

# Revival of Competency Based Teacher Education

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**Abstract:** Competency Based Teacher Education (CBTE) was widely implemented around the 1970s to the early 1980s in Indonesia and elsewhere. Although there was no formal cancellation of this curriculum, its role seemed to fade away as other concepts of teacher education came into the field. In the last two years CBTE seems to get a new momentum to reemerge along with the launching of competency based curriculum in primary and secondary school levels. This article describes critically the responses on the sides of teacher education, towards the newly launched issue and what have been done so far in the national level in the preparation of reemergence of CBTE, especially on formulation of competencies which should be acquired by the teacher candidates in teacher education scheme. It's expected that the freshly graduated teachers are ready to play their roles, as soon as they graduate from teacher training institutions.

**Keywords:** competency-based education, teacher education, curriculum development.

Strong tendency to introduce improvements and innovations in education stays forever, all over the world, including in teacher education in Indonesia. The latest issue currently heating the climate of education in Indonesia was the declaration of the implementation of Competency Based Education (CBE), marked by the plan of the launching of a new curriculum—a competency based curriculum for all primary and secondary education. Although a formal statement related to its implementation has not yet been made—and it is expected that the statement would not explicitly mention CBE as the for-

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mal designation—the impacts of the extensively discussed issue have significantly provoked concerns and varied attitudes amongst the education experts and laymen, from the educational authorities in the national level to heads of schools stationed in remote areas, and from university professors to teachers holding the lowest ranks in the professional hierarchy, especially related to the preparation of the teachers who have to change their main roles from the sole resources of information to their new roles.

The issues of CBE have also triggered the reemergence of CBTE which was predominant in Indonesia in around the 1970s and early 1980s as the main reference for the development and implementation of teacher education curriculum. As a concept CBTE has been successful in formulating the elements of teacher competencies—well known as Ten (Basic) Teacher Competencies—around which teacher education curricula were developed. However, it's a provoking question in the emergence of CBTE whether the old formulation of teacher competencies can still be retained and simply be reintroduced to education circles, or should it be reformulated or even a totally new formulation is needed.

#### **NEW PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER COMPETENCIES**

The meaning of teacher competencies differs across educational settings, and various developments seem to have strong influences on it. In part this has been happening because of subjective interpretations of competencies themselves, which in turn are not independent from the functions of the related institutions. However, there are common elements of teacher competencies which are generally recognized by any institution, and regarded as the main constituents of teaching profession. Some meanings and interpretations of teachers' competencies are described below.

In the midst of 1980s a team of writers recruited by the Indonesian Open University (Universitas Terbuka) indicated ten elements of teachers' competencies—as formulated in the lecture notes written for Teaching License V Program—which should be adequately mastered by the teachers. These were: (1) mastery of teaching materials, (2) management of teaching-learning programs, (3) classroom management, (4) knowledge and use of learning media, (5) knowledge of bases of education, (6) management of teaching-learning interaction, (7) evaluation of students' learning progress, (8) knowledge of principles and use of student counseling, (9) knowledge and ability of conducting school administration, and (10) knowledge of research methodology and ability of using results of educational research for teaching.

Earlier, Cooper et al (1973) as quoted by Turney (ed., undated) indicated that teacher competencies covered attitudes, understandings, skills, and behaviors believed necessary to facilitate intellectual, social emotional and physical growth of children. To ensure mastery of these competency elements, the students were supposed to be able to fulfill three performance criteria, i.e. (1) cognitive understandings, (2) appropriate teaching behavior, and (3) knowledge and use of evaluation techniques. In Cooper's words those criteria were named knowledge, performance and product or consequence criteria respectively.

Referring to supporting and opposing thoughts about Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET), Kerka (2000) indicated that confusing understandings of teacher competencies have resulted from different ways in viewing competency as the main element of professionalism in teaching profession, the ways for breaking it down into detailed performing skills, and the ways how these should be judged. More specifically this writer indicated that the confusing understandings of competencies were no more the products of contradicting ways of thinking of the behaviorists and constructivists. The behaviorists conceptualized teachers' competencies as something that must be breakable into measurable teaching performances such communication, numeracy, information technology, interpersonal competence and problem solving. The constructivists on the other hand, criticized these views as extremely reductionist, narrow, rigid, atomized, and theoretically, empirically and pedagogically unsound. The constructivists viewed competency as an entity which was integrated, holistic, and relational in nature. Competency must be seen as a complex combination of knowledge, attitude, skills and values, displayed in the context of task performance. This view was—among others—promoted by Gonzi (1997), and Hager (1995).

