

CHALLENGES OF COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KOSOVO

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Abstract

Competency-based education (CBE) has gained recognition as a progressive approach to teaching and learning, emphasizing the mastery of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. Competence-based education began its implementation in Kosovo ten years ago. It has become a main topic in all pre-university education, including primary education. There are almost as many parents, teachers, and civil society organizations claiming to have a clear definition of competency-based education and then implementing it in the classroom by teachers as there are practitioners. The most important characteristic of competency-based education is that it aims to measure and assess learning rather than time. Unfortunately, this is not happening due to several factors, but an important one is that professional development activities are more supply-driven than demand-driven. These issues challenge not only our technologies, but our educational institutions, values, and way of living and interacting. Competency-based education is supposed to deal with very complex problems and to be successful and productive requires innovative, practical solutions that can be modified in the light of experience and feedback on the ground. In this direction, this study analyzes appropriate literature and official reports on Kosovo's achievements in the education system as well as in the rest by surveying nearly 650 teachers from all regions of Kosovo, analyzes and evaluates the current challenges of supporting and accepting the new curriculum of based on competences (CBE - Competence Based Education). The results show that although the majority of teachers accept the new curriculum (CBE) as a challenge and a positive change, for some of them it is burdensome and unclear as well as inaccessible, but again most of them practice modern methods and techniques for the purpose of development of the appropriate competencies of students. Furthermore, the trainings organized by MEST are the most current and frequent forms through which support for the new curriculum (CBE) is provided, on the other hand, modern forms and methods of teaching (reorganization, monitoring, ICT, others) are partially present in the learning process for the implementation of the new curriculum (CBE) / Teaching programs by teachers in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo.

Keywords: Competency-based education (CBE), new curriculum, challenges in education, teachers, professional development

Introduction

The Republic of Kosovo, located in the Balkans, has embarked on a journey to reform its primary education system by introducing competency-based education (CBE) or competency-based curriculum (CBC). The proliferation of competency-based curricula in elementary and secondary schools has fueled progress in competency-based learning. Participation at all levels has been steadily increasing, especially at the primary level. Education is one of the top priorities in Kosovo, as shown by spending on education at 4.6% of GDP, well above the regional average.

Given its large young population and low participation in the labor market, increasing local competences can create more employment opportunities and strengthen civic participation. According to OECD (2021), Kosovo has solid strategic documents, by-laws and action plans for quality assurance in education. The focus should now be on implementation, which includes strengthening local capacity, increasing the number of quality assurance coordinators in schools and strengthening mechanisms to work with companies, including work-based learning. The latter can also lead to significant improvements in education and vocational training, an

important educational stream in Kosovo (OECD, 2021). Improving teacher training, by improving initial teacher training and providing opportunities for continuing professional development, should be another priority. So this approach marks a shift from traditional, rigid educational models to a system that prioritizes the acquisition of skills and competencies. CBE emphasizes student mastery of specific learning outcomes and encourages a personalized, learner-centered learning experience. However, the transition to CBE in primary schools is not without its challenges.

This paper explores the unique challenges facing the implementation of CBE in Kosovo's primary schools, shedding light on the historical, cultural and practical obstacles that educators and policy makers must address.

Competency Based Education (CBE)

Kosovo, a relatively young nation that declared independence from Serbia in 2008, has attempted to establish a strong education system as a fundamental pillar of nation building. Education is seen as the gateway to prosperity, social mobility and national development.

During the last decade, Kosovo has taken important steps to increase the quality and importance of education at all levels. Progress has been made in fostering more competency-oriented learning through the introduction of competency-based curricula. New curricula that focus on competencies and learning outcomes are being rolled out in primary and secondary schools. The Strategic Education Plan of Kosovo identifies the main priorities for education reform. Significant progress has been made in increasing participation in education at all levels. With the help of donors, efforts have been made to improve data collection and monitoring of education policies. A package of evaluation instruments for evaluating teacher performance has been developed, along with a framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of continuing professional development (CPD) programs for teachers.

Over the years, Kosovo's education system has witnessed various reforms, with a notable shift towards the adoption of competency-based education (CBE).

