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Concepts of competence-based education

"Competence-based education" is a new approach to promote learners into the spotlight of the educational process. This approach emphasizes the standards of knowledge, skill, and attitude that learners need to achieve, and at the same time objectifies teaching and assessment methods to help learners develop identified competences.

"Competence-based education" (CBE) has become the subject of many different domestic and international studies. This teaching method is approached from the following direction: 1) pedagogical theory; 2) teaching and assessment methods and 3) application of competence-based education in specific fields.

Competence-based education network (C-BEN) evades definition but describes competence-based education as a learning model in which learners acquire and demonstrate knowledge and skill through participation in exercises, activities, and experiences that are aligned with specific learning outcomes. In this model learners receive active guidance and support from the teacher. C-BEN assumes that competence-based education "is an innovative approach in tertiary education to organize knowledge or teaching methods according to competence - what learners know and are able to achieve - rather than following the traditional approach."⁽¹⁾ Competence-based education is the development and continuation of output-based education. According to researcher S.P.T. Malan, competence-based education started in the 1960s in the United States "due to the concern that students are not

being equipped with essential skills for life after graduation.”(2) Malan believes that competence- based education promotes mastery of skills in learners rather than rote memorization of knowledge.

Competence-based education is especially popular and relevant in practical career fields such as medicine, pharmacology, and pedagogy. Melissa S. Medina has written that competence-based education is an educational model in which students learn and develop abilities at their own pace.(3) She believes that competence-based education in the pharmaceutical industry has both benefits and limitations. Although this model will help pharmacy students acquire the necessary skills in the profession, it is difficult to implement as more universities have to operate with limited resources.

Educause Association is a US-based non-profit organization that promotes educational innovation by applying information technology. Educause believes that the focus of competence-based education should be on students’ learning ability and skills rather than scores.(4) In competence-based education programs, learners are active in their education in accordance with their own abilities and are given a clear explanation of the learning objectives. The difference of this method from the traditional education model lies in its flexibility of its training time because each learner has a different ability to learn. This requires flexibility in training management methods as opposed to applying a planned management model. This is the challenge that makes competence-based education less viable in training institutions where management is outdated and resources are lacking.

Alison Brown and Fred Hurst of Northern Arizona University in the United States, say the main reason why competence-based education programs are increasingly popular is because this type of training program solves many problems of tertiary education, including providing a lower-cost bachelor’s degree training.(5) At Northern Arizona University, competence-based education is called “personalized learning”. This method of training allows students to master their own learning process more effectively, at a lower cost by objectifying subjects to suit their learning style and

individual pre-existing knowledge background. Brown and Hurst argue that each student is unique while the prevalent education system tends to treat all the students the same.

The Australian Department of Education and Training defines competence-based education as "a training method that focuses on learners' ability to receive, process, and respond to information in order to form personal competences. It is designed with a view to the formation and use of skills that meet defined professional standards, rather than to enhance the academic achievement of one learner in comparison to others." (6) Competence-based education programs are not time-dependent. When learners master a required competency, they move on to the next. This process helps learners practice problem-solving, self-management, communication, and information technology skills.

In Vietnam, competence-based education is a relatively new topic both theoretically and practically. It is approached mainly from two directions.

First, competence-based education is studied in the field of pedagogical theory. Accordingly, it has many similarities with the learner-centered teaching, personalized teaching as well as the active teaching method. Competence-based education is associated with the identification of the core competencies required by the future profession. This approach can be clearly seen in the article "Solutions for Teacher Training following Competence-based Education" by Assoc. Prof, Dr. Pham Hong Quang in Education Magazine, Issue 216, or in the article "Competence-based Education in Training Political Teachers" by Assoc. Prof, Dr. Dinh The Dinh, from Vinh University.

Second, the competence-based education model has been applied to some subjects and at some schools, providing both experience and practical lessons. This model is more commonly applied in practical training fields than in theoretical fields.

