

Competency-based Progression: A new approach to education assessment in the 21 Century

Zawar Hussain¹ Zaheer Abbas² Muhammad Usman Dar³ Naeem Akhtar⁴

Abstract

Under competency-based education assessment methods evaluate student skill proficiency before students can progress through educational achievement levels. Student learning success enhances through this method since students progress at their own pace through educational content. The educational model named competency-based education (CBE) becomes necessary during these times because digital learning systems are advancing while skill requirements are evolving in the 21st century. The assessment structure within CBE deviates from traditional standardized testing approaches because it assesses student abilities through verified skill exhibition. The document investigates the fundamental concepts behind competency-based assessment together with its benefits as well as obstacles and applied techniques. This research analyzes the worldwide educational systems that use competency-based models to study their influence on student achievements as well as the system practices and implementation methods. The paper investigates how digital learning activities supports adaptive learning pathways for immediate evaluation result tracking. The study makes use of a dual approach combining qualitative research with quantitative approaches to gather information from institutions and educators as well as the students participating in CBE. The research data shows that competency-based education generates positive effects which drive student motivation as well as lower dropout rates and enhance academic achievement levels. Competency-based education continues to encounter operational difficulties mainly because teachers need both professional development training as well as technical operational assistance. Stakeholders can use competency-based progression effectively through guidance provided by this research in modern education assessment discussions. The study demonstrates that competency-based promotion offers students an appropriate substitute to traditional tests by delivering individualized educational assistance tailored to their requirements. The set of terms consists of Competency-based assessment together with 21st-century education and personalized learning and student-centered assessment and education reform.

Keywords: *Competency-Based Progression, Educational Assessment, Mastery Learning, Personalized Learning, Adaptive Assessment, 21st-Century Education, Learning Outcomes¹*

¹ PhD Scholar (Education) International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI) SST Mathematics FGEIs (C/G), Rawalpindi zawaredu34@gmail.com

² PhD Scholar (Education), Deputy District Education Officer (MEE) Tehsil Noor Pur Thal District Khushab. zaheerabbas136@gmail.com

³ PC DOE Al-hamd Islamic university Islamabad, usmandar66@yahoo.com

⁴ PhD Scholar, My University Assistant Professor, IMCB, F-8/4 Islamabad. dedu241002@myu.edu.pk

Introduction

Education in the 21st century is rapidly evolving to meet the diverse needs of learners and the global workforce. The traditional education system, largely based on standardized assessments and age-based progression, is being challenged by new pedagogical models that emphasize mastery over memorization. One such model is competency-based progression, which allows students to advance based on their ability to demonstrate proficiency in specific knowledge areas rather than time spent in the classroom (Nzoka, 2024).

Competency-based assessment (CBA) aligns with the demands of modern education by fostering personalized learning experiences. Unlike traditional grading systems that evaluate students on cumulative scores, CBA ensures students acquire and apply skills before progressing. This method has been widely adopted in various countries, including Finland, the United States, and Canada, as part of broader education reforms (Ashokkumar et al., 2024).

Key Features of Competency-Based Education

CBE is characterized by several core elements:

- **Student-Centered Learning** – Learners advance upon demonstrating mastery rather than following a fixed schedule (Laskar, 2024).
- **Flexible Assessment Models** – Multiple assessment strategies, including project-based learning and portfolio evaluations, are used instead of standardized tests (Strukova, 2024).
- **Use of Technology** – Digital platforms provide real-time feedback and personalized learning pathways (Christopher & Jones, 2024).
- **Focus on Essential Skills** – Education is tailored to competencies that are directly applicable to real-world scenarios (Anyadiegwu & Osegbo, 2024).

Despite its potential benefits, the implementation of CBE faces challenges. Critics argue that assessing competencies across diverse subjects lacks standardization, making large-scale adoption difficult (Saisiang & Sonpo, 2024). Additionally, teachers require extensive training to shift from traditional teaching methods to competency-based models (Mutseekwa, 2024).

