



Shifting towards Competency Based Learning: Benefits, Challenges & Prospects from Indian Perspectives

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Abstract:

Students' progress is based on evidence of mastery, not through seat time. Competency-based learning has garnered some strong interest among higher education institutions and other education stakeholders due to its innovative approach. Although a competency-based curriculum is much more efficient in helping the learner acquire competencies needed for doing specific tasks, there are various challenges that institutions face in its implementation. The discussion of this study explores the pros and cons with the challenges to implementation in India and the possible pathways to overcome it where the perception is an old system proven so resistant to change and that change is difficult because the system is stuck. For this purpose, a brief description and theoretical conceptual analysis on the competences in the educational field is carried out.

Keywords: Educational Aims, Competency, Challenges & Possibilities.

1. Introduction:

Learners gain new knowledge and skill through education to improve their competence, capacity and performance. The effective learning also helps students to apply self-efficacy to their workplace in future. The research and practice have taught us that deeper learning outcomes indicate students believe to accomplish even difficult tasks that is joy in rigorous. Our classroom is a great place to start capacity building. School is a place where students can realize their visions for themselves, a place populated by people who care about them and who can help them succeed in achieving their goals. Competency-based learning asks schools to align their work to clearly articulated skills that are essential to the career and life of the students. A shared commitment to these skills among students and educators drives decisions about the design of the school experience, including what, when, where and how students learn.

2. Objectives:

The objectives of the discussion in this paper explores the pros and cons with the challenges to implementation of competency-based evaluation in India. To find out the possible pathways to overcome it where the perception is an old system proven so resistant to change and that change is difficult because the system is stuck.

3. Methodology, Background & Relevance:

In this study, a brief description and theoretical conceptual analysis on the competences in the educational field is carried out. Today the entire education system is facing a crisis regarding its perceived quality. It is

not rarely seen today that the employers have grievances about university graduates who lack skill or efficacy, they try to indicate 'Not found suitable candidates' in the various 'campusing programme' regarding job opportunity and on the other side students also put pressure on the meaning and value of a higher education. At present time, it is a challenge to all the stakeholders in the education system to show the value of their degrees in front of people of the society globe wide. Competency-based education is a modern approach that ensures students are not just learning for exams but are genuinely understanding and applying what they have learned. Evaluates a student's ability to apply specific skills and knowledge in real-world scenarios. Dissimilar to traditional methods that often emphasise memorisation, competency-based evaluation focuses on demonstrating mastery of particular competencies.

4. Prosperity in Competency based Learning:

Competency-based Learning is a system designed to mirror how people learn, work and collaborate in the world beyond school. It is built on evidence-based assessment and it prioritizes flexibility in time, space and support to ensure all students have the chance to use the content they learn to practice durable and transferable skills. In this learning system students are empowered every moment to make important decisions about their learning experiences. How they will create and apply knowledge and how they will demonstrate their learning. Assessment is a meaningful, positive and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant and actionable evidence. In Competency-based Learning system, students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs and the progress depended on evidence of mastery, not seat time. Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills and dispositions) are explicit, in this system learning is transparent, measurable and transferable. The rationality behind the concept of competency-based education is simple, here learning is best measured by students demonstrating mastery of learning, rather than the number of hours spent in a classroom. The benefits of competency-based learning system are very prominent as follows –

4.1. Focus on Mastery: It is a fact that the main goal of competency-based learning is mastery. In other learning models, students are exposed to content, whether skills or concepts over time and success is measured summatively. Whereas in a competency-based learning system, learners are not allowed to move to the next level of training unless they demonstrate mastery of some specific skills. In this way, the definition of competency-based learning is closely tied to mastery learning.

4.2. Integrated Development: One of the benefits of competency-based learning is that it focuses on the holistic development of learners. With this learning approach, learners can learn how to acquire knowledge and skills and apply them to real-life problems. It also helps them to develop the attitude of wanting to learn more and build their skills.

4.3. Relevance to Real-World: Without a doubt, competency-based learning helps learners become relevant in the real world. That's because it focuses more on the practical application of acquired knowledge.