The move towards CBE represents a significant departure from traditional models of education, with particular emphasis on specific skills and competences, learner-centred learning and flexible and varied assessment strategies. CBE is considered an innovative approach that matches the demands of the modern world, emphasizing practical and applicable skills over rote and rote learning.

In this regard, according to the OECD (2021) eleven priority actions have great potential to strengthen education and competences in Kosovo, with the implementation of quality assurance and teacher training being the two main priorities of peer learning:

- Strengthen the implementation of quality assurance at all levels (peer learning priority 1)
- Improving teacher training for knowledge transfer (peer learning priority 2)
- Increasing access to early childhood education
- Promoting equal education at all levels
- Efficient use of education funding
- Updating and modernizing curricula
- Improving the quality and relevance of vocational education and training (ATP)
- Use digital technologies in the classroom.
- Increasing access and quality of adult education
- Leverage foreign direct investment (FDI) to increase skills
- Fostering closer ties with the diaspora

Challenges of Competency-Based Education (CBE)

The challenges in implementing CBE in primary schools in Kosovo are multifaceted and can be broadly categorized into the following areas:

- a. ***Curriculum development and in accordance with competencies:*** Developing competency-based curricula that are appropriate, engaging and aligned with Kosovo's educational goals is a complex task. This challenge includes defining clear learning objectives, identifying core competencies and integrating them into the curriculum. Ensuring that the curriculum reflects the cultural diversity of the nation while maintaining a standard of quality presents significant challenges.
- b. ***Teacher training and professional development:*** The transition to CBE requires equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate this approach effectively. Teachers must adapt to a new pedagogical approach that focuses on personalized learning, individualized support and student assessment. Professional development programs and ongoing support are essential, but are often limited by resource constraints.
- c. ***Assessment and evaluation methods:*** Traditional standardized testing is less suitable for CBE, which emphasizes the development of specific skills and competencies. Creating effective assessment methods that can accurately measure student performance in accordance with the new curriculum presents a challenge. Balancing formative and summative assessments and ensuring that these assessments are culturally and contextually appropriate is vital.
- d. ***Resource allocation and infrastructure:*** Successful implementation of CBE requires adequate resources, including modernized educational materials, technology, and well-equipped classrooms. Ensuring that all schools, especially those in rural or underserved areas, have access to these resources is a crucial challenge.
- e. ***Cultural and social factors:*** Kosovo's diverse cultural and social landscape influences the acceptance and implementation of CBE. Different ethnic communities may have different expectations and needs, which should be taken into account in the development of CBE programs. Additionally, traditional attitudes toward education, teacher authority, and students' roles in the learning process may affect the success of CBE.

As for teachers, in Kosovo (as in other Western Balkan economies), quality of initial teacher education (ITE) has traditionally had a strong focus on content knowledge at the expense of other key skills, such as pedagogy, psychology, methodology and other areas. Teachers also tend to focus on traditional pedagogy with a strong emphasis on lecturing and reproducing content. Research shows that this approach tends to be poor for developing so-called "21st century competencies" including creativity, critical thinking, collaborative problem solving and communication (Jacobs and Toh-Heng, 2013).

Such teaching practices are also not conducive to personalized learning, which has an impact on inclusive education (OECD, 2012). Recent reforms in Kosovo have focused on improving the quality of quality initial teacher education (ITE). Some reforms include: adaptation of programs in all institutions that train teachers (faculties of education as well as others); strengthening quality assurance in all institutions that prepare teachers; introduction of one-year preliminary training for teachers trained in faculties other than the faculty of education; and developing curricula for pre-service teacher training (European Commission, 2018).

Increasing interest in the teaching profession remains an important challenge that Kosovo must address. On the one hand, teachers' salaries have increased significantly over the last decade, from an average gross monthly salary of 240 euros in 2010 to 430 euros in 2016 (Aliu, 2019). Despite increases to 466 euros for primary school teachers and 515 euros for secondary school teachers (as a result of strikes in 2019) (Observatoria Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, 2019),

salaries remain below the average gross salary of 600 euros in 2019 (Bank World/WIIW, 2021). Teacher compensation is not linked to performance, which limits incentives for highly skilled people to enter the profession and for existing teachers to invest in CPD (OECD, 2020).

