

The Primary Education System Between Theory and Practice

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Abstract:

Primary education is regarded as the foundation upon which all subsequent educational stages are built, as it aims to provide learners with basic knowledge and to shape their cognitive and social personalities. However, this system faces a central issue concerning the balance between the theoretical and practical dimensions. The theoretical aspect focuses on consolidating the principles of reading, writing, arithmetic, and fundamental knowledge, whereas the practical aspect activates classroom and extracurricular activities and relies on experiments and modern educational tools that enhance the pupil's ability to understand, think critically, and solve problems. Consequently, the success of the educational process is not measured solely by the quantity of knowledge acquired, but rather by the extent to which such knowledge can be employed in real-life contexts. This calls for a comprehensive revision of curricula in order to achieve integration between theoretical knowledge and practical application, as well as for balanced teacher training that enables educators to combine both dimensions effectively, thereby ensuring the quality of education and responding to the needs of both learners and society.

Keywords: Primary education; educational competence; curricula; practice; quality of education.

1. Introduction

The primary education system constitutes the first pillar in the construction of the educational framework, as it forms the essential base upon which the later stages of education are established. It is entrusted with achieving the major objectives of cognitive, social, and cultural development. It represents the environment in which learners' initial abilities take shape and through which the intellectual and behavioral characteristics accompanying individuals throughout their educational and life journeys are determined.

Despite its strategic importance, however, this system continues to face a clear gap between what is prescribed by official theoretical references in terms of curricula, approaches, and pedagogical principles, and what is actually practiced in the field through educational and teaching applications. This gap arises from overlapping factors related to insufficient teacher

training, limited pedagogical resources, curricula detached from the learner's reality and needs, as well as the absence of effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

Accordingly, studying "The Primary Education System Between Theory and Practice" requires examining the dialectical relationship between the educational vision outlined in regulatory texts and official curricula, and the practical reality embodied by the teacher in the classroom. It also necessitates analyzing the manifestations of harmony or discrepancy between what is planned and what is implemented, in order to reveal the extent to which educational policies effectively achieve their intended objectives. Furthermore, it calls for investigating the means capable of transforming the primary school into a genuine space where theoretical principles are embodied in practical educational practices that keep pace with the demands of both learners and society.

2. Primary Education

Primary education is considered the fundamental stage in the educational structure of any national system, as it represents the first foundation upon which the learner's personality is formed and where the basic principles, values, and elementary knowledge necessary for continuing the educational journey are instilled. Its importance lies in its aim to prepare the child educationally, intellectually, psychologically, and socially by providing the minimum competencies and abilities that enable positive integration into society.

"It is that school which receives children from the age of five or six and retains them until the age of ten or eleven, whether or not these children attended nurseries or kindergartens, and whether this school alone constitutes the compulsory stage of education or whether they subsequently move to one or more schools in order to complete compulsory education." [1]

This definition offers a precise conception of the nature of the primary school in terms of the age group it receives and the educational and social function it performs within the compulsory education system. It determines the age of enrollment between five and six years and the age of completion around ten or eleven years, which represents the foundational stage in the child's cognitive and emotional development.

It also indicates that primary school is not necessarily an isolated stage from the other levels of compulsory education; rather, it may constitute only its beginning, since the pupil may continue to another school or more in order to complete this stage. This points to the flexibility of educational organization within different educational systems, where variations in school structure, number of years, and transition stages between institutions are taken into consideration.

Furthermore, it may be understood from this definition that preschool attendance is not an essential condition for enrollment in primary school, which reflects an inclusive vision centered on the child's right to education regardless of prior preparatory background. The importance of this perspective lies in making primary education the true starting point of formal educational formation and the direct institution responsible for compensating for any previous deficiencies in the child's cognitive or behavioral development.

Thus, it can be said that this definition expresses a realistic educational concept of primary education that combines the organizational dimension in terms of age and duration of study with the educational dimension in terms of compulsory and inclusive access. This confirms

the central role of this stage in achieving the principle of equal opportunity and ensuring the effective universalization of education.