Among the most generic, and (probably) scientific analyses of (teachers') competencies was the one described by a team of writers of Open University of the Netherland, which was developed from a constructivist viewpoint (Stoop et al, 1999). In this analysis the writers avoided the use of sole and absolute meaning of competency. Instead, they offered an alternative way for abandoning the competency confusion by taking into consideration people, goal and context which formed the basis of viability of the real meaning of competency. In other word the meaning of competency must be constructed contextually in which people of interest, goals and the existing context are duly taken into considerations. Differences in meanings of competency are not important as long as the developed meaning serves the people well in

their efforts to achieve the already formulated goals, which in turn have already been benchmarked in according to the existing context.

Using what was called 'boundary approach' the above team further developed the meaning of competency by either one of two possible ways. From its formulations it can be indicated that this development was strongly influenced by the thoughts related to teacher preparation programs. One way developed by the team was dubbed 'inside out' in which essential dimensions were used for developing competencies. The other way was called 'outside in' in which dimensions identified as not the appropriate parts of the conceptualized competencies were sorted out from further development so that the resulted competencies contained only the essential dimensions.

In the 'inside out' approach discussions were developed around six issues. They were (1) personal versus task characteristics, (2) individual versus distributed competencies, (3) specific versus general competencies, (4) levels of competencies versus competencies as levels, (5) teachable versus non-teachable competencies, and (6) static versus dynamic competencies. The 'outside in' approach on the other hand contrasted the following issues, (1) competencies versus performances, (2) competencies versus qualification, (3) competencies versus ability and capability, and (4) competencies versus an integrated set of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Shortly, it can be stated while the 'inside out' approach take it for granted a number of essential and accepted dimensions to be developed as the core of teachers' competencies, the 'outside-in' approach starts the development of teachers' competencies by eliminating dimensions or entities which later turn out to be not essential as parts of the conceptualized competencies.

Regardless of the ambiguous ways they used, at the end the writers succeeded in selecting a number of plausible meanings of teachers' competencies. Among the definitions recommended by the team were:

- Competency is a knowledge, skill, ability, or characteristics associated with high performance on a job, such as problem solving, analytical thinking, or leadership. Some definitions of competency include motives, beliefs and values (Mirabile, 1997).
- A competency is a cluster of related knowledge, skills and abilities that effects a major part of one's job, that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development (Parry, 1996).
- A competency is an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causality related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance

in a job situation. Underlying characteristic means the competency is a fairly deep and enduring part of a person's personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks. Causality means that a competency actually causes or predicts behavior and performance. Criterion referenced means that the competency actually predicts who does something well or poorly, as measured on a specific criterion or standards (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Beyond the definitions described above an even more constructivist view argued that the viability of the definitions of competency would increase if three factors were taken into consideration. Those three factors were people, goal, and context. It means that a definite meaning of competency is actually not always relevant since it depends on who perform the competencies: individuals or a team, what is the goal of the formulation of competencies and in what context the competencies are expected to be performed.

If the competencies are entitled to a group of people, differences will yet be detectable amongst the individuals. In many situations the differences are logical consequences of different roles the members of the group have to perform. The goals of the formulation of competencies can be classified into four groups: the goals related to training, recruitment and selection, restructuring a role for work improvement, and building a framework of reward system. Formulations of competencies may differ in the emphasis, width and depth for each purpose. Finally, the context, which is the broader reference for developing competencies must also be considered as each organization has its own goals and interests in formulating the meanings of competencies (of its staffs), and the level to be achieved in its organizational performance.

