concept of *competence* and the one of *performance*. According to Chomsky (1965, p.4), *competence* has to do with the [learner]'s knowledge of his target language. In contrast, *performance* refers to his/her effective use of that language in a practical situation. As pointed out by Fulcher (1995), "competence is fundamentally different from performance but is said to generate performance" (p.25). In other words, competence implies "knowing" a target language, whereas performance denotes "what can be done" with that language.

The present research has shown that most English language instructors in secondary school Education refer to *diagnostic* and *formative* assessments to measure their learners' competence in the target language. However, they use interim and summative assessment techniques (written evaluations) to evaluate their target language performance. Among the various implications of the learner assessment in using the CBA, the development of their academic performance and the teaching and learning process can be noted.

The present research study has helped raise teachers' awareness of the assessment in the context of the CBA as it is a new approach to language teaching and learning. To meet its objectives, it has resorted to some critical research studies related to the issue that has been investigated and the perception of this issue by some language actors from two secondary schools of general



education in the Republic of Benin. The different results of this study showed that both EFL teachers and learners mostly develop a positive attitude towards the various types of assessment. They help each of these language actors achieve educational objectives and examine their strengths and weaknesses or limitations they need to improve. This study also revealed that language educators still do not appreciate the Competency-based Approach to Education that they consider unadaptable to their educational system because of the cost of its requirements.

The following ideas and recommendations have been formulated to help language instructors successfully implement CBA and effectively assess their learners in such an educational programme.

- The government should provide each actor in language Education with appropriate and necessary teaching and learning materials.
- Students and their parents should cooperate with the language instructors for the effectiveness of the implementation of the CBA.
- The Authority in charge of Education should provide teachers with efficient support and practical training to implement the new approach better. Further clarification of the concept of assessment in this teaching approach also needs to be provided. Regular inspections can be organised to assess this approach.
- Before carrying out any evaluation, language instructors should consider their assessment objectives and ensure that their learners understand them. This attitude will help the latter to improve their performance better.
- Language instructors have to use the different types of assessments addressed in the present study and be aware of their roles as an organiser, prompter, controller, participant, resource person, and assessor.
- Language learners should not fear being assessed on their competence or their performance regarding the target language. They should rather avoid cheating during the process of their knowledge evaluation.

Future research on learner assessment in the context of CBA could attempt to investigate new types of evaluation that can help the new approach meet its objectives. A comparative study with a larger sample size from various secondary schools may contribute to generalising the results of this study.

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