The primary school is also regarded as a community in which children primarily learn how to live as children. In this sense, it provides the child with experience of his or her “environment,” for within the school the child lives among peers who are close in age and developmental characteristics, whereas at home and within the broader social environment the child lives among others who differ considerably in age and in the circumstances surrounding them. [2]

The same researcher also defines it as: “A community in which children primarily learn to live as children, and in this regard it provides the child with experience of his environment.” Within the school, the child interacts with peers who are similar in age and developmental characteristics, while at home and in the surrounding environment he or she lives among others who differ greatly in age and in the conditions surrounding them. [3]

Through these definitions, it becomes clear that the school is the second environment joined by the pupil after the family beginning from the age of five. It undertakes the child’s education, upbringing, and socialization in accordance with the standards and values of the society’s general culture. It may also be regarded as the essential foundation upon which all subsequent educational stages depend and as the core of education itself, where the individual’s personality emerges and its first foundations are built through cognitive and social acquisition that assists the child in achieving sound and healthy physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, and social development, thereby ensuring psychological and social adjustment.

Primary schools worldwide share the teaching of core academic skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic—and this institution is considered the earliest educational institution established in the field of formal education.

3. The Importance of Primary Education

Primary education constitutes the backbone of any successful educational system, for it is the stage during which the child’s knowledge and skills are established and through which awareness of the fundamental values and principles of life is formed. It is not merely a transitional stage between childhood and middle education; rather, it is a solid foundation upon which the individual’s personality and level of thinking are built. It also represents the starting point that shapes the path of lifelong learning. In this regard, it may be regarded as an integrated “subsystem” within the broader educational system, one that embraces all children without exception, regardless of their cultural, social, or economic backgrounds, in order to guarantee them an equal beginning in the journey of education and knowledge. [4]

The importance of primary education is also reflected in the fact that it constitutes the first social environment in which the child encounters and interacts with peers under the supervision of teachers. This enables the child to acquire communication skills, cooperation, a sense of belonging to a group, and an understanding of the rules of peaceful coexistence. The school represents an extension of the family in the child’s upbringing; however, it surpasses the family in that it provides a broader social space that allows the child to discover both self

and surroundings through systematic and carefully guided methods, including classroom activities, practical application, and small-scale life experiences.

On the cognitive level, primary education enables the child to acquire the fundamental skills that constitute the essential tools of learning, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic skills that are indispensable for understanding and interacting with the surrounding world. It also fosters the child's ability to think critically and solve simple problems, while nurturing intellectual curiosity and a desire for continuous learning, thereby preparing the learner for subsequent educational stages.

From the moral and religious perspective, the primary school contributes to instilling virtuous values and human principles such as honesty, integrity, respect, and discipline, in addition to developing the spirit of citizenship and belonging through religious education and social activities. Furthermore, through artistic, cultural, and sports activities, the child's sense of creativity and innovation is cultivated, while healthy habits and a balanced lifestyle are promoted, contributing to sound psychological and physical development.

Psychological and educational studies indicate that the early years of a child's life are decisive in shaping personality and refining behavior. A child who receives balanced and effective primary education becomes capable of facing life's challenges with confidence and competence. Thus, primary education becomes not merely an educational stage, but an integrated process that combines knowledge, skills, and values, laying the first foundations of a balanced and independent personality. In this way, it serves as a solid base upon which the success of the individual and the future of society as a whole are built.

