



Efficacy & Equity towards Education through Competency Based Learning in the Light of NEP 2020

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Abstract:

Education must depend on learning not in time. In schools across the country, time is the constant and the quality of learning is the variable. To get a high school certificate, students must attend school for roughly six hours a day, 180 days of the year and for 12 to 13 years. Some students graduate ready for the Ivy League and others are barely able to read. Competency-based learning is a comparatively modern approach to learning design. It is gaining immense popularity by industry-leading corporates as well as universities since it shows a definite improvement in skills and job results. On one hand, businesses can ensure that their workforce is competent for the task they are assigned to, and on the other side, users are confident that they are equipped with the right knowledge to perform their tasks. Competency-based education is a system in which students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge and how they will demonstrate their learning. The objectives of this article are to highlight the formative role of Competence-based learning in comparison to traditional learning systems. The study also tries to indicate needs of competence-based learning in the focus of equity and efficacy in education and why NEP 2020 advocates competence-based education systems as a fundamental pillar for future.

Keywords: Education System, Learning Goals, Competency & Education Policy.

Introduction:

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has started his journey with clear inspiration 'how to think' rather than 'what to think'. The policy represents a revolutionary shift in the educational framework in India. The NEP 2020 is designed to foster critical thinking, creativity and innovation among the learners, preparing them for the challenges and opportunities of their future life. Today our Globe is undergoing rapid changes in the knowledge landscape. NEP 2020 is dedicated to nurturing future ready students who are equipped with the knowledge, skills and values needed to excel in a rapidly changing world and designed to align with the needs of the 21st century to make education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary. Competency-based assessment is a modern approach that evaluates a student's ability to apply specific skills and knowledge in real-world scenarios. Unlike traditional methods that often emphasise memorisation and standardised testing, competency-based evaluation focuses on demonstrating mastery of particular competencies. This approach ensures that students are not just learning for exams but are genuinely understanding and applying what they have learned. In India the National Policy on Education was framed in 1986 and modified in 1992. Since then, several changes have taken place that call for a revision of the Policy. The NEP 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and replaces the thirty-four years old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986. To build the foundational pillars of Access,

Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability in education systems and seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030, so that all of the critical targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved.

Objectives:

The objectives of this article are to indicate the formative role of Competence-based learning in comparison to traditional learning systems. The study also tries to highlight the needs of competence-based learning in the focus of equity & efficacy in education and why NEP 2020 promotes competence-based learning as an important pillar for future.

Background:

Empowering all students to master relevant skills that help them develop ownership over their learning is the most important work of the education system. A school can prepare students for the world beyond it. At present the relevance of certain content and knowledge is constantly shifting and the ability to learn deeply in a variety of contexts with new tools is critical in a modern world. In addition, a growing body of research emphasizes the importance of noncognitive competencies to success in school and beyond skills like empathy, self-regulation and purpose, that students develop through doing complex work on meaningful tasks, not by absorbing as much content as possible. The traditional design of school as a time-based, content-driven experience does not support agency, equity and transfer. Furthermore, the traditional model of school has never worked for many marginalized students because it perpetuates systemic barriers and inequities by allowing students to fall behind in a one-size-fits-all system. Competency-based learning is an equity movement and has been led by innovative and the Mastery Collaborative. It reflects a deep belief that the system needs to change to become more inclusive and learner-centered which align with goals of NEP 2020.

Competency-based Education: Concepts & Characteristics:

The term 'competency' was first defined in 1973 by the American psychologist David McClelland to indicate the human factors that define 'competence.' According to McClelland (1973), competencies are task and organization-specific, hence they exist only in reference to a specific work-related task carried out in a specific organization. For example, fluency in a certain foreign language is a competency only if it is essential to effectively performing a certain role in a certain organization. In the Education system the word 'Competence' indicates a person's ability to practice the knowledge acquired over time. Competency is measurable as you can compare the skills and knowledge of two or more individuals based on their performance at a specific job. Being competent means, you don't only have the knowledge to perform a task, but likewise possess the skills to provide solutions that matter to real-life problems. Competency-based learning is a learning approach where learners move from one learning level to a higher one based on their demonstration of knowledge rather than based on time spent on a specific course. This learning approach ensures that learners learn at their own pace and focus more on mastery of knowledge and valuable skills. It's not about dumping and forcing knowledge onto learners. In this approach the main focus is placed on how competent each student is in the subject. So that students can only move forward when they can demonstrate mastery. Competency based education and personalized learning really go hand-in-hand. By personalizing the learning experience for each individual student, teachers ensure that each student has full mastery before they can move forward. In this way, the goal of equity is achieved, students move forward at their own pace, but everyone in the class achieves mastery. Competency based education gives a clear focus on preparing students for the next stage of their life, which is prominent with the motto of NEP 2020 'Educate Encourage Enlighten'. The concept of competency-based learning focuses some key characteristics:

I. Learner-Centric: Firstly, competency-based learning is centered on individual learners. It offers each learner the opportunity to develop skills and acquire knowledge at their pace. Apart from that, it also promotes collaborative learning as learners can work together to become successful. Competency-based learning empowers learners to progress through learning processes without time restrictions. Besides that, it also helps them to explore diverse opportunities in learning and to reflect on their own learning achievement.