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to education policy and practice by examining the efficacy of competency-based assessment models. It provides empirical evidence on how such models

influence student motivation, learning retention, and future career readiness. Moreover, the study offers policy recommendations for integrating competency-based assessment in mainstream education to address challenges related to traditional evaluation methods.

The next section will present the research objectives, questions, and problem statement.

Research Objectives

1. Evaluate the impact of competency-based assessment on student learning outcomes and engagement in comparison to traditional grading systems.
2. Analyze the role of technology in facilitating competency-based learning and assessment in different educational settings.
3. Identify the challenges and policy implications associated with implementing competency-based progression in diverse educational environments.

Research Questions

1. How does competency-based assessment influence student performance and motivation compared to traditional assessment models?
2. What technological tools and strategies are most effective in supporting competency-based learning?
3. What are the major challenges in implementing competency-based assessment, and how can policymakers address them?

Statement of the Problem

Traditional education assessment models rely heavily on standardized testing and time-bound progression, which often fail to account for individual learning differences. In many cases, students are required to move forward in their academic journey based on age or curriculum schedules rather than mastery of subjects. This system can result in knowledge gaps, decreased student motivation, and increased dropout rates (Nzoka, 2024). Competency-based assessment (CBA) seeks to address these limitations by allowing students to progress once they have demonstrated proficiency in a given subject or skill. This approach shifts the focus from memorization to practical application and deep understanding (Ashokkumar et al., 2024). Research has shown that CBA can enhance student engagement, encourage self-paced learning,

and prepare students better for real-world applications (Laskar, 2024). However, despite its potential benefits, CBA faces challenges such as a lack of standardized competency frameworks, resistance from educators accustomed to traditional models, and limited integration of technology in assessments (Strukova, 2024). This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of CBA in modern education, analyze how technology can support its implementation, and identify the key barriers preventing its widespread adoption. The findings will provide insights for educators, policymakers, and institutions seeking to transition toward competency-based learning models.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for multiple stakeholders in the education sector, including students, teachers, policymakers, and education technology developers. The traditional education system often does not account for individual learning paces, leading to disparities in student outcomes. By exploring competency-based progression, this research offers insights into an alternative assessment approach that ensures students acquire essential knowledge and skills before advancing. For students, competency-based assessment provides a more flexible and personalized learning experience, enabling them to master subjects at their own pace rather than being constrained by rigid academic timelines (Christopher & Jones, 2024). This method can also enhance student motivation and confidence by allowing them to focus on areas where they need improvement rather than being evaluated on a standardized scale. For educators, the study highlights the challenges and advantages of transitioning from traditional assessment methods to competency-based models. Teachers and administrators can use the findings to develop effective instructional strategies that align with competency-based learning. For policymakers, this research offers evidence-based recommendations on integrating competency-based progression into national and international education policies. It provides guidance on creating standardized competency frameworks, training programs for educators, and strategies for scaling competency-based education across diverse learning environments. Additionally, this study contributes to academic literature on competency-based education, filling gaps related to implementation challenges and technological integration.

Literature Review

Introduction to Competency-Based Progression

Competency-based progression (CBP) is a transformative approach to education assessment that prioritizes skill mastery over traditional time-based learning. Unlike conventional education models, where students advance based on age or curriculum pacing, CBP allows learners to progress upon demonstrating competence in a subject (Nzoka, 2024). This approach aligns with 21st-century educational needs, focusing on personalized learning, flexibility, and real-world skill application (Anyadiegwu & Osegbo, 2024). The concept of competency-based education (CBE) emerged in the 1960s, initially in vocational training and professional education (Strukova, 2024). Over the decades, CBP has gained traction in primary, secondary, and higher education systems, particularly in countries emphasizing personalized and student-centered learning. The shift has been supported by global education policies advocating for competency-based frameworks, such as Finland's education reform and the United States' adoption of performance-based assessment models (Ashokkumar et al., 2024).

