

# THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

*Yelena Butova, PhD student*

Kazakh National Pedagogical University named after Abai, Almaty -  
Kazakhstan

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## Abstract

This article provides a historical review, which describes the implementation of the competence-oriented education. The author traces the several stages of its formation and describes the characteristic features. Starting with the very first application of the competency-based approaches within the linguistic education, proceeding to the next stages of acknowledgment and integration in other fields. Finally, after discussing the purpose, goals and influences of the competency-based education approach, the author makes an attempt to uncover the need of introducing the competency-based approach in all fields of education.

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**Keywords:** Competence, the education system, competence approach, competence-oriented education

## Introduction

Openness of the society, its increased informatization, dynamism and mobility have changed the requests for the educational area. Moreover, the need of mastering new social roles by university graduates, has significantly increased the level of expectations that shall be justified by an education in the field of social restructuring. In such context, implementing a competency-based education is a key issue of modern educational science in general.

Over a short period of time, education and professional competency have taken leading positions in globalization history, in positioning of manufactures, industries and the scientific researches associated, including those within the educational science. As a strategic area of the educational or teaching system organization, the competency-based approach is a method for keeping general and professional education in balance with the needs of society and labor market. By the early 21th century, economic processes as well as profilation of new technologies had accelerated the pace of globalizing competitiveness in educational area. Therefore, the issue of

social expertise, mastering skills and competency as basic cluster ideas of goal-setting of modern educational process has got the highest acuteness over the entire history of its development.

## I.

The competency-based education was formed as an educational trend in the United States of America. Its initial idea was adopted from the so-called generative grammar by N. Chomsky who declared in 1965, "...fundamental difference between the competence or knowledge of language and the application or actual use of language" (Chomsky, 1968, p. 172).

In the late 1960s, such difference was understood much wider than its original linguistic context and it was used in pedagogical and philosophical experimentalism. The experimental essence of the competency-based approach is currently moving to historically generative context as the ideas of competency have spread far beyond a single trend and have been accepted almost by everyone, including some conformist educational schools. At the moment, we suppose that, determining what the competency-based education is and what its development process and perspectives are as the most essential thing.

Competence-oriented education is based on the specification or definition of what constitutes a certain competence in a given field of activity (traditionally, a significant amount of research is performed in order to identify levels of competence), in which the required level of competency is formed by characterization and specification of the tasks for which the levels of performance are set. When characteristics of such type have been identified and put on their place in the hierarchy of a complex phenomenon of reality, an instructional sequence shall be developed in order to enable the students of this activity type to be more efficient in achieving their set of objectives-characteristics. Within the competency-based approach, the time required for mastering a competence may vary, and the objectives set in the course of education shall remain unaltered, while existence and provision of a number of alternative ways for a learner to achieve the declared objectives is considered to be the highest concentration of an educational approach of such type.

A psychological idea that different individuals have different learning technologies and are predisposed to different learning styles is assumed as a starting point. Since the main objective of the competency approach to education is not ranking the students, but teaching them to achieve their goals, this approach implements an attempt to increase the student's probability of success by providing various instructional routes, wherefrom the future specialist may choose the one that suits his personal learning style

(for example, among these methods the student can choose lectures, reading the study materials, video presentations, guidance in the form of software, etc.).

As we have already mentioned, the competency-based education was founded in entelechic form in the 1960s as a separation of the notions of “professionalism”, “competency”, and “competence”. Certainly, these notions are widely being used for long time however, according to I. Zimnyaya (Zimnyaya, 2005, p. 21), before the competency-based education, substantial components of these notions had always been confused. Many researchers addressed the issue of the competency-based approach development (we should mention N. Gishanova, I. Zimnyaya, V. Baidenkon, R. White, J.C. Raven, etc.). Summing general conclusions made in the course of development of different approaches to this issue, we can separate three key stages that determine respectively three highly essential stages in historical development and modern existence of the competency-based education.

First of these stages dated to between mid-1960s and early 1970s, may be determined as a terminological one as it was that very period when basic notions of a future educational discipline were introduced in scientific use (such as a “competency” itself). In addition, the prerequisites have been identified for a professional, a special division of some concepts related to each other (as already mentioned "professional", "competence", "education") on the basis of their dissimilarity relative to the central concept of competence. Nevertheless, in spite of such important achievements for modern competency-based education, in that period, the conclusions about generative grammar were not yet transferred to the field of education and pedagogy, remaining within the competency-based field of linguistic school. It was not until 1975, when D. Hymes introduced the notion of “communication competency”, that Chomsky’s ideas could be considered as adopted by psychological science.

From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, the psychological aspect dominated in the competency-based approach, and that is what we would call the second stage of the development of competence-based approach to education. Such scientists as J. Raven, C. Makeshnan, R. Burns established and developed many concepts of the competency-based education at that period, but the application of these concepts was limited to purely psychological (communication theory), human resources and psychological (management) and administrative spheres.