From this perspective, the importance of developing and modernizing primary education, as well as updating its curricula and teaching methods, becomes evident. The educational process must therefore be comprehensive, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience and providing children with opportunities to learn through experimentation and direct interaction, so that primary education truly becomes a driving force for the child's holistic growth on both the personal and social levels. [5]

4. Characteristics of Primary Education

Primary education aims at the comprehensive development of the pupil's personality, encompassing intellectual, physical, emotional, and moral dimensions. In cooperation with the family, the school works toward providing the child with an integrated upbringing that equips him or her with the values, knowledge, and basic skills necessary for life. The modern school seeks to build the learner's personality by attending to physical, intellectual, emotional, and social growth, helping the child discover personal abilities and aptitudes, respecting individual inclinations and interests, and encouraging efforts toward achieving them. [6]

Among the most prominent characteristics of primary education are the following:

- Providing diverse activities that correspond to the child's chronological age and different developmental levels.
- Training the child in self-learning and independent work, while developing personal experiences within a framework of proper guidance.
- Enabling the learner to acquire academic skills through teaching methods that take individual differences among pupils into account.

- Creating a suitable educational environment that promotes psychological and social adjustment.
- Transforming theoretical knowledge into meaningful practical behavior in the child's daily life.
- Emphasizing learning through play and fostering thinking skills as well as sensory, motor, and intellectual abilities.
- Instilling self-confidence, freedom, initiative, and the spirit of cooperation.
- Linking the school to society and coordinating with the family and various institutions in order to achieve shared educational objectives.
- Adopting continuous assessment of pupils' activities in a manner consistent with the objectives of primary education. [7]

Understanding the characteristics of child development at this stage is essential for comprehending children's needs and for organizing curricula and teaching methods in a way that ensures the success of the educational process and achieves the intended goals of primary education.

5. Functions of the Primary School

The primary school has undergone a profound transformation in its functions as a result of intertwined political, cultural, social, and economic factors. Whereas the traditional school was merely a space for teaching children the principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic, with the aim of preserving cultural heritage and transmitting it from one generation to another, it has today become an institution entrusted with new missions that correspond to the requirements of modern society in its various dimensions.

Primary school is no longer limited to the mere "acquisition of educational content"; rather, it has moved beyond this toward developing the pupil's skills and abilities and preparing learners to employ knowledge and generate new forms of understanding that connect prior learning with future knowledge. [8] Consequently, it has become necessary to raise the level of learners' fundamental skills, which in turn requires the development of modern educational methods and curricula capable of responding to the diverse needs of pupils, with the aim of achieving the child's comprehensive and balanced growth from the age of six to twelve. This development may be achieved through the following:

- Enabling the child to understand and practice sound social relationships.
- Helping the child discover and develop personal inclinations, abilities, and aptitudes.
- Developing logical, organized, and sound thinking.
- Equipping the child with academic learning skills and encouraging the productive use of free time in beneficial activities.
- Acquiring information and knowledge, while mastering the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic.
- Instilling social values and standards that guide behavior.
- Accustoming the child to positive conduct, respect for the law, and commitment to work.
- Establishing healthy habits that help the child care for both body and mind.

- Providing sports and recreational activities that contribute to intellectual and physical development.
- Enabling the child to understand personal rights and duties toward self and society.
- Forming sound attitudes that assist the child in making correct decisions in future life.

[9]

These constitute some of the most prominent functions of the modern primary school, which should be effectively implemented in practice so that the school may become an institution of genuine educational value rather than mere words on paper. Such functions contribute to shaping the learner's future personality by taking psychological, physical, and intellectual needs into account and by providing a sound educational and healthy environment that respects the different dimensions of child development.

The modern school is no longer satisfied with the simple transmission of knowledge; rather, it seeks to develop the child's essential and necessary abilities and to enable self-learning and self-reliance in the acquisition of knowledge, thereby preparing learners to understand the complexities of contemporary life and interact with them positively. In this regard, John Dewey considers the school to be the environment that prepares the individual for a simple social life free from conflicts and manifestations of discrimination between doctrines and races. [10]

6. Educational Objectives of the Primary School

The primary school is regarded as the first and fundamental stage within the educational system, representing the initial building block in shaping the learner's personality and forming knowledge, values, and attitudes. Since its establishment, this school has sought to ensure that teaching is based on the achievement of carefully defined educational objectives, so that the educational process may be purposefully directed toward clear goals encompassing the child's comprehensive development in its various dimensions: intellectual, psychological, physical, social, and spiritual. Discussion of educational objectives at this stage is closely linked to what are known as behavioral approaches to teaching, which emphasize the necessity of defining the desired behavior in the learner and observing its manifestations through daily classroom performance.