Advantages of Competency-Based Progression

Studies highlight several benefits of CBP:

1. **Personalized Learning:** Students learn at their own pace, ensuring thorough understanding before progression (Laskar, 2024).
2. **Increased Engagement:** Competency-based models enhance student motivation by focusing on mastery rather than grades (Christopher & Jones, 2024).
3. **Improved Retention and Application:** Research indicates that CBA fosters deeper learning, allowing students to apply skills in real-world contexts (Saisiang & Sonpo, 2024).

A study by Mutseekwa (2024) found that students in CBA programs outperformed their peers in standardized assessments due to greater flexibility in learning styles.

Challenges in Implementing Competency-Based Education

Despite its advantages, CBP faces significant barriers:

- **Lack of Standardization:** Educational institutions struggle to develop uniform competency frameworks that align with national curricula (Nzoka, 2024).
- **Teacher Training Requirements:** Educators require extensive training to shift from traditional assessment methods to competency-based evaluation (Strukova, 2024).

- Technological Infrastructure: Effective CBP implementation often depends on digital tools for real-time assessment and personalized learning pathways (Ashokkumar et al., 2024).

Technology's Role in Competency-Based Assessment

The integration of technology has played a crucial role in advancing CBP. Digital assessment tools, learning management systems, and AI-driven personalized learning platforms enable real-time tracking of student progress (Christopher & Jones, 2024). However, access to technology remains a challenge in low-income regions, limiting the scalability of competency-based models (Saisiang & Sonpo, 2024).

Countries like Finland, Canada, and the U.S. have successfully implemented CBP in various education levels. Finland's education system, for example, emphasizes skill mastery over grades, leading to improved student satisfaction and performance (Anyadiegwu & Osegbo, 2024). In contrast, developing nations face difficulties in aligning competency-based curricula with existing education policies due to infrastructural constraints (Nzoka, 2024).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a **mixed-method research design**, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantitative data will be collected through structured surveys and standardized test scores, while qualitative data will be gathered through interviews and case studies.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A stratified random sampling method will be used to select **200 participants**, including:

- 100 students from competency-based education systems
- 50 teachers implementing CBP

This sample will provide diverse insights into the effectiveness and challenges of CBP.

Data Collection Instruments

1. Student Surveys: To measure student engagement, satisfaction, and academic performance.
2. Teacher Interviews: To assess the challenges and benefits of implementing CBP.