#### **WHY RETURN TO CBTE?**

Apart from the confusions resulted from different perceptions of competencies, and the lost of its grip in teacher education some years ago, a strong movement back to CBTE seems to get a new momentum along with the proliferation of the philosophy of constructivism in education. Almost at the same time movements and developments in education with similar characteristics such as contextual teaching-learning approach, competency-based education at various types and levels of schools, and school-based improvement program were introduced and implemented. Even though these programs came up in different forms and had different objectives to achieve they shared some common characteristics, exposing indications that they were parts of

movements towards approach in education. The characteristics showing constructivist nature of the movements were recognition of the potency of the main actors of education activities—students, teachers and school community in general—and respect to efforts carried out by the actors to enhance their abilities.

The above developments provoked questions about the reasons of the recursion, and whether there were relationships between movements to constructivist approach and CBTE. At the same time focal critics on CBTE were sound enough that the proponents of the approach were forced to find plausible responses and even formulated better forms of CBTE before introducing it to education community.

Philosophically, the movements mentioned above can be regarded as indications of resurrection of awareness and respect to human potency and capacity to play a greater role in their own development towards maturity, and to achieve what they really want to achieve. Empirically it might be inspired by the weaknesses of rigid objective-based education which have been dominating the business of nurturing and educating younger generations. It's widely recognized that inflexible implementation of objective-based approaches in education has ignored the real seeds of human successes in their development, i.e. the potency and ability of human beings to plan for their own future and mobilize efforts to achieve it. However well-formulated they are, behavioral objectives actually are entities which come from outside the individuals and forcedly developed by teachers and other education authorities for the learners. Whether the learners like it or not they have to perform a set of prescribed learning activities to achieve the objectives, and their progress will be judged accordingly. In other words, behavior objectives belong to the teachers and curriculum developers and the learners have to achieve them by mobilizing their best efforts regardless whether the objectives are suitable for them or not. There was a widely perceived sense that the teachers and curriculum developers had oversimplified the business of teaching and learning, that the essential and most important characteristics of it, i.e. providing opportunity to the learners to develop according to their own potency and capacity for growth, was denied.

The constructivists' view of human being on the other hand, put forward individual's potency as the main element of growth and the principal drive to perform an act, in the efforts to achieve certain objectives and to build the individuals capacity. By optimizing the use of their own potencies human beings will actively and creatively develop ways to respond to the challenges

faced in their lives and solve the related problems. Successes in responding to the challenges mean further development of human potency and broadening of the capacity to solve greater and/or more difficult problems. In the constructivists' view, building of personal capacity is facilitated by mechanisms of adaptation, accommodation, and equilibration. It means that development of human capacity is contextual, taking into consideration the challenges exposed by the environment. These mechanisms can be facilitated only in a constructivist learning situation. Behaviorist concepts of human development on the other hand have failed to take these into consideration.

It can be concluded from the above discussions that the trends of returning to CBTE, at least in part, have been inspired by the shift from behaviorism to constructivism. The adoption of constructivism as the principal philosophy of education means providing greater opportunity for student teachers to manage their professional growth according to their own capacity. The students have in their own hands full control of the development of their competencies, and are able to manage the rate of their own progress in their efforts to achieve the professional requirements. It means assurance for professional maturity or readiness which is expected to be achieved by the students before they leave teacher training institutions.

The implementation of CBTE also means an establishment of quality assurance mechanism in teacher preparation, as by its implementation dependable criteria of success in learning can be formulated. According to Joni (2003) these criteria in fact are the elements of teachers' competencies, i.e. mastery of related academic subject, mastery of teaching skills, appreciation of relevant attitudes, and ability to perform professional work.

Besides the above considerations there are a number of formal policies driving teacher education in Indonesia to return to CBTE. First, the Law of National Education System. Article 35 of this law declares national standards of education which includes standards of content, process, competencies of graduates, educational staff, equipment, management fund and evaluation. Further, it is recommended that the standards should be used as the main reference in the development of curriculum and other elements of education. These mean that all education initiatives should comply with the established standards, including the quality of graduates. The only comprehensive and dependable standard to judge this is the competency of the graduates, demonstrated as professional performances.

