

The Competency-Based Approach in Modern Educational Curricula: Reality and Critiques

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Abstract

Most countries around the world have undertaken reforms to their educational systems to address existing shortcomings and imbalances, improve educational effectiveness, and develop curricula capable of keeping pace with rapid technological advances. These reforms have prompted many countries to adopt new approaches to curriculum development and educational practice. Among these, the competency-based approach has emerged as a major conceptual and pedagogical framework for developing modern educational curricula.

Despite its widespread adoption, however, the competency-based approach has attracted considerable criticism. Some critics contend that it serves the requirements of the capitalist system and primarily responds to economic interests and labour-market demands. In contrast, others attribute its widespread diffusion to the influence of globalisation. These and other criticisms raise questions about the foundations, purposes, and educational relevance of the approach. This study therefore asks: To what extent can the competency-based approach be regarded as a reliable and appropriate framework for contemporary educational curricula?

Keywords: curricula; educational curricula; competency; competency-based approach.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar in the development and advancement of societies. Most countries around the world have undertaken reforms to their educational systems to address shortcomings and imbalances, improve their curricula, and keep pace with global developments, particularly rapid technological change. These developments have led many countries to adopt new approaches to curriculum design. The competency-based approach provides a conceptual framework for the development of modern educational curricula in many countries by focusing on the learner and placing them at the centre of the educational process. What, then, is meant by this approach? How effective is it? What criticisms have been directed at it?

1. Educational Curricula and the Competency-Based Approach

1.1. Definition of the Curriculum

The curriculum has been defined in numerous ways, including the following:

According to De Landsheere, “the curriculum is a set of activities planned to stimulate learning: it consists of the specification of learning objectives, content, methods (including assessment), resources (including textbooks), and procedures relating to the appropriate training of teachers.”¹

- The curriculum consists of the educational and cognitive experiences that the school makes available to pupils, both within and beyond its boundaries, to help them develop the various dimensions of their personalities in a manner consistent with the established objectives.²
- The curriculum comprises everything that the school provides to its pupils in fulfilment of its fundamental mission of developing the human person, in accordance with specified educational objectives and a sound scientific plan, in a manner that contributes to their comprehensive physical, intellectual, psychological, social, and spiritual development.³
- In formal terms, the curriculum is an official pedagogical document issued by the Ministry of National Education to define the compulsory framework for teaching a particular subject.⁴

Despite the differences among the preceding definitions, the curriculum may be understood as “the totality of experiences and activities that the school provides to pupils under its supervision, with the intention that they engage and interact with them. As a result of this engagement and interaction, learning or behavioural modification occurs, thereby leading to the achievement of comprehensive and integrated development, which constitutes the ultimate objective of education.”⁵

It should be noted that “curriculum” and “programme of study” are distinct concepts, although they are often used interchangeably. Such indiscriminate usage creates considerable theoretical and practical confusion, both in programme development and in classroom implementation; the two concepts are not synonymous.⁶ Over time, the term “curriculum” came to be distinguished from its traditional meaning of a “programme of study” or syllabus. It came instead to denote a plan and a set of intentions broad enough to encompass needs, objectives or competencies, content, teaching and learning activities, pedagogical methods, resources (including textbooks, teachers’ guides, collective teaching aids, and equipment), assessment

¹ Gilbert de Landsheere, *Dictionnaire de l'évaluation et de la recherche en éducation* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 65.

² *The Educational System and Educational Curricula: A Training Manual for Primary School Head Teachers* (National Institute for the Training and Further Education of Education Personnel, 2004), 132.

³ Badr al-Din Ben Tridi, *Modern Dictionary of Education* (High Council of the Arabic Language, 2010), 347.

⁴ *The Educational System and Educational Curricula*, 132.

⁵ Lakhdar Lakhali and Kamal Farhaoui, *Fundamentals of Educational Planning: Theory and Practice* (National Institute for the Training and Further Education of Education Personnel, n.d.), 113.

