

Towards Competency Based Education National Education Policy, 2020

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Abstract

Competency based Education (CBE) is an outcome-based approach, which focuses on ensuring proficiency in learning in terms of skills, values, attitudes and knowledge required for real-life situations. In the context of school education, this refers to such systems of teaching-learning, assessment and academic reporting wherein students exhibit that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through different grades and levels of education. CBE is essentially a learner-centred approach, and teachers are the facilitators who would enable the transfer of knowledge and skills, and create a positive attitude and motivation for learning. However, in the present context, complete implementation of the principles of CBE is not possible. The system should focus on the development of appropriate ways of achieving learning outcomes for each grade and stage. The learning outcomes are expected to represent the holistic development of the learner. It is crucial to take teaching, learning and assessment together, one complementing the other and portrays a holistic picture of the child. In order to make the education system organic and responsive, the National Education Policy 2020 has suggested certain actions to be taken forward following the learning outcomes based approach.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental principles of the *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*, which will guide both the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions within it, is identifying and furthering the unique potential of each student by sensitising children, teachers and parents and making them partner in the holistic development of each child. Conceptual understanding should be emphasised rather than rote learning. Developing and nurturing essential life skills, such as communication, cooperation, teamwork and resilience on one hand and creativity and critical thinking on the other hand to encourage logical decision-making and innovation are core to the policy. The policy also bats for regular formative assessment for easy learning and holistic development (360 degrees) instead of summative assessment that encourages rote learning or learning for exams. Besides these academic aspirations, the makers of the policy have envisaged that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with the country, and an awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing society.

Competency based learning or Competency based Education (CBE) is an outcome-based approach to education. The focus of this approach is to ensure proficiency in learning

by students through demonstration of the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for dealing with real-life situations. The competencies or proficiencies need to be identified and marked at the age and grade-appropriate level.

COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION— THE CONCEPT

The word 'competency' has been framed from the word 'competence', which means having the ability or skill needed to achieve something. It represents a mix of knowledge, skills and attitudes and it is a set of demonstrable attributes and skills that would enable and improve the performance of a task or job. Taking the cue, the word 'competency' can be understood as the representative mix of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes contributing towards enhanced performance and ultimately success. In the context of education, competency-based education refers to such systems of teaching-learning, assessment and academic reporting wherein students exhibit that they have learned the knowledge and skills expected from them to learn as they progress through different grades and levels of education. The concept of Competency based Education (CBE) evolved after several years of research. CBE is essentially a learner-centred approach and it is based on the following four key beliefs: learning belongs to individual;

it is competency based; it takes place anytime, anywhere; and children have ownership over their learning. In a CBE system, teachers are considered as important facilitators who would enable transfer of knowledge and skills, and create positive attitude and motivation for learning. Such a system, when guided by a well-planned set of educational goals, leads to a deeper learning process, which yields necessary outcomes, required to prepare every student for life ahead.

WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL SKILLS?

The foundational skills like communication, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and many others are identified as 21st century skills. These skills are core not only for individual success but also for organisational success. In the case of education, it is increasingly felt that the turnouts of the system are not doing good enough on these essential skills and this is why we find a mismatch in the world of education and the job market. However, the present policy takes a serious cognizance of it when it says: 'Curriculum content will be reduced in each subject to its core essentials, to make space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning'. (Para 4.5 *NEP, 2020*). Interestingly, the Committee on 'Deeper Learning and Defining 21st Century Skills' conducted an assessment of

literature related to the development of these skills (*Education 2012*). The committee indicated that 21st century skills are important dimensions of human competence. In their scheme of classification, 21st century skills consists of three broad but overlapping cluster of competencies that included cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. The cognitive is related to concerns, reasoning and memory, the intrapersonal domain involves the ability to manage behaviour and emotions to achieve one's goals and the interpersonal domain entails expressing ideas, comprehending and responding to thus messages. The *National Research Council (NRC) Report (2012)* supports that young people who develop and apply these intertwined competencies are likely to be more successful.

Competency Based Education and Learning Outcomes

In the context of school education, in general, it will be appropriate to say that while the goal of competency based learning is to ensure that more students learn what they are expected to learn, due to the ineffective

Research on teaching and learning has begun to illuminate how intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies support the learning of academic content. A primary product of deeper learning is the ability to know how, why and when to use and transfer knowledge, to answer questions and solve problems.

and incomplete implementation of the principles of CBE, the picture changes and instead students study till the end of the academic year. Students are promoted to the next grade, whether they have fully learned the concepts and skills or not. However, students' progress is observed and recorded on the basis of competencies achieved, without a time-barred compulsion. Therefore, in the school education context, it would be better to make the system focus on the development and achievement of learning outcomes for each grade and stage in such a way that it represents holistic development of the learner. In common understanding, the basic difference in competency and learning outcomes is that competency is a general statement that describes the desired knowledge, skills and behaviours of a student passing out a programme or completing a course, whereas competencies are the applied skills and knowledge that enable people to successfully perform in professional, educational and other contexts. On the other hand, outcomes is understood in terms of a *specific* statement that describes what a student should be able to do and it is measurable in some way. There could be more than one measurable outcome defined for a given competency. Let us try to understand the concept with a few examples.