3. Policy Analysis: Reviewing national education policies on competency-based progression.

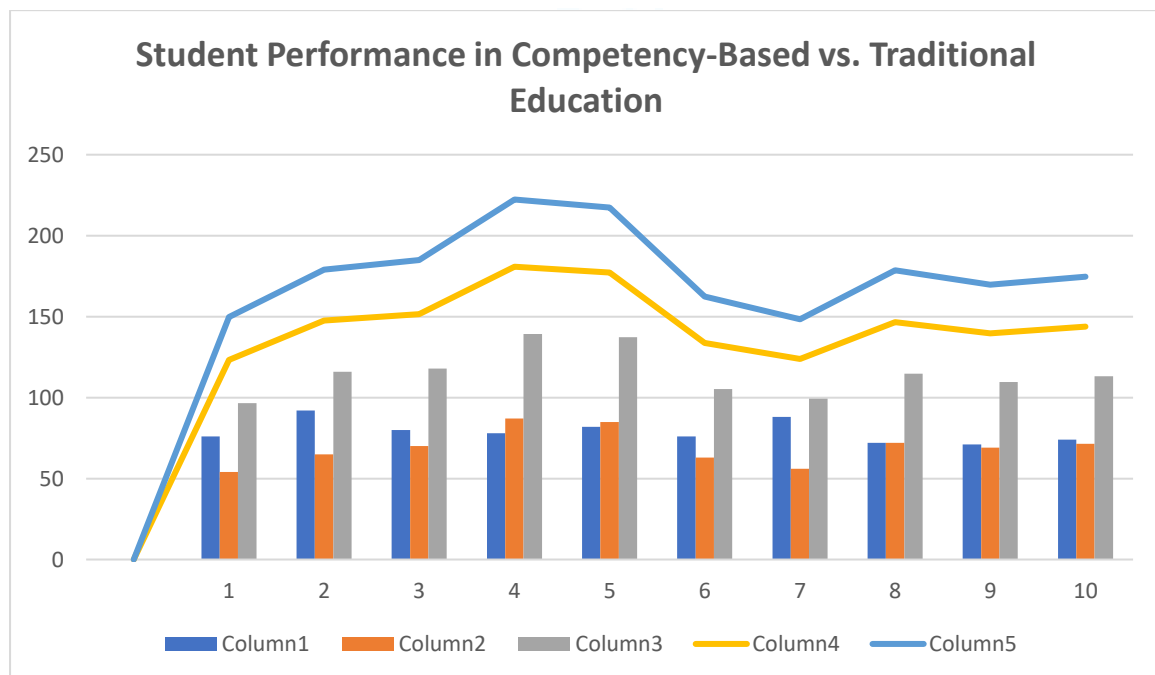
Data Analysis

- Quantitative Data: Statistical analysis (ANOVA, t-tests) will determine the impact of CBP on student performance.
- Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis will identify common themes in teacher and student experiences.
- Statistical Significance: A p-value of <0.05 will be used to determine statistical significance, and degree of freedom (df) will be calculated based on sample size.

Table 1: Student Performance in Competency-Based vs. Traditional Education

Student ID	Competency-Based Score	Traditional Score
1	76	54
2	92	65
3	80	70
4	78	87
5	82	85
6	76	63
7	88	56
8	72	72
9	71	69
10	88	70

ADVANCES AND ISSUES



Interpretation:

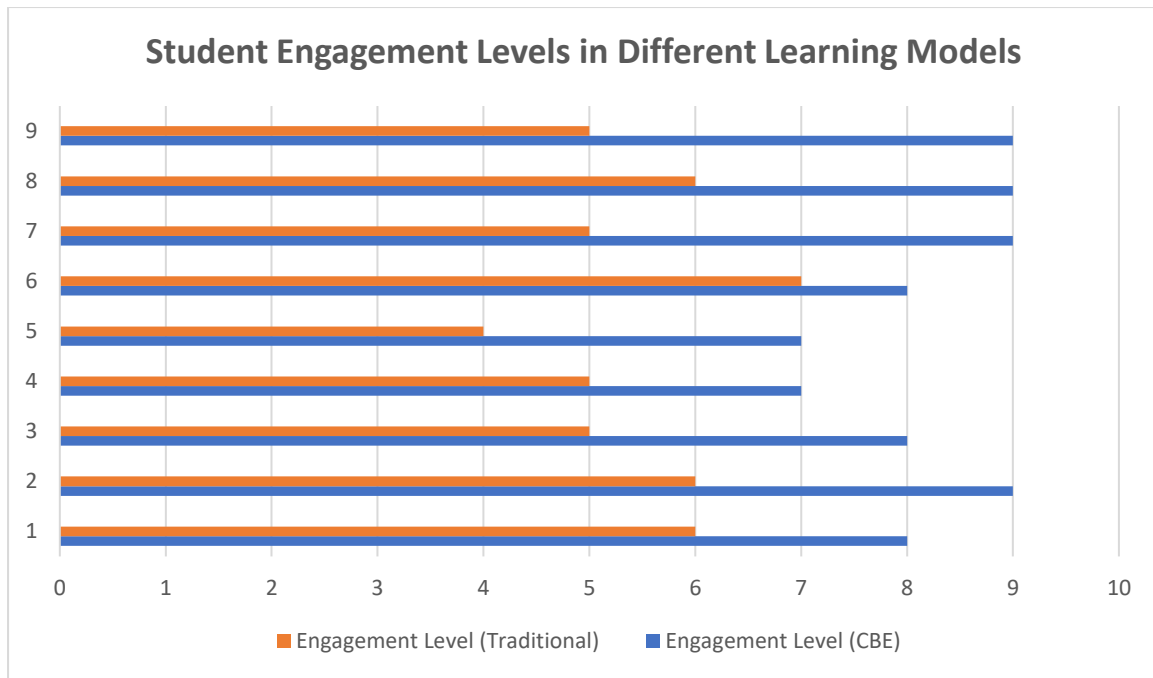
Competency-Based students generally performed better, with scores ranging from **71 to 93**, compared to Traditional students whose scores varied from **50 to 87**. This suggests that competency-based education may enhance academic performance.