⁶ Philippe Jonnaert et al., “From Competence in the Curriculum to Competence in Action,” *Prospects* 37, no. 2 (June 2007): 189.

procedures, human resources, and timetables.⁷ The French educational tradition used the term “programme” to denote the curriculum, whereas the English educational tradition used “curriculum,” now the more widespread term. The latter appeared in seventeenth-century English educational terminology to denote the programme of studies of an educational system or educational institution. By the 1960s, the meaning of educational curricula had expanded to include objectives, content, teaching resources, teaching and learning activities, the educational environment, human resources, timetables, methods, assessment, and related elements.⁸

1.2. The Competency-Based Approach

1.2.1. Definition of Competency

Some scholars maintain that the Arabic term for competency, in its commonly used sense, is a loanword resulting from contact and interaction among languages and civilisations. Its origin is said to be the Latin *competentia*, meaning “relationship,” with the French equivalent *compétence*; its use in European languages is reported to date from 1468.⁹

At the conceptual level, the notion of competency has generated extensive reflection and has been examined in considerable depth in the literature. Among the most prominent contributions are those of Rey (1996), who analysed the concept with considerable precision. Moreover, many authors who remain committed to objectives-based pedagogy now understand pedagogy in a manner closer to the contemporary meaning of competency.¹⁰

Some scholars maintain that more than one hundred definitions have been proposed for the term and that its meaning is determined by the general context in which it is used.¹¹ At first glance, this multiplicity of definitions may suggest fundamental disagreement; in practice, however, many of the differences are largely matters of emphasis. This diversity can be attributed to the following factors:

1. Each researcher approaches competency from a particular perspective and from theoretical, scientific, philosophical, and educational premises that may differ from those adopted by others.¹² In addition, competency is examined through highly diverse disciplinary approaches. It is used differently across fields, ranging from the workplace

⁷ Ben Tridi, *Modern Dictionary of Education*, 347.

⁸ *The Educational System and Educational Curricula*, 133.

⁹ Kheireddine Heni, *The Competency-Based Teaching Approach*, 1st ed. (A/Ben Press, 2005), 53.

¹⁰ Mohamed Ben Yahia Zakaria, *The Competency-Based Approach* (National Institute for the Training and Further Education of Education Personnel, 2003–2004), 4.

¹¹ Heni, *The Competency-Based Teaching Approach*, 53.

¹² Mohamed Ben Yahia Zakaria and Abbad Massoud, *Teaching through: 1. The Objectives-Based Approach and the Competency-Based Approach; 2. Projects and Problem Solving* (National Institute for the Training and Further Education of Education Personnel, 2006), 74.

and vocational education to social psychology, linguistics, the social sciences, and educational sciences.¹³

2. The relative novelty of the concept of competency, whose meaning has not yet crystallised sufficiently for researchers to adopt a single definition, has led individual scholars to use the conception they consider most appropriate.¹⁴

Among the best-known definitions are those cited by Badr al-Din Ben Tridi in *Modern Dictionary of Education*:

Rogiers, X.: "Competency is an integrated set of capacities that spontaneously enables one to perceive a given situation and respond to it in a relatively appropriate manner."

D. Hainaut: "The totality of knowledge, practical know-how (*savoir-faire*), and appropriate conduct (*savoir-être*) that enables one properly to perform a role, function, or activity."

Perrenoud, P.: "The capacity to act effectively in a specific type of situation, a capacity that draws upon knowledge but is not limited to it."

Dictionnaire actuel de l'éducation: "An acquired skill, through the assimilation of relevant knowledge [and through] experience, consisting in identifying and solving a specific problem."

Dictionnaire de pédagogie: "Competency represents what an individual is capable of accomplishing. Possessing competency means possessing knowledge or mastery of a practice of recognised quality in a specific field, and a competent individual is one who demonstrates knowledge or expertise in a particular domain."

Gillet, P., citing Rey, B.: "A system of theoretical and procedural knowledge, organised in the form of practical mental representations (schemes), which, when confronted with a family of situations, makes it possible to identify a problematic task and solve it through effective action."¹⁵

Le Boterf defined competency as follows:

- a. Performing well when confronted with a situation, for example:
 - carrying out a required operation;
 - applying a technique.
- b. Acting appropriately when dealing with a situation, for example:
 - acting effectively in an unexpected situation;

¹³ Philippe Jonnaert, "Sur quels objets évaluer des compétences?," *Revue Éducation & Formation*, no. e-296 (December 2011): 33.

¹⁴ Zakaria and Massoud, *Teaching through*, 74.

¹⁵ Ben Tridi, *Modern Dictionary of Education*, 274–75.