Accordingly, the training program focuses on the core knowledge, skills and qualities constituting professional competence, which thereby determines the teaching methods and assessing this capacity. Do Manh Cuong on the topic "Integrated teaching and implementation capacity in vocational training," has pointed out two primary approaches in vocational training: 1) the traditional approach and 2) the approach according to the implementation capacity. He has said that, in vocational training, the training content is "the ability to solve tasks at a working position in an enterprise or company." (7) The challenge for a competence-based education program lies in properly assessing the learner's baseline level of competence. The training program must identify specific competencies and measurable learning objectives. Teaching and assessment go hand in hand to motivate students to achieve their learning goals. Formative assessment will then prevail over summative assessment with an emphasis on student progress rather than their final grade. Formative assessment includes giving specific descriptions of the competencies to be achieved, providing clear assessment criteria, and relevant feedback on students' work. This requires teachers to transform their role from conveyors of knowledge to that of instructors, thereby inspiring learners.

Nguyen Quang Thuan in his article, "Competence-based Assessment," has said that the competency development approach helps to train "dynamic practitioners," meeting the requirements of the job and the expectations of society. The author tries to answer two questions: "Why should we teach, learn, and evaluate in the direction of competence development?" and "The purpose of competence-based evaluation is to determine what and how to assess?" He said, "The program to approach the competence is actually the program to approach the outputs" where the outputs here are the "competency systems" that learners need to achieve after the training process. Evaluation is essential and determines the success of a development-oriented training program because this program "focuses on practice rather than accumulating knowledge." (8) Assoc. Prof, Dr. Le Duc Ngoc of Vietnam National University, Hanoi said that the information explosion has upset the goals of traditional education by shifting from knowledge acquisition and skills training to competency-training, in which self-study is a core competency. While this transformation takes

place in a great variety of aspects, two of the main aspects are: 1) shifting the center from teaching to learning and, 2) shifting from transmitting knowledge and skills to focusing on teaching qualities and competencies.(9) This transformation also requires a corresponding change in the training management method from centralized management to autonomous management, from planned management to flexible management. This concept is also associated with the philosophy of lifelong learning. Accordingly, study at a university is only a short stage in the lifelong learning process of each individual, in which the role of self- study becomes dominant.

If the traditional training method focuses mainly on transferring knowledge by turning the knowledge of the teacher into the knowledge of the students, the competence-based education is now oriented towards competency development, motivating learners to acquire and create knowledge and effectively transform that knowledge into practical use. We are living in an era of knowledge explosion with a lot of new information and good philosophy, but if those knowledge and philosophies are not applied to reality, their beauty is only theoretical. Memorizing information is no longer and should not be the ultimate goal of the educational process. Competence-based education is training capacity and action thinking so that learners learn how to turn the beauty of others' creativity into their own and give the beauty of knowledge a vivid reality.

Some experiences in competence-based evaluation

The United States is a leading country in implementing competence-based education programs. According to statistics from Pearson Education, competence- based education programs have quadrupled in the United States since 1990. They predicted that by the end of 2014, at least 52 universities and colleges in the United States would offer such programs. According to the collaborative report "Competence-based education: A Policy Guide" by Capella University and the educational consulting organization White Advisors, there are currently about 600 universities in the US that operate or are designing competence-based education programs. It is

estimated that by 2020, the number of competence-based education programs will increase to a total of about 750 programs with the participation of 500,000 students.⁽¹⁰⁾ Western Governors University (WGU) in the United States has been a pioneer in implementing competence-based education programs since 1997. All WGU training programs are offered online. According to the WGU approach, competence-based education “measures skills and learning rather than time. Students end their course when they can demonstrate they have mastered the required skills rather than waiting until the end of the semester. If students are faster learners, can spend more time on assignments, or build on the knowledge or experience they already have, they can shorten their learning curve.”⁽¹¹⁾ WGU's competence-based education program is made possible by 1) an online learning system operating 24/7; 2) lecturers who are ready to provide appropriate support to students, and 3) active students, who know where their learning journey has come from and where they need to go.

WGU does not provide a definition of competence-based education but outlines five key features of this program.

First, students can accelerate their learning according to their ability. This means that students with outstanding academic ability can shorten their studies and graduate before the standard time. With flexible study times, students can start or finish courses at any time during the semester.

Second, the curriculum is designed to be competency-centered. These competencies match the requirements of real-life jobs, helping students master the knowledge and skills that their future careers require. The roadmap to achieve these competencies is formalized and transparent.

