

IV The Competency Based Approach

THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH

The competency-based approach is based on linking learning carried out at school to varied and relevant contexts-of-use in order to make the learning useful and durable. The aim is for students to develop intellectual, linguistic and problem-solving capacities in school that will enable them to tackle cognitively and pragmatically challenging situations both in and out of school. Students will thus see learning as being worthwhile and having relevance both for their studies and their future.

Definition of Competency

A competency is the ability to act using a range of skills and knowledge in various situations that may differ from those in which they were learned. An individual's competency in a certain area develops over time. A competency is firmly linked to a context-of-use. In other words, students will be prepared to use English effectively in real-life situations by drawing on and manipulating what they have learned in school.

Rationale

In this curriculum, language is viewed as a set of interacting competencies. Therefore, the ability to *use* language as a speaker, listener, reader and writer is critical in the goals of the curriculum. The program is therefore always centered on the students and the development of their capacities in order for them to acquire, in the most effective way possible, competency in English. Competencies are linked to their in-school and out of school needs. Students learn to speak, listen to, read, write and re-use what they have learned in new situations. These skills are taught in an integrated way, since in real-life that is how they are used. It is no longer sufficient to dispense information to students, rather the aim is to help students to play an ever more active role in their own development and make them responsible for their own learning. In order to take this active role, students need opportunities to find the answers to questions arising from their own daily life and to become more responsible and autonomous. In this approach to learning students confront complex and significant situations; their personal process of adaptation relies on their cognitive and affective resources while also taking into account the influence of their social and cultural interactions with the world around them.

By framing the aims of the curriculum in terms of competency, the focus is on what learners **can actively do** in and with the language rather than on a discrete list of items they are expected to remember.

Language competencies and supporting competencies

Language competencies

Language involves three basic competencies:

- Interactive competency
- Interpretive competency
- Productive competency

Interactive competency

Interactive competency is the ability to use language orally to interact with others in order to create social relations, express needs, understand and address needs of others and to get things accomplished. Engaging in a discussion is an example of using one's interactive competency.

Interpretive competency

Interpretive competency is the ability to understand written language through reading or spoken language through listening and to interpret it appropriately. Reading is the ability to understand and interpret written texts, listening is the ability to understand and interpret oral language. Reading and listening are thus addressed separately in the curriculum.

Productive competency

Productive competency is the ability to produce coherent, appropriate and relevant messages in writing and speaking. It is also the ability to effectively express ideas and organize thoughts appropriately. Productive competency is more often associated with writing because writing involves producing texts such as letters or essays. Productive speaking competency is also the production of texts; it differs from interactive speaking competency in that it does not involve interaction with other speakers. Giving a lecture or a presentation are examples of using one's productive speaking competency.

Learners have different levels of competency at different levels of language proficiency. A beginning language learner can do less in each competency than an advanced language learner. This is reflected in the Algerian English Framework in the next section (Section V). The Algerian English Framework describes the level of attainment of each of the competencies for each grade in school.

Supporting competencies

In order to develop interactive, interpretive and productive competencies, language learners also need to develop supporting competencies:

- Linguistic Competency
- Language Strategies

Linguistic competency

Linguistic competency includes the learning and mastery of grammar, pronunciation and the vocabulary needed in a given context. There is a separate set of descriptors of linguistic competency for each grade level.

Language Strategies

Language strategies are ways that help students to acquire, remember, organize and use information on an ongoing basis. The language strategies are incorporated into the competencies, rather than listed separately.

In the next section, the Algerian English Framework describes in detail the level of attainment of *each* competency for *each grade* in school, beginning with Middle School 1 through High School 3, seven levels all together.