One of the weak points that affects the development of CBE in Kosovo, according to OECD 2021, is the low access to early childhood education and care (ECEC), especially in rural areas. About 37.5% of Kosovar children aged 3-5 have attended a preschool institution, which is lower than most regional peers and well below the OECD (81.7%) and EU (99.9%) averages. The limited availability of publicly funded ECEC is a major barrier to participation. Kosovo spends only 4.6% of its budget on ECEC education (UNICEF, 2021). As a result, there are only 43 public preschools in the entire economy, representing about a third of all licensed kindergartens (UNICEF, 2020).

Currently, 11 municipalities lack even one preschool institution. In the absence of publicly funded opportunities, the high cost of private facilities limits participation in preschool education, especially for children from low-income families. Limited awareness of the benefits of ECEC and social norms regarding childcare also contribute to low enrolment, especially in rural areas and among families from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Gjelaj, 2019).

As for the modernization of the curricula, the curriculum reform in Kosovo started in 2009, but the extension to municipalities and schools is still ongoing. Kosovo adopted a competency-based curriculum about ten years ago, which became mandatory as of 2018. To date, implementation has been lacking and teachers have been resistant to its implementation. This has to do with insufficient training (only about 40% of teachers have been trained to implement the new curriculum), lack of updated textbooks and insufficient scientific staff (Aliu, 2019). These challenges, in turn, reflect fundamental funding limitations, as well as limited capacities in other areas within the education system, such as strategic orientation and planning (Aliu, 2019).

Subject and methodology of the research

To illustrate the challenges discussed, this section provides case studies from specific primary schools in Kosovo that have experienced barriers to CBE implementation. These real-world examples show how different teachers and schools have encountered and addressed these challenges in their unique contexts, surveying and evaluating them with objective indicators for assessing challenges from the new competency-based curriculum.

Based on this goal as well as the above-defined challenges, for methodological objectivity as well as for the interpretation of the hypotheses in the study, the methods of analysis and generalization are used in the qualitative aspect in the part of the review of the literature and the basic concepts of the research, that is, curricula based on competencies, as well as in the quantitative one by means of descriptive statistical methods of numerical frequencies and percentages by means of graphs and on the other hand with linear regression methods, the support of the curriculum and its implementation in the grave by the socio-demographic factors of the teachers is analyzed.

In this context, the basic purpose of this analysis was to describe and analyze the experiences of teachers or schools in the implementation of the competency-based curriculum; to identify the challenges and problems faced by schools and teachers in the implementation of the curriculum; to identify opportunities and needs for continuous support of teachers; and provide evidence-based recommendations for the necessary actions to be taken to ensure effective implementation of the new curriculum in all schools of the Republic of Kosovo. Based on this goal as well as the above-defined challenges, for methodological objectivity we structured the hypotheses as follows:

H1. Trainings organized by MEST are the most current and frequent forms through which support is provided for the new curriculum (CBE) / Teaching programs in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo

H2. Teachers in primary education have positive attitudes towards new curriculum (CBE) / Curriculum and the same is well accepted and trusted by them.

H3. Modern forms and methods of teaching (Reorganization, monitoring, TIK, others) are more than present in the learning process for the implementation of the New Curriculum (CBE) / Learning Programs by teachers in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo

H4. Level of support, acceptance and implementation of the New Curriculum(CBE) / Curriculum depends and is influenced by socio-demographic factors (Municipality, Location of the school, Gender, Age, Qualification, Years of experience, position in the school, Type of class, school year when they started working with plans and programs new ones as well as attending trainings for the implementation of the new curriculum)

Results

There were 650 teachers involved in the research, who answered the questionnaire through Google form and through e-mail. According to the place of residence, it turned out that 59% of the surveyed teachers are from rural settlements and 41% from urban settlements. Furthermore, 72.6% of them are female and 23.8% are male. According to age, 36.5% are in the 41-50 age group, 33.3% in the 31-40 age group, 14.3% in the 21-30 age group and 15.9% in the over 50 age group. According to the qualification, 43% of the surveyed teachers with a bachelor's degree dominate, while according to the experience as a teacher, 38% dominate with over 18 years of work in teaching.