Third, the program is designed with the awareness that students have different experiences and abilities which allow some to absorb quickly while others proceed more slowly. As a result, students' teaching, support, and assessment are

personalized, allowing each student to complete the program at his or her own pace. This also means that the student support system must be highly developed professionally to help students stay on track. As mentioned above, this is a big challenge for training institutions that do not have an adequate training management system, support services, or learning materials.

Fourth, the learning materials are standardized in the direction associated with core competencies. The learning materials are consistent with the defined learning objectives of each module and have a progressive difficulty level. This resource helps students to not only learn effectively in class but also to actively study on their own.

Last but not least, the training program is inclusive and adapted to the needs of employers and industries. The designations of the core competencies of the modules and training programs are closely linked to actual real-life job descriptions. The higher education institutions must have the capacity to train the students what the employers need, build practical programs, and teach what the market needs, not what the school offers. WGU's competence-based education programs have four basic characteristics: 1) effectiveness: students quickly go through familiar topics, spend a greater part of their time on new material, and develop the ability to scan through documents to clearly understand the subject; 2) flexibility: students can study anywhere, anytime with the support of a networked wireless learning system; 3) individualization: the training program considers the differences of students and 4) encouragement: the student is the master of his or her own learning process but receives the support and encouragement of the lecturer.

WGU is a typical case of applying information technology to deploy a competence-based training model. The school currently has about 110,000 students enrolled in online training programs. Of course, the online training program will have more flexibility, which means it will not be limited by physical conditions such as classrooms or practice rooms. Although the application of a competence-based education model is necessary, it is not a model that can be applied on a large scale. However, it is suitable for vocational training programs such as for teachers, doctors, journalists, or

other practical training programs.

Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) in the United States is also a leader in competence-based education programs. Examples of programs that use this approach include: Communications (business and health majors); Healthcare and Management (specializing in insurance, logistics, and public administration). The bachelor's program in Communication at SNHU equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary for a variety of careers such as public relations, social media, advertising, organizational communications, and corporate communications. The competence-based education model is clearly shown by determining the output standards of each program and for each module.

SNHU's Bachelor of Communication program consists of 60 credits, of which 51 are focused on communication competencies and 9 credits focus on business competencies. Each credit is associated with a specific defined competency. Determining the specific competencies to be achieved for each credit is an important basis for teachers to organize teaching, for students to guide their learning process, and for assessing their fulfillment. The building of a competence-based education program is therefore associated with the systematization of core competencies, which are clearly designed and do not overlap between modules.

The description of the competencies of each credit has succinct descriptions. For example, COM20111 - describe the roles and functions of communication in organizations and businesses; COM20113 - describe the development of the media profession to understand and solve contemporary media problems; COM20091 - apply legal and ethical considerations when providing information to targeted public groups; COM20110 - evaluate relevant information and data to determine how to segment and reach the target audience; COM30122 - identify considerations for effective communication with different segments of the public; COM30116 - select and apply appropriate technology to produce visual communication products; COM20100 - develop oral presentation skills to make a demonstration that aligns with organizational goals.⁽¹²⁾ Like in the United States, competence-based education in

Vietnam was applied early in vocational training in certain fields such as healthcare. In 2015, the Department of Science, Technology and Training, under the Ministry of Health released a "Competency-Based Teaching Manual for Midwifery Trainers." This document grew out of the documents "Basic Competency Standard of Vietnamese Midwives" and "Guidelines for the Development of Output Standards Based on the Basic Competency Standards of Vietnamese Midwives" of the Ministry of Health. The essence of this training program is now based on the "skills, knowledge, and qualities that graduates need to be specifically taught and assessed." (13) Students will apply their knowledge and practice skills in real situations under the hands-on guidance of the lecturer.

Aside from the medical industry, the global media and communication industry is gradually updating training trends throughout the world to build competence-based training programs. Signs of this trend can be seen in the evolving strategy of media – communication training institutions to develop specific output standards; consulting employers in the development of programs; strengthening the exercise of practice and internship in the training program and associating training with an eye to the changing needs of the profession. However, there is currently no media – communication training program which is truly a competence-based training program. There are many different reasons for this gap which require specific solutions.

