

Towards Competency based Education

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Abstract

As per National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, learners construct their own knowledge when they are active in the process of learning. This of course requires a participatory classroom ethos where the teacher stimulates the thinking and imagination of the learners and simultaneously challenges and motivates them for self directed learning. The National Education Policy 2020 repeatedly emphasises the need to nurture creativity, encourage innovativeness and develop entrepreneurship. According to the policy document, classroom transactions must shift towards competency based learning and education. This implies that the school curriculum has to emphasise experiential learning and develop in students the right kind of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in order to enable them to face successfully the challenges posed by the rapid scientific advancement and technological development. It is in this perspective that the present article discusses the concept of competency, developing competency based curriculum and its distinctive features. It nicely illustrates how this curriculum helps the learner by giving remedial instruction, additional information and more time to practice.

INTRODUCTION

Education system today is increasingly becoming learner driven. Learning is an active, reflective and interactive process for the present day learner. His legitimate question today is 'If I cannot understand the way you teach, can you not teach me the way I

can understand?' The earlier notion of considering the teacher as a dispenser of information and the child's brain as the store house of information is unacceptable in today's perspective. Therefore, it has become necessary to bring a change in the thinking of the teacher who traditionally considers

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that children are the receivers of knowledge and the textbooks are the only source of information. Post National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, the school system is making all efforts to ensure knowledge creation by the learners through personal involvement and firsthand experience.

In such a participatory classroom the teacher stimulates the thinking of learners, challenges and motivates them for self directed learning rather than merely transferring the accumulated information to passive listeners. In the global competitive world of today, the need is to nurture creativity, encourage innovativeness and develop entrepreneurship.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 rightly states that “Education must thus, move towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multi-disciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields.”

The National Education Policy has laid “special emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual in all its richness and complexity”. The draft policy emphasised “to close the gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is truly needed, classroom transactions must shift towards competency based learning and education.” In a similar view, NEP 2020 stipulates that “While

learning by rote can be beneficial in specific contexts, pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible, and of course, enjoyable.” Therefore, the school curriculum has to emphasise experiential learning and develop in students, the right kind of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in order to enable them to face successfully the challenges posed by the rapid scientific advancement and technological development. This will help them to quickly adjust to changing socio-economic conditions.

COMPETENCY – THE KEY DIFFERENTIATOR

Competency can be described as a combination of knowledge, skills and personal and social attributes possessed by a person. Competencies are essential to perform a job, task or professional practice efficiently. A competent person uses his abilities and traits in appropriate and consistent manner in order to achieve the desired performance level. Competencies are in fact multi-dimensional in nature. These are linked to the desired level of performance in a job. Competencies are so stated that these become observable and measurable so that these can be comprehensibly assessed. The desired competencies can be nurtured and developed by individuals to reinforce their competitive advantages. Competencies when effectively applied produce a successful performance

in a given function or activity. The ability of a person to identify and acquire the required set of functional as well as behavioural competencies proves to be key differentiator for his future success. The behavioural competencies help to improve interpersonal relationships and personal effectiveness. Competency, in addition comprises aspects of self-concept, self esteem, social motives and ways of thinking, feeling and doing.

A person to be successful requires technical competencies essential to perform a given job. Alternatively, they may require these competencies to efficiently handle their role in a specialised department. For example, a person engaged in management functions requires leadership competencies for proper planning and organising the activities in their organisation. These competencies help a manager to effectively implement a plan or activity by motivating the team members for optimum efficiency. "At times, it is found that the specialised technical skills associated with different (work) roles are considered less important by the employer than the soft skills that are transferable between different jobs and different employment sectors. They instead prefer to hire those candidates who have well-honed set of soft or employability skills." (Sen Gupta, 2017). Some of these skills include ease in working as a team member, ability to solve a problem satisfactorily, participating positively in group discussions, dealing with

difficult colleagues, expressing entrepreneurial qualities, negotiating deals successfully, ability to manage time, stress or conflict, etc.

The present day discipline or subject centered curriculum is teacher oriented. Students following this curriculum learn what the teacher teaches. They basically transfer knowledge created by others. In discipline based curriculum, content organisation is historical rather than future oriented. It is academically neutral. As opposed to this, learning in competency based curriculum is learner focused. It works with self paced learning and independent study. The role of an instructor in this type of curriculum is that of a guide, motivator and a facilitator. In a competency based curriculum, the learners focus on one competency at a time. It constitutes a small component of a larger learning goal. Once the student masters the individual competency and has been evaluated on it; he moves on to other competencies. In this manner, after mastering initial competencies the learner learns higher or more complex competencies to a degree of mastery.

While developing a competency based curriculum the first job is to identify the required set of functional as well as behavioural competencies. This is done based on job analysis and task analysis.

STATING A COMPETENCY

Competencies are stated as statements that describe the characteristics a graduating learner

is expected to demonstrate. The statement indicates the learner's capacity to perform and function independently in an academic, vocational or professional practice. Each competency integrates in itself the application of facts learnt, performance of skills and display of personal qualities like attitudes and values required to do a job efficiently and effectively. In practice however, several courses usually assist in the attainment of each competency.