Furthermore, over 90% of the teachers declared that they attended the training program for the implementation of the new curriculum (most of them over 5 days and the majority declared that they were satisfied with the training), while nearly 60% of them declared that the school where they work has started working with new lesson plans and programs designed according to the new curriculum in 2016 and 2017.

In the question of how teachers see the new curriculum based on competences (CBE), they declared with diverse statements, including those according to hierarchical categorization (from the most frequently answered statement to the least answered), the statements are structured as follows :

- It requires a change in the work approach of teachers
- More advanced than previous curriculum
- Creative for students and teachers
- Clear and understandable
- Encouragement to learn
- There are unreasonable charges
- Easy to implement
- Unattainable, others.

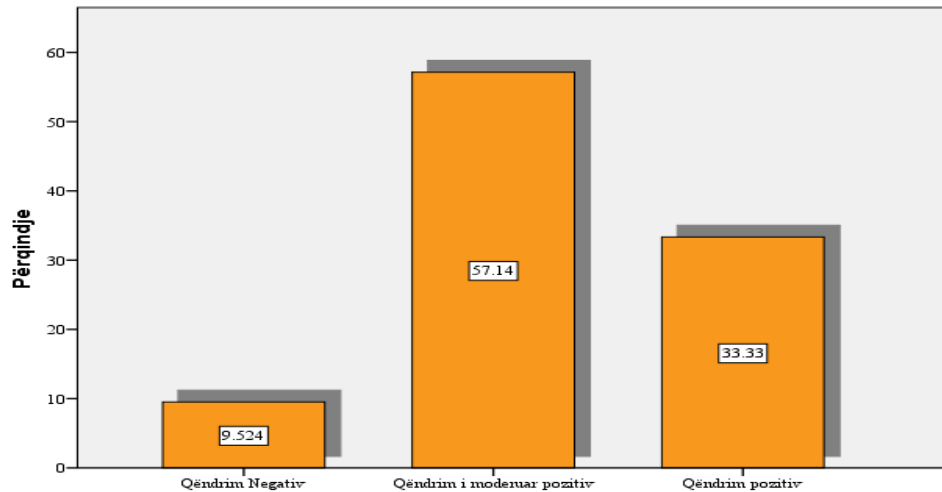
On the other hand, what are the practices that teachers have received as a result of the new competency-based curriculum (CBE) for the development of students' competencies, the majority of teachers stated that:

- I support students who use independently, critically and creatively, the tools and opportunities of communication and expression
- I take care to create habits, conditions and opportunities for students to prepare for lifelong learning
- I modify teaching practices in order for students to practice different forms of communication and expression

- I systematically collect data on student progress, analyze them to understand and provide support
- I practice involving students in planning and decisions regarding teaching methods

Based on the content of hypothesis H1, trainings organized by MEST are the most current and frequent forms through which support is provided for the New Curriculum (CBE) / Teaching Programs in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo, from the above results we conclude that H1 stands and is verified.

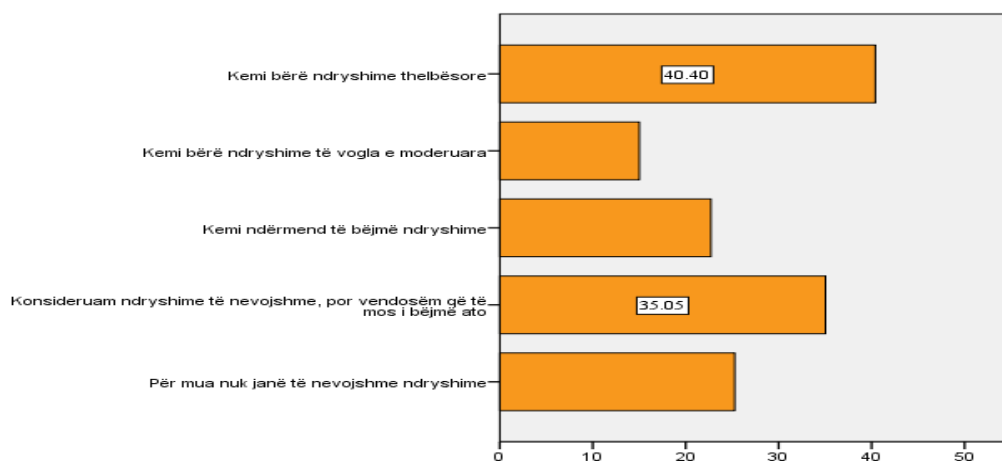
After processing the data with the SPSS statistical program, the following are the frequencies of teachers' attitudes in general form for the new competency-based curriculum (CBE):