However, some educational aspects of the competency-based approach were established in general at the same stage due to linguistic origin of the competency theory. This happened in the field of foreign language learning (Burns, 2002, p. 33–35). This very type of education

should be historically considered as the first preceptor of the competency-based orientation. Besides, in 1984 one of the classics of the competency theory J. Raven advanced a revolutionary theory of competence socialization in his book *Competence in modern society – Its identification, development and release* (Raven, 1984). He suggested several complete definitions for key notions and developed complete lists of basic competences with their basic features. We should note that Raven repeatedly used such characteristics of general notion of competence as above-mentioned preparedness and probability (as well as the groups of competences we separated as “will competences”). Moreover, it was Raven who first stated the idea of interconnection (or inseparability) between social and professional competences.

Thus, it was the second stage of development of the competency-based pedagogics when the idea of competences (those started to be classified in different ways, especially by Russian scientists, such as L. Petrovskaya, A. Markova, etc.) as definite and final goals of learning: this crucial aspect of general competence theory underwent some transformations with the course of time as a competence finiteness ceased to be understood as an actual entity; as it was more like a distant image in the process of excellence of a trained specialist. In 1990, the Council of Europe “...separates a strategic, social, sociolinguistic, linguistic, and educational” (Zimnyaya, 2004, p. 32) competences to become the first legal confirmation of the notions of the competency-based education.

Besides, we should note that such Russian researchers as N. Kuzmina and L. Petrovskaya came to an essential conclusion of a modern competency theory at the same time (1990) which says that the basic notion of this theory should be considered within the integral psychological and social context since the competency is not just a consequence of posteriorization of formal knowledge, but also a personality trait of a professional. This very observation implies that educational preparation in the system of higher education shall pursue a wider set of objectives rather than just compliance of a graduate with the awareness standards.

Finally, the third stage of development of the competency-based education is characterized by global development and active implementation of conclusions made at the previous stages. This period is known for significant increase of interest in competency pedagogics in Russia, where a great number of fundamental works appeared (by such authors as A. Markova, L. Alexeyeva, G. Sivkova, L. Mitina, etc.). They thoroughly analyzed the place of competency in social and cultural life of learning and developing specialists. A characteristic feature of the third, modern, stage of development of competence-based approach to education becomes a documentary acknowledgment of this approach. Thus, UNESCO materials

dedicated to educational technologies include stated sets of competences considered as necessary objectives in desired and currently implemented educational system. According to L. Petrovskaya, the four pillars of modern education stated by J. Delors (learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be) are actually “global competencies” (Petrovskaya, 1989, p. 146).

The competency-based education is currently focused on learning outcomes and addresses its basic ideas to what the learners shall learn to do, rather than the more traditional goal of defining of what they must learn. Keeping some basic features, the competency-based approach is currently (just like in the period of its establishment) an educational trend for setting goals in the form of knowledge, skills and behavioral features a student shall master by the end of his/her studies.

The competency-based education adapts to the evolving needs of students and teachers, but also to the needs of society: competency, which implies the ability to use a skill, requires a close focus on potential possibilities of future activities of graduates. Given this, we have to mention that the competency-based approach implies that both are competent, the graduate, but also the teacher, which in its turn requires determination of the specific competences that have to be typical for a teacher according to the considered educational approach.

## **Conclusion**

Any form of the competency-based education (its forms are regularly updated, which is a key feature of such method) is dynamic kind of education opposed to statistical methods of the noncompetency-based approach. The competency-based approach intensifies significantly the possibilities and facilitates the orientation process for learners at the practice of their future activities, at strategic and operational side of expected educational outcome. In other words, skill orientation of the competency-based approach is actually an integral way of considering the educational phenomenon itself within objective goals stated by the modern world and set for young specialists. Moreover, the competency-based education is a humanistic trend that may refer to a professional competence along with a personal or social one of specialists, citizens, individuals.

Thus, the higher education aimed at teaching a student self-motivation, forming a learning specialist cannot be fully understood within the instructional goal-setting (at least, due to the fact that in such system the goals set are usually the ones of a teacher), resulting in production of dependent (noncompetent) professionals. As we noted, professionalism should be understood as an opportunity to carry out activities and competence - as success of its implementation, including - social success. In

our opinion, in spite of the fact that the competency-based education implies a certain risk relating to decrease in directional functions of a teacher and increase in student's control, only this approach can result in high manifestations of competent activity as only competency-based higher education implies reduction of negative psychological effects of the learning process, integral development of professional and social skills of a student and as a result, it can significantly accelerate the speed and quality of preparedness and development of a skillful specialist for efficient working activity.

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