- taking the initiative when confronted with a situation in which not all elements are available; that is, knowing what must be done, which knowledge must be used, and when;
- mobilising a set of knowledge resources that makes it possible to respond to the situation.¹⁶

Mohamed al-Taher Waali provides a concise definition of competency and explains it as follows:¹⁷

Competency may be defined concisely as “the learner’s capacity to mobilise his or her resources in an integrated manner in order to solve a complex situation.”

- Capacity: the learner is able to act effectively, willingly, and with motivation when confronted with situations, particularly new ones.
- Mobilisation: the learner deploys acquired cognitive, practical, and behavioural knowledge in order to confront situations and respond to them rationally.
- Integration: the mobilised resources are organised in a coordinated and coherent manner.
- Complex situation: the problem, obstacle, or task encountered by the individual, requiring the use of all forms of information in order to reach a solution.

The preceding definitions focus on closely related ideas. Competency is associated with:

1. Responding appropriately to a situation (Rogiers, X.);
2. Mastery of practice (D. Hainaut);
3. Acting effectively (Perrenoud, P.);
4. Identifying and solving a problem (Dictionnaire actuel de l’éducation);
5. The capacity to accomplish and mastery of practice (Dictionnaire de pédagogie);
6. Solving a task effectively (Rey, B.);
7. Performing well and dealing effectively with a given situation (Le Boterf); and
8. The learner’s capacity to mobilise their resources (Mohamed al-Taher Waali).

All these definitions focus on the outcomes of learning once knowledge has been acquired and the learner is confronted with a particular situation. For the learner to be considered competent, the response must therefore demonstrate appropriateness, mastery, effectiveness, efficiency, the capacity to act, and the ability to mobilise resources. Competency thus represents what an individual is capable of accomplishing; possessing competency means possessing knowledge and mastering a practice of recognised quality in a particular field, or, in other words, being able to perform a specific action proficiently in a particular situation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Farid Hadji, *Teaching and Assessment According to the Competency-Based Approach*, 2nd ed. (Dar al-Khaldounia, 2013), 17–18.

¹⁷ Mohamed al-Taher Waali, *Competency-Based Pedagogy*, 2nd ed. (Dar al-Warsam for Publishing and Distribution, 2013), 27.

¹⁸ Fateh Laazili, “Competency-Based Teaching and Its Assessment,” *Maarif Journal*, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Bouira, 8th year, no. 14 (October 2013): 69.

The following definition of competency may therefore be proposed: “the learner’s acquisition of the capacity to confront a particular situation effectively and to generalise that capacity to similar situations, regardless of differences in their form.”

1. Enabling the learner to acquire: this implies the presence of a sender (the teacher) and a receiver (the learner), thereby placing the learner within the context of the learning process.
2. Capacity: here, capacity is the criterion indicating the learner’s ability to receive correctly the message conveyed by the sender (the teacher) during the teaching process.
3. Confronting a situation: this means placing the learner in a particular situation to give realism and credibility to acquired learning and to integrate it, thereby encouraging the learner to demonstrate the capacities acquired.
4. Particular: the situation is specified in a manner that serves the competency being targeted.
5. Effectively: effectiveness refers, on the one hand, to mastery of acquired learning and, on the other, to the appropriate mobilisation of the learner’s capacities in confronting the required situation.
6. Generalising this: this refers to the process of transfer, manifested in the possession of a competency and its mobilisation whenever required; it constitutes a criterion for the success of the educational endeavour.
7. To similar situations: this refers to a family of situations. When learning is linked to a particular situation, that situation is not itself the ultimate objective; rather, the objective is to transfer the acquired capacity and generalise it to all situations that share the same general framework, that is, the same family of situations.
8. Regardless of differences in their form: this also refers to the process of transfer (generalisation). It means confronting the learner with new situations that nevertheless share the same general framework as the original situation, because the acquired competency is associated with a particular category of situations that share essential characteristics. These common characteristics make generalisation and transfer possible and allow acquired learning to be applied across situations.

1.2.2. Definition of an Approach

a. Linguistically, the term “approach” denotes drawing near or coming closer, as opposed to being distant.¹⁹

b. Terminologically, an approach may be defined as:

1. The general manner in which a particular issue is perceived and studied, a project is undertaken, a problem is solved, or an objective is attained; and

¹⁹ See Ahmad ibn Faris ibn Zakariyya, *Maqayis al-Lughah*, ed. Abd al-Salam Harun, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Dar al-Fikr for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, 1979), 80; see also Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Razi, *Mukhtar al-Sihah*, ed. Mustafa Dib al-Bugha, 4th ed. (Dar al-Huda, 1990), 336.