Competence-based education for media and communication

Competence-based education is now an inevitable trend and in fact has been applied in many countries in the fields of practical vocational training such as for doctors, teachers, and journalists. To what extent this trend is deployed depends on the availability of human resources, facilities and learning materials of the training institution. In the immediate future, online training schools like WGU will have more advantages in competence-based training because this system is highly extensible and flexible and capable of meeting the needs of most students and the diverse needs

of different learners. Meanwhile, traditional training institutions will need to organize and move quickly to catch up with the trend.

If media and communication training at least at the bachelor and master levels is practical vocational training, then a competence-based training model is necessary and reasonable. Graduates need to find work and be able to work in the industry for which they were trained. The percentage of graduates who have jobs in the right field of training and can get up to speed to meet job requirements in practice is the most important indicator of training quality. Quality is conceptualized as the degree to which a training institution achieves its training objectives, which is epitomized by output standards. The specific and accurate identification of output standards is a favorable condition for building a competence-based training program.

The media and communication competence is made up of essential knowledge and skills to help learners complete the practical tasks of the profession. The media and communication training programs should aim to form and develop this knowledge and these skills. Different training programs such as for television or radio majors may emphasize specific experience and skills, but it must still be associated with a common system of competencies. Competencies can be grouped as follows: general competencies, core competencies, and specific competencies. The identification of these competencies needs to be based on standards formed from research by professionals, researchers, employers, and learners.

Building a competence-based training program for media and communication can be done by building a media and communication competence framework. This framework can be developed by each training institution or by cooperation between media – communication training institutions throughout Vietnam as a common national competence framework. This is not an easy process, but it has been successfully implemented into practice in some countries. A national competence framework for a specific training area will be used as a benchmark for program development, implementation, and evaluation.

In the United Kingdom, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education is a mandatory reference standard for higher education institutions in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales for developing training programs. The regulation consists of three parts: Part A – Developing and maintaining training standards; Part B – Ensuring and improving the quality of training; and Part C – Information about universities with a unified Statement of Quality. This frame of reference clarifies “what standards universities must meet and what society can expect from them.” (14) According to this regulation, quality must be determined by specific standards and the university’s commitment to quality must be bound by clear systems.

The UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has developed a Subject Benchmark Statement for Communication, Media, Film, and Cultural Studies. This benchmark statement defines the standards of knowledge, understanding, and skills that students in these programs need to achieve to graduate. This statement is intended for three stakeholders: 1) those who develop, teach, and evaluate training programs in communication, media, film, and cultural studies; 2) students enrolled in or interested in these programs to understand what to expect and what to prepare for and 3) employers to learn about the emerging knowledge and skills graduates of these programs will bring to the organization.

This benchmark statement is defined as follows; “In order to promote the academic and personal development of students, programs in the fields of Communication, Media, Film, and Cultural Studies should educate creativity, critical capacity, flexibility, and adaptability, ability to work independently and in groups, and have productive and critical skills.”(15) Three important output standards of the above training programs include: 1) full knowledge of communication, media, film, and other forms of cultural expression in their training programs; 2) understanding of various concepts, theories, and approaches related to training programs and their application and (3) appropriate analytical, research, production, and communication skills that match the learning tasks in the program as well as baseline and creative skills.

In terms of knowledge, graduates of communication, media, film, and cultural studies majors in the UK need to fulfill 13 learning outcomes. These common outcomes are applied uniformly to the above programs, but to varying degrees depending on the focus of each program. Some of the core knowledge includes: knowledge of the central role of communication, media, film, and cultural actors in the economy, politics, and society at the local, national and international levels and the ability to study and demonstrate these impacts; awareness of the specific history and context of the learning content; knowledge of appropriate research methods, procedures and traditions, and an understanding of their strengths and limitations; knowledge of types of texts, genres, forms of aesthetic expression, cultural activities, and the ability to analyze these types.

In Vietnam, traditional journalism training institutions such as the Academy of Journalism and Communication can play an important role in building a framework for media and communication competence. This should be an internal competency framework that is generally applicable to training majors in media and communication at the Academy. Going a step further, the Academy can cooperate with domestic communication and media training institutions to develop a common competence framework. This is a basic and important premise to standardize training programs in media and communication throughout the country.

Tài liệu tham khảo

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