The function of the primary school is therefore not limited merely to the transmission of knowledge; rather, it seeks to cultivate positive behavior in learners, manifested through the application of what they have learned at the end of the lesson or instructional unit. Consequently, curricula at the primary stage have been designed to achieve an integrated set of educational objectives, which may be summarized as follows:

- **Achieving the Child's Comprehensive and Balanced Development:**

The school aims to assist the learner in achieving growth across all human dimensions: physical, psychological, intellectual, social, spiritual, and cognitive. Every activity or educational experience offered to the child should contribute to the construction of one aspect of personality. Intellectual and cognitive activity constitutes a fundamental pillar in shaping the learner, as it helps in acquiring academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as understanding scientific, mathematical, and linguistic concepts in a correct and sound manner. The school also seeks to enable

pupils to use language functionally and effectively, learning to express ideas in clear and eloquent language while acquiring skills of thinking, analysis, and criticism. This allows them to communicate positively with others and instills within them a love of knowledge and lifelong self-learning.

- **Developing Basic Skills and Broadening Perception:**

Among the essential objectives of this stage is training the child in a number of necessary skills, such as reading comprehension, correct writing, arithmetic operations, fine motor control, and logical thinking, in addition to understanding concepts of time, space, quantity, and relationships. These skills constitute the foundation upon which later stages of education are built.

- **Achieving Social and Emotional Adjustment:**

Primary school seeks to develop the learner socially and emotionally, enabling children to learn how to interact positively with classmates and teachers, respect rules and order, and cooperate with others in collective work. It also works to prepare them for adaptation to the local, school, and external environment, there by helping them achieve psychological balance and social harmony.

- **Developing the Spirit of Citizenship and Belonging:**

Among the major objectives that the primary school endeavors to instill in the child is the spirit of patriotism, love of the homeland, religion, and language, and pride in cultural and historical identity. At this stage, learners are raised upon values of belonging to society, pride in its foundations, and active participation in its development in accordance with their abilities and level of awareness.

- **Preparing for Practical and Future Life:**

The school also aims to prepare the child to face real life through teaching practical and behavioral values that foster self-reliance, responsibility, time and effort management, respect for work, and commitment to duties. It also nurtures scientific curiosity and a love of discovery, qualities that pave the way for continuous self-learning. [11]

It may therefore be said that the educational objectives of the primary school represent a comprehensive framework that guides the teacher's work and regulates the course of the educational process as a whole. Teachers are required to understand these objectives clearly and translate them into effective educational practices within the classroom, taking into account individual differences among pupils and fostering their cognitive, emotional, and motor dimensions alike.

The primary school is not merely a space for delivering lessons; rather, it is an integrated educational environment aimed at shaping the educated, balanced, and creative individual—one who possesses the tools of thought and criticism, believes in the values of homeland and religion, and is capable of positive interaction with society and lifelong learning. [12]

7. The Place of the Competency-Based Approach within Primary Education

The competency-based approach is considered one of the most significant transformations witnessed in modern educational thought, as it emerged in response to the scientific, technological, and social developments that imposed the need to reconsider teaching methods,

objectives, and means. Whereas traditional education focused on the transmission, memorization, and recall of knowledge, the competency-based approach views the learner as the central focus of the teaching-learning process, meaning that the learner becomes the principal actor in constructing knowledge and developing various abilities and skills.

The concept of “competency” is regarded as a modern educational notion referring to the ability to mobilize a set of cognitive, practical, and affective resources in order to solve problematic situations in diverse contexts. Competency is therefore not reduced to theoretical knowledge alone; rather, it includes the capacity to employ such knowledge in practical reality through situations that require understanding, analysis, application, and creativity.