Grafiku 1. Qëndrimet e mësimitdhënësve për Kurrikullën e Re/ Programet mësimore

After collecting and processing the data from the second part of the questionnaire, according to the frequencies of Graph 1, we find that more than 57% and more than 33% of the teachers have moderate positive attitudes, i.e. positive attitudes, while 9.5% have negative attitudes about the new curriculum (CBE) / Teaching programs and based on these frequencies we find that it is accepted and trusted by teachers in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo. So, H2 teachers in primary education have positive attitudes towards the New Curriculum (CBE) / Curriculum and the same is well accepted and trusted by them, it stands and is verified.

Further, from the processing of the data from the third part of the questionnaire, it resulted that over 40% of the teachers have made substantial changes in the Teaching Forms and Methods according to the new Curriculum, despite the fact that 35% of them have considered or are aware that they should they make changes and adaptations but have decided not to do them, while other frequencies meet these two ends.



Grafiku 2. Format dhe metodat moderne janë më se prezente (të inkorporuara) në zbatimin e Kurrikullës së Re/ Programeve mësimore (ndryshimet të bëra dhe adaptuara nga mësimdhënësit)

As for H3, modern forms and methods of teaching (Reorganization, monitoring, ICT, others) are more than present in the learning process for the implementation of the New Curriculum (CBE) / Learning Programs by teachers in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo, it is partially.

According to the content of H4, to be interpreted in the following, we reflect the linear regression analyzes for the influence of a group of socio-demographic factors (Municipality, Location of the school, Gender, Age, Qualification, Years of experience, position in the school, Type of class, school year when have started working with new plans and programs as well as attending trainings for the implementation of the new curriculum) in the position for the Level of support, acceptance and implementation of the New Curriculum (CBE):

Table 1. The influence of a set of socio-demographic factors on the attitude towards the level of support, acceptance and implementation of the New Curriculum (CBE)

Pattern	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.447a	.200	.089	16.433	1.076	.044

Dependent Variable: Level of support, acceptance and implementation of the New Curriculum
 Predictors: (Constant), Municipality, Location of the school, Gender, Age, Qualification, Years of experience, position in the school, Type of class, school year when they started working with new plans and programs, as well as following implementation training of the new curriculum

With the above linear regression methods, it was found that for $R=.447$ with $F=1.076$ for $\text{sig}=.044$, i.e. $p<0.05$, we conclude that the level of support, acceptance and implementation of the New Curriculum (CBE) is in significant correlation with socio characteristics -demographic of the teachers, or in other words, the level of support, acceptance and implementation of the New Curriculum is significantly influenced and depends on the socio-demographic characteristics of the teachers. So, H4. The level of support, acceptance and implementation of the New Curriculum (CBE) / Learning Programs depends and is influenced by socio-demographic factors (Municipality, Location of the school, Gender, Age, Qualification, Years of experience, position in the school, Type of class, school year when they started working with new plans and programs as well as attending training for the implementation of the new curriculum (CBE)), stands and is verified.

Recommendations

According to the analysis of relevant international reports as well as local ones on the one hand and on the other hand based on empirical results, we can clearly conclude that the new curriculum (CBE) in Kosovo represents a very serious challenge for the social system as a whole with a special pretext for the educational system, especially for teachers as the most relevant educational subject. Although the majority of teachers accept the new curriculum (CBE) as a positive challenge for some of them, it is burdensome and unclear as well as unattainable, but still most of them practice with interactive methods for the purpose of developing appropriate competencies of students.