II. **Differentiated:** Differentiation in competency-based learning refers to learning practices that identify and modify to meet the overall needs of each learner. It's all-round and applies to a lot of things, including learners' communications, interventions and support.

III. **Outcome-Based:** Apart from being learner-centric, Competency-based learning is similar to outcomes-based learning in those said outcomes, in this case, called 'competencies' are identified beforehand and students are frequently assessed. In this way, competency-based learning can be thought of as a form of outcomes-based learning. By focusing on the learning outcomes, organizations are empowered to develop top-notch sharable resources and assessments to support the clearly defined learning outcomes. Also, instructors can identify risks in learners' progress toward attaining success and provide them with preventive measures to mitigate it.

Polarity of Competency-based Education from Content based Education:

To explain the difference between the two learning approaches, it may look at the structure, focus and content of the learning. In the case of traditional time-based models, Instructional Design is driven by textbooks and standards. However, in competency-based learning, Instructional Design is driven by learners. In the traditional, instructional planning is based on an infrequent feedback loop, while in competency-based learning, it's based on a continuous feedback loop. Structurally in the traditional education system it is found that the year is set out in advance for every learner. After the end of each unit, all students must move forward, whether or not they fully understand the content or have mastered the necessary skills. In competency-based education, it is flexible to the learners and where they are in the learning process. That means students are given the support they need individually to move forward and master the subject and inherent skills. Instead of moving forward based on age, students move forward based on where they are and what they are capable of. According to Learning outcomes, traditionally, learning outcomes are focused on memorization and comprehension with the goal of passing tests. In competency-based learning, the focus is placed on deep understanding that is demonstrated through application. That indicates learning outcomes are proven by action and focus on building the skills students need to become better learners into adulthood.

In Evaluation traditional grades are made up of test scores, assignments, and behaviour. Where Competency based education scores are based on the performance levels of each student, without bias. With personalized and creative assessments, teachers are able to collect and understand data on student progress. Then, they use this data to develop scores that are transparent and help both students and parents to understand what's really going on. Interventions and personalization are generic and sporadic in traditional time-based models. However, they are timely, differentiated and based on learners' needs in competency-based learning.

Principles of competency-based education with NEP 2020:

- Equity is set at the initial stage - Equity does not mean giving each student the same thing as everyone else. Instead, it means giving each student what they need to reach the same end goal. This is a main principle of competency-based education because it purposely seeks to understand and remove bias in school leadership. Students are taught and supported based on their personal strengths and weaknesses, giving each individual the same chances for success. Thus, the predictability of achievement based on culture, social class, family income or language is completely removed. Competency based education also helps create an inclusive culture where all students feel safe and respected. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 emphasized that, "Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality" which has implications for development of an inclusive community and society at large. The NEP 2020 also acknowledges the value of multilingualism with Power of Language and places it at the center of school wherein it will be the choice of the state and the students as to which language is to be learned.

- Classes emphasize measurable competencies that help to build skills for life Competencies must be defined in advance and set as learning objectives for each student. These competencies can be based on understanding of key concepts, ability to apply knowledge to meaningful problems and mastery of relevant skills. Competencies must be defined in advance by school leadership. It is important to take inputs from the whole teaching staff to develop ideas on what knowledge and skills are necessary to determine mastery. The NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of digital literacy and digital classrooms in the new education system. These tools provide students with access to quality education, improve student outcomes, and prepare them for the digital world.

▪ Transparency helps students take ownership - It is an important question 'What is the end goal for each student in a particular class?' The answer to this question shouldn't only be available to teachers. The learning objectives that are set for the class (and the school as a whole) should be clear to both students and parents. In a competency-based education system, students understand these three things when starting the class: *what they need to learn, how mastery is defined and how they will be assessed*. When each student has the end goal clear in mind, they'll take more responsibility for their own education. For example, a student understands that he/she needs to take his/her understanding of math and apply it by completing the project of designing a small garden. He needs to use math skills to measure the size of the area and determine how many plants will fit. If the student clearly understands what he needs to do in order to be proficient and move forward in the class, he will take more ownership over his education. Then, when he hits a snag in the project or lacks the knowledge to finish it properly, he will realize on his own that he needs help. Transparent goals and outcomes thus help students take responsibility for their learning path. This ownership, in turn, helps them become better learners now and into adulthood. NEP 2020 introduces a flexible curriculum structure that allows students to choose subjects from different disciplines based on their interests and aptitudes. This empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey and create a personalized educational experience.