2. A theoretical foundation consisting of a set of principles on which the design of a programme of study, the selection of teaching or assessment strategies, and forms of feedback are based.

An approach may therefore be understood as an intellectual endeavour oriented towards action and achievement. It rests on interconnected epistemological and ideological foundations and is shaped by its proponent's view of life.²⁰

1.2.3. Definition of the Competency-Based Approach

The competency-based approach is defined as a functional pedagogy that seeks to enable learners to manage the circumstances of life, with all the interconnected relationships and complex social phenomena they entail. It is therefore a methodological choice intended to enable learners to succeed in life by enhancing the value of school knowledge and making it usable in different life situations.²¹

Some consider the competency-based approach to be a method of preparing lessons and curricula based on:

- a precise analysis of the learning situations in which learners find themselves or are likely to find themselves;
- identifying the competencies required to perform tasks and assume the responsibilities arising from them; and
- translating these competencies into educational objectives and activities.²²

Others maintain that the competency-based approach is a methodological framework that offers educational systems concerned with equity an opportunity to enable pupils to develop competencies that equip them to become active participants in everyday life and to act effectively when confronted with concrete, real-world situations by mobilising resources acquired within or outside school.²³

This approach may also be regarded as placing greater emphasis on effectiveness than other approaches and as being more readily adaptable to accelerating changes within contemporary societies. Because knowledge continually evolves, its transfer and application require attention to how it can be mobilised in ways that ensure functional and practical effectiveness.²⁴

2. Modern Educational Curricula and the Emergence of the Competency-Based Approach

Education in the modern era has undergone a series of rapid changes affecting its conception, objectives, methods, and strategies. These changes have resulted from extensive and rapid

²⁰ See Ben Tridi, *Modern Dictionary of Education*, 334.

²¹ Hadji, *Teaching and Assessment According to the Competency-Based Approach*, 10.

²² Waali, *Competency-Based Pedagogy*, 14–15.

²³ Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, Executive Training, and Scientific Research, Kingdom of Morocco, *Guide to the Competency-Based Approach* (Maktabat al-Madaris, n.d.), 13.

²⁴ Ministry of National Education, *Guide to the Competency-Based Approach*, 12.

developments in science and technology, particularly in the behavioural sciences, such as psychology and sociology. It was therefore natural for these developments to influence educational science, particularly the field of teacher preparation. Competency-based teacher training emerged in the late 1960s. Before that, attention had focused on teaching through pedagogical objectives, centred primarily on defining the pedagogical objective in a precise and appropriate manner that clearly identified the behaviour expected of the pupil in the form of a learning activity, as well as the criteria to be used in assessment. Excessive reliance on pedagogical objectives, however, often led to serious distortions, including:

- the fragmentation or atomisation of educational action to such an extent that it becomes meaningless to the learner;
- the separation of objectives from educational content; and
- the linear and rigid organisation of educational activity.

As a result of these distortions, the competency-based education movement emerged. The concept first appeared in 1968 in the United States and subsequently spread to other countries.²⁵ Some scholars maintain that most of the theoretical work undertaken by Anglo-Saxon researchers on “competency-based education” dates from the early 1970s (Houston and Howsam 1972; Schmiedler 1973; Burns and Klingstedt 1973).

Nevertheless, this early work was concerned primarily with vocational training.²⁶

The concept developed considerably during the 1980s, with increasing emphasis on competency as an ultimate educational outcome: an overarching aim of education, defined in official texts and demonstrated through meaningful problem situations specific to a subject or shared across subjects and selected for their scientific, social, and ethical significance. Some scholars maintain that competency-based education is grounded in epistemological developments and has also been strongly influenced by the work of specialists in didactics on problem- and project-based pedagogy. Its theoretical foundations can be identified in the work of John Dewey on democracy, Piaget on structuralism, Bruner on discovery learning, and Chomsky on linguistics.²⁷

Chomsky, the renowned linguist, was among the first to use the term “competence,” specifically “linguistic competence.” For him, it refers to biological capacities specific to the human species and consists of a set of rules (grammatical knowledge) that enables individuals to generate an infinite number of linguistic productions (performances). Thus, competence refers to what a person is capable of accomplishing based on their biological endowment. In contrast,

²⁵ Zakaria and Massoud, *Teaching through*, 65.