In relation to higher education, including teacher education, the Law of National Education System underlines two important issues. First, develop-

ment of higher education curriculum, for every field of study, must be done with the national standards as the main reference. No field of study can be developed without taking the national standards into consideration. Second, teachers as the main constituents of education, and graduates of higher education, have to fulfill, at least the minimum qualification criteria, which means there are basic competencies which must be mastered by the graduates of teacher education before formal teaching certificates are granted (High School Teachers' Competencies Development Team, 2003).

Awareness of the importance of quality education requires development of creative initiatives and well-planned actions. To maintain the standards of quality of the teachers for instance, up-grading courses must be continuously conducted, probably in a collaboration between teacher training institutions and local, regional or national education authorities. This in turn, according to Director General of Higher Education is a new paradigm of teacher education, developed in order to improve national competitiveness, and geared to seeking for organizational health and positive impacts of autonomy.

#### **FORMULATION OF (INDONESIAN) TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES**

Over the acceptance of recursion to CBTE another pressing need was widely felt by relevant parties responsible for its implementation. This was the need for standards for teachers' competencies against which teachers' professional performances would be benchmarked, and efforts to achieve the competencies would be developed. Without dependable standards it would difficult to plan what to do in the development of teachers' competencies and to judge whether a teacher has achieved a certain standard of competencies.

Responding to this need a some sections of the Department of National Education launched efforts—some even establish a project—to facilitate formulation of the standards of competencies for teachers. In general the results of these works showed extensive agreement upon the elements of teachers' competencies. However since not enough communications and coordination were made by the related parties before the formulation of the standards, some differences were easily identified between one formulation to the other.

The main elements of teachers' competencies generally included in the formulations were (1) mastery of subject content, (2) knowledge about students' characteristics, (3) mastery of teaching-learning methodology, and (4) personal and professional development. These four basic competencies were mentioned in at least in three versions of documents containing formulations of teachers' competencies. These were (1) teachers' competency document

produced by Sub-Directorate of Primary School Teacher Education, (2) the version produced by Sub-Directorate of High School Teacher Education, both of the Directorate General of Higher Education, and (3) the version produced by Sub-Directorate General High School Education of the Directorate General of Primary and Secondary School.

Differences started to show up clearly when the main competencies were broken down into details. A document offered a very detailed information while the other showed only the general ideas.

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**1. Competency:** Mastery of subject content

**Sub competencies:**

**Version 1**

Mastery of pedagogical content knowledge in five subjects, which enable teachers to select, organize, relate the content with the students' daily activities. The content should fulfill the students' daily need.

**Version 2**

Knowledge of educational concepts  
Mastery of academic subject content.

**Version 3**

Knowledge about the characteristic of subject matter.  
Knowledge about the use of the subject content in wider context

**2. Competency** Knowledge about Students

**Sub competencies:**

**Version 1**

Knowledge about entry level behavior

**Version 2**

(No entry)

**Version 3**

Ability to identify potencies of students to be developed  
Knowledge about students in relation to the competencies to be developed  
Ability to anticipate problems related to personal and social characteristics of the students.

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### CONCLUDING REMARK

Return to CBTE seems unavoidable. First because of recent developments in learning paradigm, i.e., the shifts from behaviorist to constructivist approach are looming. Second, because of signals given by the education authorities through the publication of formal papers in the form of laws or policies which indicate that indicate that the shifts to constructivism and recursion to CBTE are the right tracks.

The shift from behaviorism to constructivism has caused changes in the way people view education. Formerly teachers were recognized as the main and the only resources of information. Students are regarded as individuals with a prospective potency in themselves and must be given enough opportunity to make use of their own potencies to grow to their maturity.

The new perception of students' potencies requires new competencies of teachers as they will be deployed in a situations which is different from what was expected. Quick adaptation to the new situation can only be fulfilled by teachers rich in various experiences. And these teachers can only be produced from a teacher education system which maximize the potencies of the students.

Responding to the formal policies, various sections in the Department of National Education launched activities to develop CBTE. However since there was not enough coordination amongst the responsible parties, the final formulation of CBTE seems to trigger some new problems never anticipated before, as the influence of each institution's interests dominate the problems.

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