▪ Students get the support they need individually - Following the above mentioned example, let's say the student has a problem with his garden project and comes to the conclusion that he needs help. This is the time where teacher availability comes into the picture. It is impossible to facilitate high-quality education without capable and qualified teachers; therefore, NEP 2020 has emphasised teachers' competency. In a competency-based education system, students should have a framework to understand how long they should work on a problem before asking for help, and when in the class time they can approach the teacher. This personalized learning experience gives each student an equal opportunity for success. In order to work smoothly, teachers must be available to help students but they can't rely on students asking for help, teachers need to be fully aware of each student's progress.

▪ Teachers assess for growth and mastery - Assessments come in many shapes and sizes. Here are three types of assessments that may be useful for competency-based education, **i) Formative assessments** help teachers to determine where each student is in the learning process and adjust their teaching as necessary. Through these assessments teachers have the ability to adjust in real time by clearly identifying the key areas where students need to improve. These types of assessments allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the subject, which is the basis for competency-based learning. Then, the teacher can adjust the next lesson accordingly or plan one-on-one time with students who showed less understanding of the subject. **ii) Authentic assessments**, getting students to take their knowledge and apply it to real world situations is another great way to demonstrate mastery. Plus, students get to develop skills that they'll need in the future. **iii) Digital content assessment**, when using tech in the classroom, assessment becomes a lot easier. Many classroom softwares include assessment and progress reporting, which helps teachers see exactly where each student is in the learning process. NEP 2020 aims to transform the nature of learning assessments from summative which has over emphasised on rote memorization skills to more regular and formative which involve more competency-based higher-order skills, analytical, critical thinking and conceptual clarity.

▪ Students move forward when they demonstrate mastery - By including regular assessments and data-based progress reporting, teachers understand where each individual student is in the learning process. When students demonstrate a clear understanding of the topic, prove their ability to apply that understanding and show how they've developed important skills, it's time for them to move forward. NEP 2020 is the first educational policy of the 21st century and aims at developing cognitive capacities like foundational literacy & critical thinking with social, ethical and emotional capacities. Also emphasized the importance of skill-based education and vocational training to make students more employable and self-reliant. The policy aims to provide students with practical skills and hands-on training to prepare them for the workforce.

Important steps to design Competency-Based Learning:

There are four factors and all of this work together and help each other by developing clear guidelines for culture and experience, thus giving students the best possible competency-based education.

- **Student experience** - The student experience is shaped by how the learning structure is designed. This means including universal design and allowing for different paths to success. Next, teachers must give personalized instruction, feedback and support to each student. Students should be taught in a way that builds on their prior knowledge and engage with the material in different ways such as through practice, dialogue and project-based learning. Finally, assessments must demonstrate mastery of the subject, allowing all students to advance when they're fully competent.
- **Professional practice** - Teachers must have the right materials, including data and learning systems. That way, they can provide transparent feedback and improve the quality of their teaching. Teachers should also design the classroom in a way that allows for inclusion, promotes relationships, and develops mastery. Institutional faculty have a share in developing relationships as well. To implement a solid competency-based education system, teachers must build relationships with each other, with students and with parents in order to effectively personalize the lessons. The professional practice also includes constant improvement. All those involved in the students' learning and progress should regularly work to improve themselves and their teaching based on research and student data. In the NEP 2020, the position and role of a teacher is indicated as noblest and the teacher in India is the most respected member of the society but the significance issue is the quality of teacher education, recruitment, deployment, service conditions and empowerment of teachers is not where it should be. As a result, the quality and motivation of teachers does not reach the desired standards. The high respect for teachers and the status of the teaching profession must be restored. As per NEP 2020 a common guiding set of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) is necessary which would cover expectations of the role of the teacher at different levels of expertise and the competencies required for that stage. Because the motivation and empowerment of teachers is required to ensure the best possible future for our children and our nation.
- **School systems & Culture** - The school systems have the responsibility to shape and sustain competency-based education systems in the schools they work with. When school systems get involved in determining the framework of their schools' competency-based education systems, this provides uniformity and coherence across the network. This helps teachers to have a clear definition of what mastery looks like, which competencies are important and the assessments they should be using, while still giving them flexibility at a local level. Tying all of these components together, school culture forms the basis for the active use of a competency-based education system. Each of the above components plays an important part in developing a school culture that accepts and uses the competency-based learning system for the benefit of all students. School culture should include inclusiveness, equity, empowerment and flexibility.