²⁶ Nico Hirtt, “L’approche par compétences: une mystification pédagogique,” *L’école démocratique*, no. 39 (September 2009): 2, <https://www.ecoledemocratique.org>.

²⁷ Zakaria and Massoud, *Teaching through*, 66.

performance refers to observable behaviour, which is merely an incomplete manifestation of competence.²⁸

Competency-based pedagogy also draws on pragmatism, particularly in the use of the project method and problem solving in teaching. According to this perspective, the value of knowledge is determined by its utility, a principle also reflected in competency-based pedagogy.²⁹

3. The Spread of the Competency-Based Approach in Educational Systems Worldwide

The competency-based approach has become a prominent feature and a preferred choice in an increasing number of educational systems. In many countries, curricula are now presented as lists of competencies. In France, for example, lists of competencies that pupils are expected to master by the end of each stage of learning have existed alongside traditional programmes at the primary level since 1991. Similarly, in Belgium, basic competencies define what learners are expected to acquire during the years of basic education and the first year of secondary education, while lists of terminal competencies specify what should be attained by the end of secondary education. Since 2000, the new Quebec school training programme in Canada has likewise been structured around a competency framework. In Switzerland, the framework plan for the study of physical activities specifies the competencies to be attained by the end of secondary education, whereas in some cantons, such as Geneva, the primary-school curriculum is organised principally around competencies.³⁰ Many other countries, including Spain, Germany, and Italy, have also adopted this approach.³¹

In the Arab world, the approach has been adopted in the three Maghreb countries of Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. In Tunisia, it was adopted because of the characteristics that distinguish it from traditional approaches: it offers a different conception of learning, assessment, and the relationship between teacher and pupil, as well as a new conception of classroom and school management and organisation. In Morocco, the approach was adopted with the publication of the *White Paper*, which identified a set of educational competencies and classified them into five principal categories: strategic, communicative, methodological, cultural, and technological competencies. In Algeria, the competency-based approach was adopted and its implementation began in the 2003–2004 academic year.

4. Criticisms of the Competency-Based Approach

Like other educational approaches, the competency-based approach is not without limitations and has therefore attracted several criticisms. Philippe Perrenoud discusses, among others, the claim that the approach serves the capitalist system.

²⁸ Waali, *Competency-Based Pedagogy*, 23.

²⁹ Waali, *Competency-Based Pedagogy*, 9.

³⁰ Bernard Rey et al., *Competencies at School: Learning and Assessment*, trans. Mustapha Ben Habilis (National Centre for Educational Documentation, 2015), 5.

³¹ Rey et al., *Competencies at School*, 5.

For some critics, the popularity of competency as a concept in the corporate world is sufficient to render it suspect, leading to the conclusion that competency-oriented school programmes are merely a subservient response to employers' demands. Yet schools do not exist outside society and cannot claim to prepare individuals for life while ignoring the world of work. Nor can the prevailing power relations and dominant ideologies of society be absent from education. If the business world considers competency to lie at the heart of "human resource management," it is unsurprising that it would expect schools to contribute more substantially to competency development; curricular reforms oriented in that direction would therefore not trouble employers, managers, or professionals accustomed to thinking in terms of competencies.³² Nor should one be surprised by the close relationship between the competency-based approach in education, on the one hand, and the search for competencies associated with economic competition in the business world, on the other. Concepts such as "families of tasks" and "competency standards," for example, originated directly within companies. Faced with an increasing pace of innovation, corporate training departments were required to conduct increasingly detailed analyses of tasks and, from these, to identify the competencies required of workers.³³

Excessive emphasis on competencies may also come at the expense of knowledge, even though competency fundamentally adds value to knowledge by enabling it to be used to solve problems, devise strategies, make decisions, and act in the broadest sense of the term. School programmes commonly require knowledge to be linked to one or more competencies.³⁴ This may lead to an emphasis on competencies without first ensuring adequate assimilation of the knowledge required by the learner. Jean-Marie De Ketele responds to this objection by arguing that competency cannot be developed without mastery of the disciplinary knowledge that the competency mobilises. The nature of such mastery is not the same for those who have exercised a competency as for those who have merely learned the relevant knowledge; mastery of competencies can, moreover, lead to a stronger command of knowledge by requiring it to be mobilised more effectively.³⁵

A further criticism concerns the conceptual fragility of competency itself, since there is no universally accepted definition of the concept. Although some question the need for the term and argue that the concept of knowledge is sufficient, others point out that distinctions among competencies, capacities, know-how, and related concepts are unstable and vary from one author

³² Philippe Perrenoud, *Développer des compétences dès l'école?* (Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Geneva, 2001), 7.

