

COMPETENCY BASED LEARNING: EDUCATING ACADEMICS TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT COLLABORATION

Competency-based learning is viewed as a popular approach in the realm of education and its success depends on mastering specific skills or competencies. Students make progress at their own pace and in this process, they advance upon mastering skills that are needed for surviving and thriving in industrial landscape. The application of this method leads to promoting deeper understanding, individualized learning paths, and real-world application of skills. In addition to this, a more flexible and personalized educational experience is fostered along with an educational environment which is inclusive and supportive both. The ongoing assessment and feedback are involved in this approach as a result of which both educators and students are allowed to keep continuous track of progress. Clear learning objectives and well-defined competencies are considered benchmarks the realisation and application of which leads to making educational journey transparent and measurable. -By Ms. Saroda Chatterjee

Competency-based learning has seen growth due to its adaptability and effectiveness. It addresses diverse learning style and accelerates progress for quick learners while providing additional support for those who need it. The rise of online education platforms has also facilitated the implementation of competency-based approaches, allowing learners to access content anytime, anywhere. Jing *et al.* (2023) aptly said that competency is like a tepid flow of water, it provides ample contributions commencing from teaching and forming, designing of curriculum; also provides a professional approach in the governance and management of technical institutions.

Concept

The concept of competency-based

learning revolves around mastery of specific skills and knowledge (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Instead of following a fixed timeline, learners progress as they demonstrate proficiency in each competency. This approach emphasizes practical application and real-world skills, ensuring that individuals are well equipped for various challenges. Competencies are clearly defined, allowing learners to understand expectations and educators to tailor instructions to individual needs. Educators can make use of these clearly defined competencies with the objective of tailoring their instructions for meeting the learners' individual needs (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). The need for clearly defining competencies by students is understood in light of the need for getting ideas about what is expected from them in



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terms of meeting learning outcomes and developing skills in order to succeed in a particular course.

Approaches to Competency-based Learning

In India, across many educational institutions practises competency-based learning, and some of the common approaches are: -

- **Outcome-based curriculum:** Many institutions in India have shifted towards outcome-based education, defining specific learning outcomes for each course or program (Rawlley & Mehra, 2020). This aligns with the

competency-based approach, focusing on what students should know and able to do.

- **Skill Mapping:** Some institutions map the skills and competencies required for various professions and industries, integrating these into their activities (Chaturvedi, Chaturvedi & Chaturvedi, 2020). This ensures that students develop the practical skills needed for success in their chosen fields.
- **Project-based learning:** Implementing assessments require students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios (Kokotsaki, Menzies & Wiggins, 2016). This includes projects, case studies, and practical assignments that assess competencies beyond traditional exams.
- **Industry collaboration:** Collaborating with industries and professionals to design activities that align with the current needs of the workforce. The industry-academia collaboration is increasingly viewed as a means to boost innovation and this vision becomes a tangible reality with elevated thrust on the exchange of knowledge (Ankrah & Omar, 2015). This ensures that graduate students equipped

with job market specific competencies are properly placed or employed.

- **Continuous Feedback:** The establishment of continuous feedback (between students and educators) mechanism leads to the adjustment in teaching methods on the basis of progress made by individuals (Beal, 2017).

MAKAUT'S Approach to

Competency-based Learning

The efforts of incorporating competency-based learning approaches by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology or MAKAUT (also known as West Bengal University of Technology) are reflected in some of the practices that the educational institute applies. They are as follows:

- **Curriculum Design:** The alignment of the curriculum with industry-relevant or job market specific skills and competencies with special emphasis on their practical applications.
- **Assessment Method:** The implementation of diverse assessment methods that are considered useful for the evaluation of students on the basis of their ability to

demonstrate competencies.

- **Flexibility in learning paths:** Instrumental in providing flexibility in the pace on learning thereby resulting in allowing students to make progress to the next competency level following the demonstration of proficiency.
- **Technology Integration:** The incorporation of educational technology tools and platforms to ensure that competency-based learning is supported in addition to online resources and interactive learning materials.
- **Professional Development for Faculty:** Offering training and professional development opportunities for faculty members so that they are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies that can help them to apply competency-based learning outcomes effectively.



Figure 1: Competency-based learning Practices by MAKAUT
(Source: Self-Developed)

Challenges

Competency-based learning, as observed by Gruppen et al. (2016), is met with challenges in various forms, such as standardization, assessment, and implementation. Assessing competencies effectively is itself a challenge because it requires the implementation of methods that meet the benchmark criteria of validity and reliability. In addition to this, adapting traditional educational structures with the objective of accommodating flexible, competency-based models poses implementation challenges. Maintaining a balance between individualized learning and the need for standardized benchmark is another daunting task when it comes to transforming the competency-based learning into a tangible reality. Furthermore, addressing the diverse learning pace of students poses a challenge. It is because flexibility to accommodate varied rates of progress is required for the successful implementation of competency-based learning (James, 2019). Adequate training is required to be given to educators with the objective of facilitating their transition from traditional teaching method to competency-based approaches. Although this is crucial, resistance is likely to be faced at the initial level. Although

keeping track of students' progress with focus on their management in a competency-based system can be complex, robust data systems and proper administrative support can play a vital role in facilitating and streamlining the entire process. Lastly, ensuring equity in access to resources and support for all students, irrespective of their backgrounds, leads to creating another challenge to the successful implementation of competency-based learning.

Prospects

Competency-based learning is considered essential for offering several potential advantages. It helps in allowing personalized learning with focus on catering to individual needs and preferences of students in addition to their learning styles. In this model, the focus is given on mastery with special emphasis on the development of practical knowledge that is required in the real-world. McMullen et al. (2023) made an indication about the growth in popularity of competency-based education in the interconnected and dynamic world. Furthermore, competency-based learning can be considered useful in terms of flexibility and in addition to this, its mention worthy role in accommodating diverse learners and providing opportunities for experiential and

project-based learning are what that cannot be denied.

Conclusion

With reference to the undergraduate context, the conclusion on competency-based learning can be drawn through highlighting its potential to facilitate the enhancement and enrichment of the educational experiences of learners or students. Competency-based learning method needs to be tailored to the needs pertinent to learning at the individual levels of students. Also, it assists in enabling the solid and in-depth understanding of subject matter along with the acquisition of job market and industry relevant practical skills. This model is aligned with the competitive job market's demands. It is also instrumental in fostering graduates who need to make progress in terms of being knowledgeable and adaptable. However, the successful implementation of competency-based learning at the undergraduate level requires the realisation of efforts pertinent to addressing several challenging factors, such as standardization of assessments, faculty training etc. In addition, the integration of competency-based approaches into traditional academic structures is crucial. Overall, with a careful consideration and continuous improvements,

competency-based training can become more relevant in the landscape of undergraduate education.

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