Strengths & Weaknesses:

Competency-based learning gives a better understanding of what a teacher can do and puts the emphasis on learning in the learner's hands. Learners learn what they need to know and focus on it instead of just cramming for a test. A competency-based learning approach has many durable directions, some of which include:

1. **Affordable** - Competency-based education is affordable, the most competency-based learning programs are designed with affordability in mind. However, the program's cost differs based on which institution they are offered by and the pace at which the students complete the work. As a general rule, the faster a pupil completes the program, the lower their fee will be. In most cases, Competency-based education involves modern technology which reduces the operating costs and that may result in affordable tuition fees.
2. **Flexible** - Competency-based learning offers flexible pedagogic structures that are needed in order to suit different learning styles, capabilities & speed etc. of learners. The concept uses no set class time or training duration. Learners are not bound by rigid program structures, so they can complete learning tasks when they feel they can demonstrate skills mastery. This learning method also allows learners to receive credit for previous experiences, which helps them make progress on their individual learning journeys. Thus, each learner is free to enter a course at the level they feel capable of and they can complete it when they are ready, not when the class time is over, at the end of the semester etc.
3. **Self-Paced** - The flexibility of competency-based learning focuses on skills mastery as an outcome, not on the learning journey intrinsically. As learners are not adhering to set learning processes-classes, etc., they control their own learning and at a pace they feel comfortable. As soon as a learner feels that they can

demonstrate mastery of a skill, they can perform an assessment, receive credit and move onto the next learning task they wish. Learners are in control of how fast or slow they progress, which is beneficial to people with busy working schedules who are working toward completing a certificate or course.

4. Engaging - One of the best outcomes of Competency-based education is increased and improved student engagement. Students are more engaged in the learning material because they have ownership over their learning. They also have control over where, when, and how they learn. CBE promotes individualized learning and accommodates a variety of learning styles. This makes it a truly personalized experience and increases engagement. This is because content is tailored to the needs of each student and is more relevant.

5. Skills-Based - The forte of competency-based learning is helping learners develop the ability to use their knowledge in solving real-world problems. Real-world skills can be developed through authentic-complex and contextualized learning that is situated in a meaningful real-life context rather than being oversimplified and presented in isolation. Meaning for the learner, their investigation of real-world scenarios fosters deep long-term learning.

Even then on the other side few detractors have highlighted a number of weaknesses in the competency-based learning approach. Its main weakness is that it works well with some learning environments and less well with others. In particular: the learning approach is not suited for learning where the skills and competencies are difficult to identify and quantify. If the skills cannot be quantified, they cannot be measured. It is also not seen as suitable for situations where new skills and new knowledge need to be rapidly accommodated. There is a focus on employer needs rather than on the longer-term outlook of learners, with less focus on preparing them for an uncertain future. It may also be a fact that social learning offers measurable learning benefits and can be an important component of training but in the competency-based learning approach, does not take social learning into consideration. Competency-based learning employs an objectivist approach to learning i.e., both the goals and the objectives are to be set by the teacher or the designer of the class; whereas according to constructivism, the people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences, would argue that people can possess a wide range of skills and that skills are either present or absent—pass or fail.

Concluding Remarks:

Change often succeeds in a series of small bets and quick wins and this is also may be true in competency-based learning, where time and attention must be paid to helping educators, students and families understand what a competency-based environment means, what it looks like and how to be successful in it. In many cases, “unlearning” about how school should work must be accompanied by new learning about CBL and we can’t underestimate the value of time, patience and support in that effort. Under Competency-based learning, there are only two choices: (1) mastered and (2) not yet mastered. It is a fact that the search for better teaching strategies will never end. As a teacher, we probably spend too much of our time thinking about how to improve the learning experience of the students that pass through our institution throughout the years. After all, what they learn and how they learn it will become a part of these students as they grow, hopefully helping them become successful adults. This is the main goal of competency-based educational approach, giving each student equal opportunity, feedback and guidance to master necessary skills and become successful human resources. In comparison to the modern world, poor quality education, ineffective methodologies, unequal access to educational opportunities have been central to the Indian education system National Education Policy 2020 comes to bring fundamental changes in India’s education structure. The competency-based education is perfectly aligned with the NEP 2020’s vision of transforming the Indian education system to prioritise quality and relevance. By focusing on the mastery of skills and practical application of knowledge, these assessments support the development of well-rounded, capable individuals ready to thrive in a globalised world. NEP 2020 is trying to bring revolutionary changes in the Indian educational system to make it more holistic, flexible, and aligned with global standards.

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