5. Impediments in Implementing Competency based Learning:

The last few years have seen the increasing usage of competency-based learning in higher education. This is largely due to its innovative approach and being a self-paced, mastery-oriented program that leverages technology to a great extent. Apart from offering an alternative to traditional courses, competency-based education allows students to master and demonstrate competency in various tasks and skills to complete courses. Although the approach has many potentials, it does come with certain challenges and flaws that need to be overcome to make it a viable education model. The key challenges that higher education institutions face while implementing a competency-based curriculum include:

5.1. Achieving excellence: A competency-based curriculum requires educational institutions to demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to excellence. Some of the key concerns faced here i.e., how to ensure that the rigor and quality of the curriculum-based programs remain equitable across the board? How will the curriculum realize this goal of achieving excellence? and how will the competency-based approach break the path of mediocrity and move beyond the fate of other general education trends?

5.2. Large class size: Another key challenge in the implementation of competency-based learning in India is the large class size. A higher number of students in a classroom tends to affect student-instructor interactions and can also prevent peer exchanges during discussions in the classroom. Since every student learns differently, the instructor's pace in a high-density class may work for some students but not for others. This greatly hinders implementation of competency-based curriculum and restricts educators from applying learner-centric interactive teaching methods. Limiting the class size can be beneficial for both students and

educators, leading to improved performance of learners as instructors will be able to assist students with learning difficulties individually.

5.3. Infrastructure for learning: Since a competency-based education involves a fundamental shift from passive to active learning, the infrastructure needed for this approach is very different. In order to implement competency-based learning, educational institutions require everything from modern classrooms, creative centers, smart boards, laboratories, and the latest technologies at all levels, as it can help students to actively participate in the learning process. This essentially means that the administrators need to be fully convinced about the advantages that their institutions accrue from implementing the new competency-based learning model.

5.4. Assessment standardization: Another challenge in implementing a competency-based curriculum (CBC) in higher education is standardizing the mechanisms in which competencies or skills are assessed. This is because, being a personalized learning approach, CBC focuses largely on subject mastery, irrespective of the place, time and pathway to completion. In Indian scenario there are some of the concerns that institutions struggle with in terms of assessment implementation-how to measure each student for every performance outcome? How to identify opportunities for learners to demonstrate individualized subject mastery without adhering to standardized performance outcomes? Who determines the student learning outcomes, and should they vary from institution to institution?

5.5. Broad recognition and understanding: Competency-based learning is a relatively new learning approach. Students graduating through this method of learning are sometimes greeted by skeptical employers who aren't aware of the model. Additionally, many employers in the job market are rigid about hiring students passing from traditional educational programs and who attain a certain grade.

5.6. Expanding competency-based programs for faculty development: Educators in many higher education institutions are ill-equipped to implement competency-based learning unless they were a product of it themselves. This is the reason why building their capacity is one of the essential prerequisites before implementing competency-based learning. Further, there is another challenge related to the instructor's knowledge of competency-based pedagogy. While some of them might understand competency-based learning, a large number of them still struggle with the concept and lack the capacity demanded by the competency-based system.

5.7. Professional Licensure: The Competency-based learning is an effective approach to both education and practice. However, academic programs that require professional licensure may be slow to embrace competency programs divorced from any observable measures of contact hours. Compounding this concern, these licenses may vary from state to state. Many regulatory and accreditation agencies still require credit hours to be mapped to performance examinations. This approach is loudly supported by licensure boards that are slow to adapt. To address this concern, some institutions have implemented a 'backward' approach to their competency programs by mapping the traditional credit hour to the performance examinations and competency assessments. While this effectively placates regulatory agencies, it still binds the competency program to a credit-hour model.

5.8. Change is difficult because the system is stuck: Sometimes it is found that the old system has proven so resistant to change and that change is difficult because the system is stuck. To implement Competency-based learning stuck in routines that compartmentalize how and when teachers interact with students. Stuck with tools and resources designed for a more static system than today's students and teachers need. Stuck with college admissions requirements and state accountability systems that reinforce old expectations and make change feel risky to teachers, parents, institutions and students themselves. Until we can unstuck, parents and their advocates will be right to be sceptical and we should be sceptical about rushing ahead.

Many of these impediments are bureaucratic and logistical in nature. As progressive educational reform movements take root, these aforementioned impediments will likely be mitigated. In fact, efforts are well underway to resolve many of these challenges.