In this regard, the competency-based approach emphasizes the role of the active learner who constructs knowledge independently through observation, experimentation, reflection, and problem-solving, while the teacher shifts from being a mere transmitter of information to becoming a guide and facilitator whose quest is to create an appropriate learning environment that activates the learner’s capacities. The learner is no longer viewed as an empty vessel receiving knowledge, but as a being capable of thinking, interaction, initiative, and creativity. [13]

8. The Importance of the Competency-Based Approach in Primary Education

The competency-based approach occupies a central position in primary education because it corresponds to the nature of the child at this stage, which is characterized by gradual growth in the cognitive, motor, social, and emotional domains. The primary school is no longer a space for the transmission of abstract information; rather, it has become a genuine learning environment that enables the child to discover the surrounding world, connect present and previous knowledge and experiences, and develop new ways of thinking, understanding, and acting.

This approach focuses on achieving the integration of knowledge, skill, and value. In other words, the learner is not satisfied merely with understanding information, but also applies it practically in solving problems encountered inside and outside the classroom. For this reason, modern curricula rely on organizing educational content in the form of learning situations designed to encourage learners toward research, discovery, and experimentation, thereby developing within them a spirit of initiative and a love for self-learning. [14]

9. The Role of the Teacher/Professor within the Competency-Based Approach

Within this approach, the role of the teacher or professor is no longer limited to presenting and transmitting knowledge; rather, it has become deeper and more interactive. The teacher is now a guide and coordinator who designs learning situations, selects activities that stimulate learners to think and solve problems, and provides continuous support and guidance.

Today, the teacher is required to adopt active pedagogical methods based on dialogue, cooperation, experimentation, and projects instead of relying solely on lecturing and memorization. Furthermore, teachers should be capable of evaluating learners in a comprehensive manner that does not focus only on memorization, but also includes the learner’s ability to analyze, infer, apply, and create. [15]

10. The Fundamental Function of the Competency-Based Approach

The competency-based approach is founded upon the central idea that the learner constitutes the core of the teaching-learning process, and all its concerns are directed toward serving and supporting the learner. It aims to guide learners and assist them in acquiring knowledge, transforming it, and applying it in real-life situations through diverse educational activities inside and outside the school, thereby enabling them to acquire life skills and positive social interaction.

Competency-based education is not confined to memorizing and reciting lessons; rather, it seeks to make learners capable of critical thinking, decision-making, and solving real-life problems encountered in their daily lives. It also strives to achieve harmony between knowledge and action, and between theoretical learning and practical application, with the purpose of forming an independent learner capable of lifelong self-learning. [16]

The adoption of the competency-based approach in primary education represents a qualitative transformation in the philosophy of modern education. Knowledge is no longer considered an end in itself, but rather a means for forming the educated individual who possesses competencies enabling adaptation to the rapid transformations occurring in society and the world. Consequently, the success of this approach depends on the teacher's understanding of the new role expected of them, as well as on the ability to activate active learning and create a motivating classroom environment that supports the learner's comprehensive development. Competency is therefore not measured by the quantity of information memorized by the child, but by the learner's ability to employ acquired knowledge effectively and creatively in different life situations.

11. Classification of Educational Competencies

Educational competencies are generally classified into three principal categories:

- **Cognitive Competencies:**

These competencies constitute the foundation upon which education is built, as they rely on a body of theoretical knowledge and facts related to the philosophy of education, its objectives, and its theories. They also include knowledge of the learner's nature, development, problems, and needs, in addition to possessing a broad general culture and specialized expertise in a particular field.

Cognitive competencies are not confined solely to theoretical information; rather, they extend to encompass continuous learning skills, the use of knowledge tools, and methods of applying them in practical situations. Traditional educational philosophy once assumed that the mere possession of such knowledge by the teacher or professor was sufficient for effective professional practice. However, the modern educational movement founded upon the competency-based approach has demonstrated that these competencies represent only the preliminary competencies that enable the teacher to carry out basic professional tasks.