According to teachers' training organized by MEST are the most current and frequent forms through which support is provided for the New Curriculum (CBE) / Teaching programs in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo, as well as teachers in primary education have positive attitudes towards the New Curriculum (CBE) / Curriculum and the same is well accepted and trusted by them. On the other hand, modern forms and methods of teaching (Reorganization, monitoring, ICT, others) are partially present in the learning process for the implementation of the New Curriculum (CBE) / Learning Programs by teachers in primary education in the Republic of Kosovo.

But these attitudes, according to our analysis, have differences according to socio-demographic factors (Municipality, Location of the school, Gender, Age, Qualification, Years of experience, positions in the school, Type of class, school year when they started working with plans and new programs as well as following training for the implementation of the new curriculum (CBE)), in other words there is no permanent continuity and comprehensive inclusion in the entire territory of Kosovo, so MEST and other competent bodies must strengthen their support as in inclusion as well as in continuity.

While CBE presents challenges, there are practical solutions and recommendations that can help overcome these obstacles. Effective strategies include:

- a. ***Comprehensive teacher training:*** Invest in professional development programs for teachers, emphasizing CBE principles and innovative teaching methods.
- b. ***Localized curriculum development:*** Promote the involvement of educators and communities in curriculum development to ensure cultural relevance and sensitivity.
- c. ***Different assessment approaches:*** Develop a variety of assessment methods, including portfolios, projects and practice exams, to better assess student performance.
- d. ***Fair distribution of resources:*** Ensure that schools, especially those in underprivileged areas, have access to essential resources and infrastructure.
- e. ***Community engagement:*** Engage with communities, engage parents and stakeholders to gain their support and understanding of the benefits of CBE.

Looking ahead

The future prospects of CBE in Kosovo are promising, but require continuous commitment and cooperation between different stakeholders. As the country continues to invest in its education system, it can anticipate improvements in learning outcomes and the overall quality of education. The indicators for the development of the education system as a whole in Kosovo are many, but the following should be singled out, which are also the main indicators of the OECD for the evaluation of the education systems, that is, future research and studies for the analysis and evaluation of the curriculum based on competences should be structured according to these indicators:

- Children (3-5 years old) attending a preschool program.
- Average science score in PISA.

- Students achieving at least level 2 proficiency in reading.
- Individuals who have basic or digital-based skills.
- Young people (aged 15 to 24) not in employment, education or training (NEET)
- Teachers who have at least a Master's degree in priority schools
- Teachers who have at least a Master's degree in disadvantaged schools
- Schools where principals agree or strongly agree that an effective online support platform is available.
- Public expenditure on education (% of GDP).
- Participation of adults (25-64 years) in formal education and training.

Conclusion

The Curricular Framework for Pre-University Education in Kosovo is built on the basis of competences, referring to European competences, through which it is intended to shift the focus from the pressure for the realization of the content determined by curricula and textbooks to the development of the main competences, broken down through learning outcomes. The development of the competencies defined within the curriculum is intended to be done through the fields of the curriculum, optional subjects/modules, projects, cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities and other innovative forms led by schools (Mehmeti & Buleshkaj, 2017, p. 10).

The Curricular Framework promotes competencies, which require competency-based teaching and learning planning, integrated planning, i.e. planning based on all curriculum principles, taking into account the requirements of inclusiveness - the needs, experiences and different learning styles of each student, the development of competences and the integrated and coherent approach, the planning and use of the elective part of the curriculum, as well as the responsibility of accountability, referring to the entire process of implementing the curriculum (KK, p. 25-27).

In conclusion, the challenges of implementing competency-based education in Kosovo's primary schools are significant, but not insurmountable. The country's unique historical, cultural and educational context requires innovative solutions that prioritize student learning and development. By addressing challenges head-on and adopting best practices from around the world, Kosovo can move toward a more effective and equitable education system that prepares its new generation for success in the 21st century.

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