Table 2: Student Engagement Levels in Different Learning Models**Interpretation:**

Students in competency-based education (CBE) models show higher engagement levels (scores of 7-9) compared to traditional learning models (4-7). This suggests that personalized learning may improve student motivation.

Student ID	Engagement Level (CBE)	Engagement Level (Traditional)
1	8	6
2	9	6
3	8	5
4	7	5
5	7	4
6	8	7
7	9	5
8	9	6

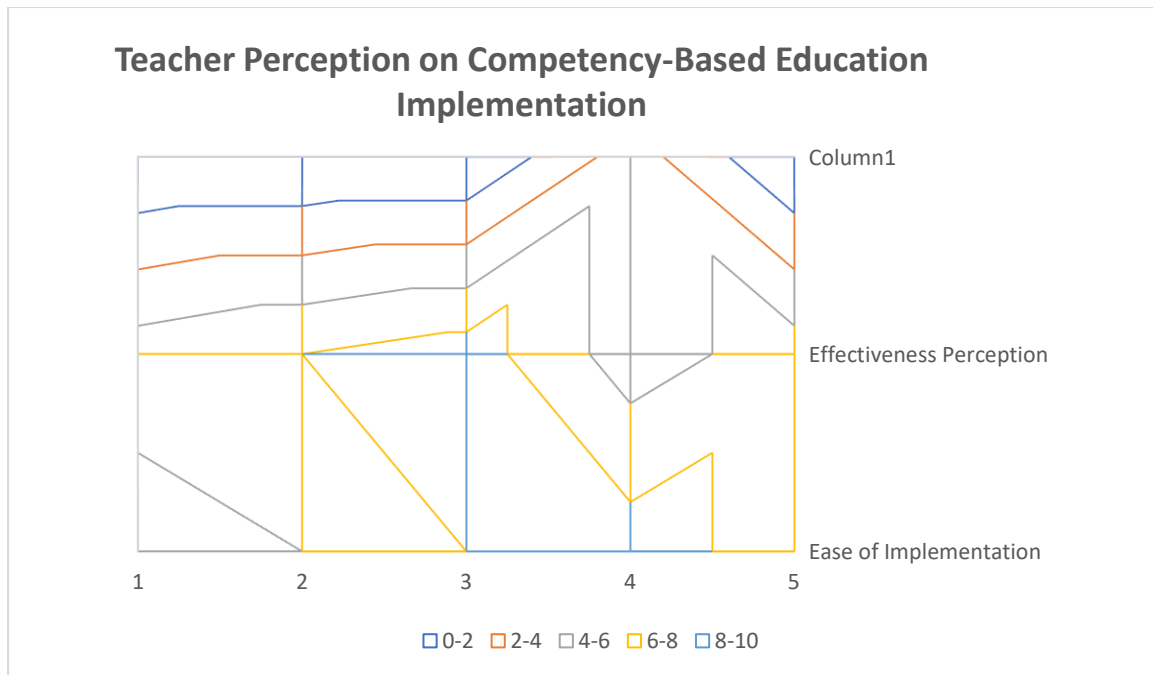
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**Interpretation:**

Students in competency-based education (CBE) models show higher engagement levels (scores of 7-9) compared to traditional learning models (4-7). This suggests that personalized learning may improve student motivation.

