

Various dimensions of competency based training approach

In a traditional educational system (followed mostly in Pakistan), the unit of progression is time and it is teacher-centered. In a competency based training (CBT) system, the unit of progression is mastery of specific knowledge and skills and is learner or participant-centered. Two key terms used in competency-based training are:

- **Skill**—A task or group of tasks performed to a specific level of competency or proficiency which often use motor functions and typically require the manipulation of instruments and equipment. Some skills, however, such as counseling, are knowledge and attitude-based.
- **Competency**— A skill performed to a specific standard under specific conditions.

While traditional, time-based approaches to education have met with varying levels of success over the years, it is an ineffective system when the goal is to train individuals to perform specific skills. There appears to be substantial support for competency-based training. Norton believes that competency-based training should be used as opposed to the “medieval concept of time-based learning.” A competent clinician is one who is able to perform a clinical skill to a satisfactory standard. Competency-based training is based upon the participant’s ability to demonstrate attainment or mastery of clinical skills performed under certain conditions to specific standards (the skills then become competencies). Five essential elements of a CBT system can be described as:

- Competencies to be achieved are carefully identified, verified and made public in advance.
- Criteria to be used in assessing achievement and the conditions under which achievement will be assessed are explicitly stated and made public in advance.
- The instructional program provides for the individual development and evaluation of each of the competencies specified.
- Assessment of competency takes the participant’s knowledge and attitudes into account but requires actual performance of the competency as the primary source of evidence.
- Participants progress through the instructional program at their own rate by demonstrating the attainment of the specified competencies.

Primary advantage of CBT is that the focus is on the success of each participant in achieving required competencies and building confidence as they succeed in mastering specific competencies. Training time is used more efficiently and effectively as the trainer is a facilitator of learning as opposed to a provider of information. More training time is devoted to working and evaluating each participant individually or in small groups as opposed to presenting lectures and general evaluation.

While there are a number of advantages of competency-based training, there also are some potential limitations. Prior to implementing CBT at the undergraduate or postgraduate level in Pakistan, it is important to consider these limitations & implications:

- Unless initial training and follow up assistance is provided for the trainers, there is a tendency to “teach as we were taught” and CBT trainers quickly slip back into the role of the traditional teacher.
- A CBT course is only as effective as the process used to identify the competencies. When little or no attention is given to identification of the essential skills, then the resulting training course is likely to be ineffective.
- A course may be classified as competency-based, but unless specific CBT materials and training approaches (e.g. learning-guides, checklists and coaching) are designed to be used as part of a CBT approach, it is unlikely that the resulting course will be truly competency-based.
- Organizations must be committed to providing adequate resources and training materials.
- Audiovisual materials need to be directly related to the written materials and training activities need to match the objectives.
- Continuous participant interaction and feedback must take place.
- Trainers must be trained to conduct competency-based training courses and participants attending training must be prepared for CBT as this approach is likely to be very different from their past educational and training experiences.

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