³³ Hirtt, "L'approche par compétences," 6.

³⁴ Perrenoud, *Développer des compétences dès l'école?*, 4.

³⁵ Jean-Marie De Ketele, "L'approche par compétences: au-delà du débat d'idées, un besoin et une nécessité d'agir," 8–9.

to another. The concept remains contested and its definition a matter of debate.³⁶ From this perspective, because competency has not yet been fully stabilised or theoretically grounded, educational reform risks being built on “shifting sands.”³⁷ Guy Le Boterf likewise emphasises the absence of a unified and comprehensive conception of competency:

“The notion of competency itself has largely remained fixed to a definition, perhaps valid in the 1970s, that no longer meets the challenges of the knowledge economy at the beginning of the third millennium. . . . There have been countless debates, writings, seminars, training activities, and university courses on this concept, yet they have remained far from proposing a clear and workable alternative. . . . Semantic overcrowding undermined the concept of competency before its meaning had been semantically settled.”³⁸

Other severe criticisms of the approach have been summarised as follows:

1. Behind the competency-based approach lie economic objectives associated with developments in the labour market.
2. The competency-based approach is, in practice, an abandonment of knowledge, whatever its advocates may claim.
3. The competency-based approach cannot claim to constitute educational constructivism; rather, it is the opposite of progressive pedagogy.
4. Far from promoting educational innovation, the competency-based approach confines teaching practices within routine bureaucracy.
5. The competency-based approach is an element of liberalisation that reinforces social inequalities within the education system.³⁹

Another issue raised by these criticisms concerns the extent to which the approach is effective within our educational system. Given the low levels observed even at the higher stages of education, including university education, where our universities occupy very low positions in global rankings, can earlier generations (those educated through the objectives-based approach, and those before them through the content-based approach) be judged to have received deficient education and to lack the competencies required to perform their duties, whatever their nature? The evidence, however, suggests otherwise. Many people educated through earlier approaches are among the most competent practitioners in their fields, and some occupy senior positions in other countries. This invites reflection on the nature of the competency-based approach and on whether it genuinely achieves our educational aims, or whether it represents the adoption of an international trend without sufficient attention to issues at the core of education. Educational

³⁶ Perrenoud, *Développer des compétences dès l'école?*, 2.

³⁷ Perrenoud, *Développer des compétences dès l'école?*, 2.

³⁸ Guy Le Boterf, *Repenser la compétence: pour dépasser les idées reçues: quinze propositions* (Éditions d'Organisation, Groupe Eyrolles, 2008), 12–13.

³⁹ Hirtt, “L'approche par compétences,” 4–5.

reforms may consequently have concentrated on formal aspects and on an external framework associated with the approach without engaging sufficiently with the fundamental issues at the heart of the educational process. This concern is reinforced by arguments linking the spread of the concept of competency to globalisation. The relative prevalence of the term “competencies” began to increase markedly from the beginning of the 1990s, at the same time that discussions of the “knowledge society” and “globalisation” gained prominence.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Learning has become a continuing challenge, and schools are increasingly required to develop learners’ competencies in ways that enable them to pursue self-directed learning throughout their lives. Adopting the competency-based approach therefore entails a profound reconsideration of educational policy in general and a restructuring of educational curricula. The aim is, on the one hand, to facilitate access to high-quality, sustainable, and transferable learning in personal, social, and professional life and, on the other, to encourage future citizens to participate actively in the sustainable development of society and to respect the social values associated with citizenship. The competency-based approach has sought to achieve these aims by placing the learner at the centre of the educational process and focusing on the learner’s capacities and skills.

The approach has become the preferred choice of an increasing number of educational systems worldwide and has been adopted as a basis for curriculum development in many countries. Despite the considerable attention and acclaim it has received, however, it has not escaped criticism. Some critics argue that it has made the school a servant of the capitalist system and of economic interests. In contrast, others view the rapid shift towards it as little more than participation in a global trend associated with globalisation. These and other criticisms prompt questions about the effectiveness of the approach and its suitability for the educational environment of any given country. Is it the most appropriate approach for our educational curricula?

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