COMPETENCY BASED CURRICULUM

Competency based curriculum, as a matter of principle is child centered. It nicely adapts to changing needs of learners, teachers and the society. In this curriculum, learning situations, activities and environments are so selected that the learners get ample opportunities to acquire and apply their attained knowledge, skills and attitudes in day to day problem situations. To put in simple language it focuses on what the learners will be expected to do or carry out later in life, in higher education or in their careers and not simply on what they are expected to know by way of studying different subjects.

A distinctive feature of competency based curriculum is that in case of any deficiency it helps the learner by giving remedial instruction, additional information, more time to practice or by providing academic support in the form of better and varied resources till they achieve the desired level of competency to satisfy the expected

standards. The goal here is to ensure that more students learn what they are expected to learn by making the time flexible and through additional instruction or resources. In this way, it is better than traditional approaches where students are evaluated in their terminal behaviour primarily to ascertain their status and certify.

Competency based curriculum gives an option to a learner to even skip a learning module entirely provided by virtue of his prior learning he can demonstrate that he has already acquired mastery over it. Due to flexibility of time and resources learners can practice and refine as much as they like and then move rapidly to other skills. In other words, competency based learning requires mastery of competencies by every individual.

DEVELOPING COMPETENCY BASED CURRICULUM

Competency based curriculum preparation involves bringing together a group of subject experts, practitioners from the field and curriculum experts who develop the curriculum.

In order to develop a competency based curriculum, the first task is to identify the required set of functional competencies along with the desired behavioural competencies. These are identified based on systematic analysis of the job into tasks to be performed. Each task is then analysed to identify the functional competencies in terms of knowledge, skills and personality traits.

Functional competencies are those competencies which are required to perform a particular function successfully. These include specific knowledge and their application, i.e., skills required to perform the specified tasks or functions. These are fortified by behavioural competencies which help one to improve one's own effectiveness through better interpersonal relationships.

Each course syllabus includes course goals. These goals are then specified into specific course objectives. With a view to assess the extent of achievement by a student, these objectives are written using precise language in measurable terms. Successful attainment of all course objectives by a student indicates his mastery.

Development of Competency based Curriculum follows the following steps—

Step 1

Identifying the minimum characteristics that an ideal graduate learner should possess in order to be able to successfully practice his higher education initiatives or be successful in his chosen vocation or profession. In other words, he competently accomplishes his goals within a particular setting.

Step 2

Listing down the necessary knowledge, required skills and attitudes or values to be imbibed by the individual for attainment of each competency thus identified. It is

advisable to indicate the methods of assessing the performance in relation to each competency.

Step 3

Arranging courses or units included in the syllabus into a particular sequence. This will enable the learners to meaningfully and effectively grasp the information.

Step 4

Presenting variety of 'practice exercises' and 'related activities' to help acquire and assess the extent of attainment of competencies. Prescribed activities are to be performed by learners under every course or unit which would be helpful in achieving the desired competency. The curriculum at every stage would specify the required level of performance to be achieved. These would motivate the learners to further practice and demonstrate the competency.

Step 5

Presenting a plan for remediation, in case a student is unable to demonstrate competency up to a given standard.

COMPETENCY BASED ASSESSMENT

The NEP 2020 mentioned that "The aim of assessment in the culture of our schooling system will shift from one that primarily tests rote memorisation skills to one that is more formative, is more competency based, promotes learning and development for our students, and tests higher-

order skills, such as analysis, critical thinking and conceptual clarity.” In this context, it is useful to realise that a competency based curriculum is amenable to a different kind of assessment scheme. In order to ascertain the successful attainment of a competency by the learner, it is essential to diagnose their status at the completion of each stage. Thus, the assessment by the teacher has to be continuous and ongoing rather than being a one time affair. With the help of such formative diagnostic testing, it would be known whether the learner requires more time, more personalised attention and further inputs or requires altogether different learning opportunities to reach the expected competency level. The development of competencies being incremental in nature the teacher helps the learner not only to acquire the competency but also to improve upon the competencies.

It is important to appreciate that any discrete assessment of single aspect will be counter productive. This is because competency assessment is comprehensive and involves all the three domains. Systematic observation and expert subjective judgement play an important part in such assessments. This implies that summative or year-end examination is not suitable for competency assessment. In spite of the subjectivity involved, the validity of assessment of competencies can be improved by involving multiple assessors, more number of assessments and assessment of different tasks and so on.

CONCLUSION

A perusal of the above indicates that competency integrates within itself the three aspects of child's growth namely knowledge, skills and personality traits like attitude, values, etc. As opposed to this, subject centered education is time bound and focuses on knowledge only. Work force in the knowledge age is required to know well his job, do each task efficiently himself and must have the will, positive attitude and be ready to adapt. Any attempt to see them in isolation will defeat the very purpose of education.

Competency based teaching is much more than a different style of teaching. This is because competency based education follows an outcome based approach. It is, as a matter of fact a definite improvement over the present day time bound education because in this, curriculum outcome is specifically defined in terms of the level of competency to be achieved.

Competency based curriculum is focused on the complex outcomes of a learning process rather than simply focusing on the subject matter content. These outcomes of the learning process relate not only to the learner's knowledge but also the skills acquired and the attitudes developed. The competency based curriculum, in addition provides academic support in the form of better and varied resources till the learner achieves the desired level of competency to satisfy the expected standards.

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