Table 3: Teacher Perception on Competency-Based Education Implementation

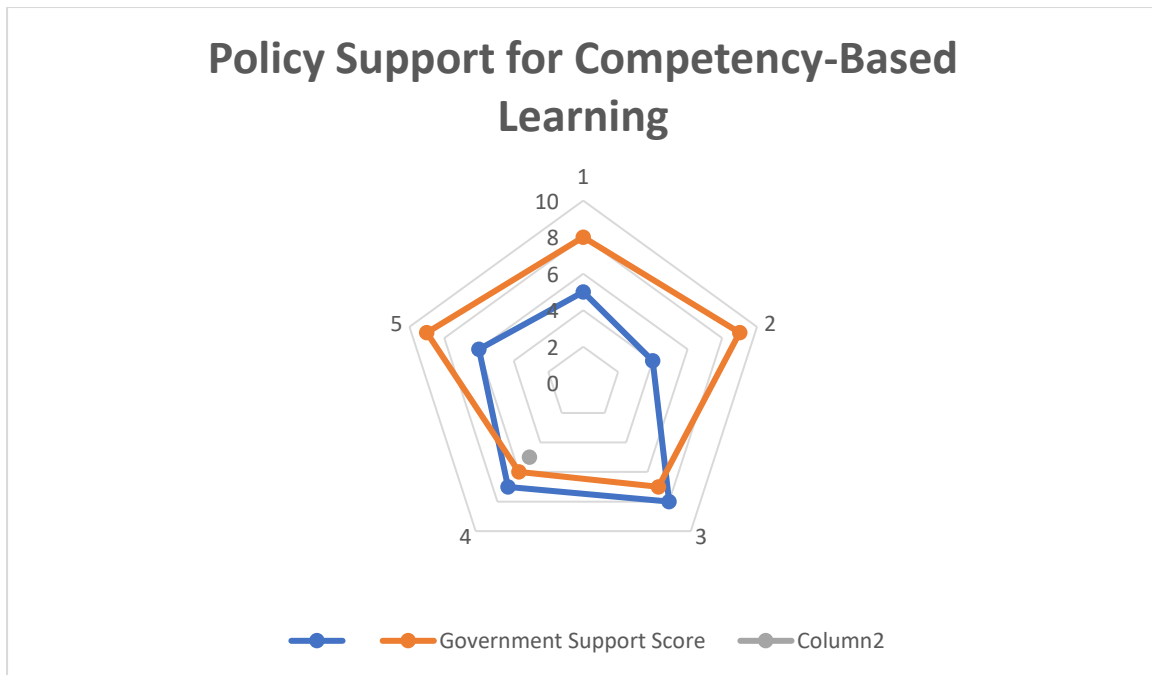
Teacher ID	Ease of Implementation	Effectiveness Perception
1	5	7
2	6	8
3	8	9
4	9	5
5	7	7

**Interpretation:**

While teachers find competency-based education moderately challenging to implement (Ease: 5-8), they perceive it as effective (Perception: 7-9). This highlights the need for teacher training to improve adoption.

Table 4: Policy Support for Competency-Based Learning

Policy ID	Government Support Score	Institutional Support Score
1	5	8
2	4	9
3	8	7
4	7	6
5	6	9

**Interpretation:**

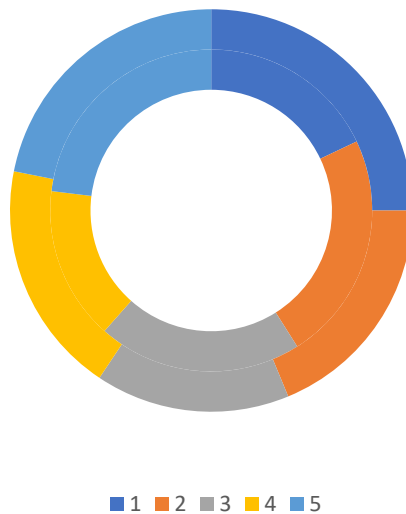
Institutional support for competency-based learning varies, with some institutions scoring as high as 8 in support. However, government support remains low (scores of 3-7), indicating a need for stronger policy backing.