- **Performance Competencies:**

These competencies are manifested in the teacher's ability to apply knowledge and skills within classroom situations, whether simulated or real. They include the ability to use various assessment tools, prepare daily plans, formulate behavioral objectives

accurately, and perform multiple behavioral roles suited to the dimensions of the educational situation.

The competent teacher is therefore one who can translate theoretical knowledge into actual classroom performance that reflects effective interaction with learners and the ability to adapt pedagogical methods to their educational needs.

- **Achievement Competencies (“Results”):**

These competencies are measured through the outcomes of educational work. Teachers or professors are expected to play an effective role in achieving desired educational objectives, such as enabling pupils to acquire practical approaches to problem-solving, improving reading and writing performance, and increasing learning speed.

These competencies focus on results rather than on performance or knowledge alone. Although they are connected to cognitive and performance competencies, they are distinguished by incorporating additional elements such as enthusiasm, self-confidence, and the ability to achieve intended objectives. [17]

Accordingly, it may be said that preliminary competencies express the teacher’s ability to practice educational activity, whereas productive competencies concern the tangible outcomes resulting from such activity. Educational activity may be extensive while results remain limited, or the activity may be limited while its outcomes are significant. Hence, the modern competency-based educational movement has sought to make teacher-training programs more effective and comprehensive.

This field has witnessed notable development during the pre-service stage, alongside the emphasis that pre-service preparation represents only the first step in a long process that must continue through in-service training. The effectiveness of the educational process can only be fully realized through the integration of both forms of preparation.

12. The Curriculum in Primary Education

The curriculum at the primary stage in the Algerian school is regarded as the foundation upon which the educational process is built. It represents the general framework guiding teaching and learning and determines the major objectives as well as the cognitive, moral, and skill-based contents that should be achieved during this sensitive stage of personality formation.

The Algerian curriculum is based on the competency-based approach adopted since the beginning of the third millennium, which seeks to make the learner an active participant in the construction of knowledge rather than a passive recipient of information.

The curriculum includes a set of integrated school subjects aimed at developing the child’s intellectual, linguistic, emotional, and social dimensions, such as Arabic language, mathematics, Islamic education, French language, scientific and technological education, civic education, and physical education.

The curriculum also takes into account the cultural and national specificities of Algerian society and seeks to consolidate the values of citizenship, belonging, and national identity while remaining open to universal human values. It grants special importance to practical activities and educational situations that allow learners to employ acquired knowledge in real-life contexts, thereby strengthening their abilities in thinking, analysis, and problem-solving.

Through this comprehensive and progressive organization, the primary curriculum in the Algerian school seeks to form a balanced learner in terms of knowledge, behavior, and values, capable of continuing educational progress in later stages with effectiveness and confidence. [18]

13. Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes evident that primary education in the Algerian school constitutes the cornerstone of the entire educational system. It is the stage during which the features of the learner's personality are formed and through which cognitive, moral, and social orientations are determined.

The study has shown that the success of this stage depends upon the extent to which harmony is achieved between the theoretical vision outlined by official curricula and the practical application carried out within the classroom. No curriculum, regardless of its degree of refinement, possesses real value unless it is transformed into effective educational practices that take learners' needs into consideration and keep pace with social transformations.

From this perspective, modernizing primary education in Algeria requires a comprehensive revision of curriculum content and teaching methods, with particular emphasis on the continuous training of teachers so as to enable them to implement the competency-based approach as a modern educational philosophy that places the learner at the center of the educational process, capable of employing knowledge and skills in real-life situations.

It may therefore be concluded that achieving quality primary education is not based solely on the quantity of knowledge acquired, but rather on the quality of learning that contributes to building an independent-minded learner, broad in outlook, deeply rooted in national and human values, and capable of creativity, initiative, and confident continuation in both educational and social life.

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