Let us say 'Critical and Creative Thinking' is a competency. The specific learning outcomes for this competency will be different for

different stages, from foundational to the secondary level. At the end of preparatory stage (Class V), the learning outcomes for competency building could be such that the child makes connections across subjects and situations; asks relevant and probing questions; tries to think and express critically; offers one's own solutions; tries to use aesthetic sense (drawing, story developing, etc.) to support viewpoint, etc. When we move to the higher stage, the learning outcomes could be that the student recognises the differences among facts, opinions and judgments; meaningfully responds to logical fallacies; seeks feedback; evaluate and reflect to revise the outcome; uses aesthetic ways to appreciate and support the development of the learner's competencies in different spheres across the different subjects. The educators and policy makers should plan and prepare on broad learning outcomes to ensure uniformity if in case the large-scale assessments are to be conducted. Teachers and schools should be given freedom to break these learning outcomes for assessing the learning progress of the child authentically. The NCERT had discussed this concept in its document titled *Learning Indicators and Learning Outcomes (2015)*.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment

A learning outcome should be written in such a way that it is precise and

can be assessed. It should focus on what the student is able to do after learning a particular concept and ultimately at the end of a class. Thus, learning outcomes become the basis for an assessment programme focusing on what a student can or should be able to do either upon completion of a course or class. The approach can also provide educators and teachers with more detailed or fine-grained information about student's learning progress, which can help them identify academic strengths and weakness, as well as the specific concepts and skills that the students have not yet mastered. When the academic progress is tracked and reported by learning outcomes in schools, teachers and parents often know more precisely what specific knowledge and skills students have acquired or may be struggling with.

Assessment needs to nurture Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) among children. It is evident that all children do not learn at the same pace and in the same way. Learning is largely associated with inherent talents and abilities and therefore, it requires using multiple strategies to deal with a set of students in the classroom. That is why, the need for individualised assessment as an integral part of teaching-learning process is emphasised. The system of CCE and School based Assessment (SBA) is considered more helpful so that the learning needs, difficulties and gaps are identified at an early stage and timely appropriate interventions

are provided to help all the children progress. Both CCE and SBA are based on learner-centric approach with an emphasis on assessment for learning. The only difference is that, under SBA, more freedom needs to be given to the school and to the teacher in the matters of assessment and taking further actions based on assessment. Such a system of assessment is likely to motivate teachers to use action research methodology, review and reflect on their methods of teaching and make necessary improvements, if needed. Rote memorisation and fear or stress from structured syllabus and textbooks will be done away and a new era for developing skills of 21st century will start taking shape. Thus, in order to make education system organic and responsive, it is imperative to take teaching, learning and assessment together, each complementing the other and portraying a holistic picture of the child. For the purpose of reporting, instead of getting grades (A,B,C, etc.) on an assignment or test, each of which may represent a specific achievement level, students are graded on specific learning outcomes, each of which describes the knowledge, skills and behaviour that the students are expected to acquire.

Providing quality education to every child, a resolve of the RTE Act, requires ensuring learning against the expected learning outcomes within the academic year and with the support of the system. These learning outcomes are based on the syllabi considering all round development

of the child—performance in subject areas, various skills, interests and aptitudes, etc.

Taking forward Competency based Approach through Learning Outcomes

In the earlier section, it has been discussed that in the pure form of CBE, students' progress is observed and recorded on the basis of competencies achieved, without a time-barred compulsion. However, in the school education context, it would be better to make the system accountable (as far as possible) for the achievement of learning outcomes by children by developing learning outcomes for each grade and stage. These learning outcomes should represent holistic development of the learner. Some necessary and urgent measures to take forward the learning outcomes based approach, as desired under the National Education Policy 2020 could be as follows:

- All States should prepare SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound) Learning Outcomes (LOs) mapped to the curriculum for every subject and class across different stages (from ECCE to Class XII). These LOs shall be based on the broader LOs developed by the NCERT.
- These learning outcomes should be codified and disseminated to all stakeholders—educational administrators, teachers, students,

parents, community members, etc. These should also be displayed in classrooms and other places of public view and popularised using media and locally popular methods to make them understandable to the public at large.

- Teachers should be given freedom to prepare classroom schedules based on experiential learning and integrating art and other aesthetic activities with education, etc.
- A variety of teaching-learning material including print material, audio-visual material, live TV programmes, phone-in programmes, etc., should be made accessible to students and teachers along with self-assessment questions to assess the attainment of Learning Outcomes on a continual basis.
- Classrooms and schools may be tracked by the SCERTs and similar agencies for achievement in each of the learning outcomes. Their roles may not be limited to monitoring, rather they should be accessible as mentors also for the teachers particularly.
- Regular and continuous capacity building should be undertaken by States/UTs for all the stake holders. In case of teachers, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) should be rigorously planned, and as far as possible, it should be customised to the needs of the teachers.

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