6. Move towards Competency based Learning - Probable Pathway:

It is extremely important and necessary to clear how to move towards Competency-based Learning (CBL) in the landscape of a Competency-based Education system. Here is also important to be clear about

what Competency-based Learning is not. It is not a particular pedagogy like project-based learning. All different forms of teaching and learning are part of a Competency-based Learning environment and are used as appropriate to meet target outcomes. It is not about eliminating grades: while traditional grades are not compatible with Competency-based Learning, CBL's true focus is making assessments more relevant, responsive and evidence-based. It is not just about what happens in the classroom, while many teachers will have to shift their practice to move towards CBL, there are structural and cultural elements of school that must shift, too, which is where the work often lies for school leaders in a Competency-based Learning environment. This study highlights a few possible ways that may be under consideration to shifts towards Competency-based Education. Some examples of how schools begin to pursue each shift:

6.1. *From Content-Driven to Skills-Driven*: Develop a graduate profile to organize learning at your school around durable, transferable skills.

6.2. *From Time-Based to Performance-Based*: Consider how time disproportionately dictates how assessment systems work at your school and use online spaces and reassessment practices to build more flexibility into that system.

6.3. *From Grading to Feedback*: Dive into the robust research on effective grading to establish more transparent, equitable, and meaningful feedback practices.

6.4. *From Lessons to Experiences*: Redesign summative assessments to become more relevant performance tasks.

6.5. *From Educator Designed to Co-Designed*: Learn about agency and create opportunities for students to set, pursue, and reflect on their own goals.

6.6. *Teachers Role from theoretical to practical*: Student agency is an important area in competency-based learning because students have voice and choice in what, when, where and how they learn. Learning experiences that promote student agency instil in students a sense of ownership, which ultimately promotes deeper learning. Now the question or challenge arises in the mindset of educators that, *how do ensure that the choices students are making are the best ones for their learning?* The answer may be considered as student choice may not always represent informed choice. There's a risk in offering students a choice that they may opt for what's easy rather than what will push their learning forward. But this risk can be minimized by rethinking the role of teachers in competency-based learning. In making the shift from classroom leader to coach, teachers work in conjunction with students to identify areas for growth and allow students to choose how they want to push themselves.

6.7. *Institutional Role*: To ensure the best results, the institute should set a clear desired learning outcome right from the beginning of the course modules. By doing so, learners are able to understand what needs to be done to attain mastery of the skills. Also, ensure to provide them with quality feedback when needed to help them progress and acquire the right knowledge. To enable employees to become relevant with competency-based learning, institutions should ensure to create effective instructional modules right from the beginning. However, ensure the modules don't just state facts but also utilize case studies and scenarios that trigger the practical application of knowledge. To systematically promote the said learning approach, institutions need to primarily focus on faculty capacity-building to help them get familiar with the changing learner-centered programs. Institutions can achieve this through various faculty development programs, which facilitates them to learn on-the-job the skills required for this type of innovative educational program.

Each of these shifts may represent a potential pathway for educators and school leaders and these pathways are often tailored to the strengths and areas for growth already present in the school.

7. Conclusion:

The Competency-based Education offers learners assessments and different learning materials based on the skills already mastered. Learners can select learning resources based on their choices and preferences and learners get relevant and timely communication that's tailored to their individual needs. A competency-based curriculum focuses on targeted learning processes that identifies specific competencies or skills in students. This enables learners to develop mastery of each of these competencies or skills at their own pace. Besides offering a more personalized path to the course completion, the competency-based approach is also structured to demonstrate learning in clearly articulated competencies. It emphasizes authentic assessment to evaluate what the learner knows and can do through real-life projects. It may be cleared that the intention of competency-based learning is to break away from the traditional classroom model, where every student studies the same subject matter at the same speed. A competency-based curriculum primarily emphasizes on what learners are expected to do rather than simply focusing on what they are expected to know. A completely learner-centric curriculum and fully adaptive to the changing needs of students, it envisions every

learner to have achieved the competencies i.e. critical thinking and problem-solving skills, imagination, creativity, communication and collaboration skills by the end of the course. Today especially when all the critical resources in education remain so inequitably distributed and the current system, where the deck is stacked against low-income students and they receive less of almost everything that matters, competency-based education may incorporate a focus on equity, it has the potential to close gaps in educational access and outcomes and to improve college and career preparation for low-income students. In a democracy, a public education system must stretch conventional notions of innovation to embrace a higher vision of the common good. Together, we need to be asking questions like these: Can our high schools close gaps in access and achievement and accelerate learning so all students achieve their potential? Can we use the talents of teachers and the power of technology to open new opportunities to learn and grow for many more students? Can competency-based education help us achieve those goals better than our current system? Can it help us get unstuck from a system that perpetuates inequality for far too many students? At present it is a high time to think, share and discuss this crisis, and should look forward to continuing exploration to solve it. In this situation Competency-based education approach may address the immediate steps and fulfil the exact needs.

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