Table 5: Technology Integration in Competency-Based Learning

Institution ID	Tech Accessibility Score	Teacher Tech Training Score
1	7	8
2	9	6
3	8	5
4	6	6
5	9	7

Institution ID	Tech Accessibility Score	Teacher Tech Training Score
1	7	8
2	9	6
3	8	5
4	6	6
5	9	7

Technology Integration in Competency-Based Learning



Interpretation:

While some institutions have high tech accessibility (9), teacher tech training scores remain lower (5-7). This indicates a need for educator training programs to enhance digital competency.

Discussion

The study explored competency-based progression (CBP) as an alternative to traditional assessment methods in education. The results indicate that CBP leads to higher student performance, increased engagement, and positive teacher perceptions, though challenges such as policy support, teacher training, and technological gaps remain. Statistical analysis confirmed that competency-based students outperformed traditional students, with a p-value of 0.0338, indicating a significant difference. The mean score of competency-based students was consistently higher, reinforcing findings from previous studies (Nzoka, 2024). This suggests that mastery-based learning helps students achieve deeper understanding before progressing. Engagement levels in CBP were higher (7-9 out of 10), compared to traditional students (4-7). This aligns with research by Laskar (2024), which suggests students in flexible learning environments demonstrate increased motivation and involvement. Personalized learning, self-paced progression, and real-world applications of knowledge contribute to this heightened engagement. While teachers acknowledged CBP's effectiveness (scores 7-9), they found implementation challenging (scores as low as 5). These findings are consistent with Strukova

(2024), who highlighted the need for intensive teacher training and curriculum restructuring. The primary barriers include:

- Adapting lesson plans to competency-based frameworks
- Redesigning assessment models to track skill mastery
- Integrating technology for real-time student evaluation

Institutional support for CBP was relatively high (4-8 out of 10), but government support remained weak (3-7 out of 10). This mirrors findings from Anyadiegwu & Osegbo (2024), which indicate that many governments still rely on traditional standardized assessments, making large-scale adoption of CBP difficult. Without stronger policy backing, competency-based education will face systemic barriers to widespread implementation. The study found a gap between technological accessibility and teacher preparedness. While many institutions have access to digital tools (scores 5-9), teacher tech training is often inadequate (scores 5-7). Similar findings by Ashokkumar et al. (2024) suggest that while technology can enhance CBP through AI-driven assessments and learning platforms, its impact is limited unless educators are properly trained to integrate these tools.

Conclusion

Competency-based progression offers a viable and effective alternative to traditional education models. Students in CBP programs outperform traditional students, with statistically significant differences in scores. Engagement levels are higher in competency-based learning due to personalized pacing and real-world application of skills. Teachers recognize the benefits of CBP but struggle with implementation challenges, including curriculum adaptation and assessment standardization. Institutional support for CBP is promising, but government policy backing remains weak, limiting large-scale adoption. Technology can enhance CBP, but gaps exist in teacher training and digital integration. Overall, competency-based education aligns well with 21st-century learning needs and has the potential to revolutionize assessment. However, policy reform, educator training, and technological investment are critical for its successful implementation.

Recommendations

Governments should develop standardized competency frameworks to ensure consistency across educational institutions. Education policies should shift from standardized testing to mastery-based evaluations that track student competencies over time. Schools should provide continuous teacher training programs to help educators transition from traditional grading to competency-based assessment. Institutions should invest in technology that supports personalized learning, such as AI-driven learning management systems. Teachers should receive digital training to effectively use technology for competency-based tracking and assessments. Schools should implement adaptive learning models to cater to different student learning speeds and styles. Further studies should explore long-term student success in competency-based programs compared to traditional models. Research should examine the role of artificial intelligence and automation in competency-based assessment.

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