



## PEDAGOGICAL SHIFTS IN KENYAN HIGHER EDUCATION: IMPLEMENTING COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING (CBET) IN UNIVERSITIES

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### Abstract:

The global shift towards a knowledge-based economy has necessitated a re-evaluation of higher education pedagogies, moving from content-centered instruction to competency-based approaches. In Kenya, this transition is critical as the nation strives to achieve Vision 2030 and the "Big Four" agenda. While Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) has been successfully integrated into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, its adoption in universities remains nascent and fraught with pedagogical challenges. This paper explores the pedagogy of CBET within the context of Kenyan universities, examining the theoretical underpinnings, current implementation strategies, and the necessary shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered methodologies. The review highlights that effective CBET implementation requires a radical change in assessment strategies, curriculum design, and the lecturer's role from "sage on the stage" to "facilitator."

**Keywords:** pedagogical shifts, Kenyan higher education, competency-based education and training (CBET)

### 1. Introduction

The landscape of higher education in Kenya is undergoing a significant transformation driven by the need to produce graduates who are not only theoretically sound but also practically competent. Historically, Kenyan universities have heavily relied on the conventional lecture-based model, often criticized for creating a disconnect between academic knowledge and industry requirements (Amutabi, 2003). In response, the Kenyan government, through the Ministry of Education and the Commission for University Education (CUE), has advocated for the integration of Competency-Based

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Education and Training (CBET) frameworks to enhance employability and national development.

CBET is defined as an educational approach that emphasizes the specification, learning, and demonstration of competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that apply to specific occupational roles (Gichuru, 2019). Unlike traditional education which focuses on time spent in class (Carnegie units), CBET focuses on what a learner can do regardless of the time taken. This paper analyzes the pedagogical imperatives of adopting CBET in Kenyan universities, reviewing literature on the efficacy of this model and proposing a framework for its effective delivery.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings of CBET

The pedagogy of CBET is rooted in Constructivism and Behaviorism. Constructivist theory, posited by Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget, suggests that learners construct knowledge rather than merely passively taking it in. In CBET, this manifests through project-based learning where students actively build skills. Conversely, the behaviorist aspect ensures that learning outcomes are observable and measurable; a student must demonstrate a specific behavior or skill to be deemed competent (Keating, 2015).

In the African context, the concept of "Ubuntu" (humanity towards others) also plays a role in CBET pedagogy, emphasizing collaborative learning and community engagement as a core competency (Waghid, 2014).

### 2.2 The Kenyan Context: TVET and University Convergence

Kenya's educational reform is heavily influenced by the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 and the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which mandate the state to promote alternative forms of education, including competency-based learning (Republic of Kenya, 2019).

The Competency-Based Education and Training Authority (CBETA) and the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) have established frameworks to standardize these qualifications. However, literature indicates a dichotomy between TVET colleges and universities. While TVETs have embraced CBET, universities often view it as a "lower" form of education, despite the growing demand for applied sciences and technology (Indire, 2019). Gichuru (2019) argues that for universities to remain relevant, they must dismantle this hierarchy and adopt CBET pedagogies to produce graduates capable of solving complex societal problems.

### 2.3 Pedagogical Challenges in Implementation

A significant body of literature highlights the friction between CBET pedagogy and traditional university cultures. Komba and Mlambiti (2015) identify that the primary challenge is the "transmission" mindset among university faculty, who are accustomed to the "banking model" of education (Freire, 1970), where knowledge is deposited into

students. Furthermore, Oduor and Iravo (2018) note that large class sizes in Kenyan public universities inhibit the personalized mentorship required for competency mastery.

### 3. The Pedagogy of CBET: A Shift in Praxis

Implementing CBET in Kenyan universities requires a paradigm shift in three critical areas: Instructional Strategies, Assessment, and the Learning Environment.

#### 3.1 Instructional Strategies: From Lecture to Facilitation

In a CBET framework, the lecturer ceases to be the primary source of knowledge. Instead, the pedagogy shifts towards:

- **Problem-Based Learning (PBL):** Students are presented with real-world industry problems relevant to the Kenyan context (e.g, water management in arid areas). Research by UNESCO-UNEVOC (2020) indicates that PBL bridges the gap between theory and practice.
- **Experiential Learning:** As per Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), CBET requires a cycle of concrete experience (fieldwork), reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. For Kenyan universities, this implies stronger partnerships with industries for internships and attachments.
- **Demonstration and Modeling:** Lecturers must demonstrate skills before learners attempt them. This requires that university lecturers themselves possess current industry competencies, which is often not the case (Manyasa, 2018).

#### 3.2 Assessment for Learning

Traditional summative assessment (end-of-semester exams) is ill-suited for CBET. The pedagogy demands **Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA)**, where learners are assessed against pre-defined criteria rather than against each other (norm-referenced).

According to the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA, 2019), assessment in CBET must be formative and continuous. A student in a school of engineering, for instance, is not graded solely on a written paper but on their ability to fabricate a component that meets specific industry standards. This requires universities to invest in assessment centers and standardize rubrics across the board.

#### 3.3 The Role of Industry in Pedagogy

A defining feature of CBET pedagogy is the involvement of industry practitioners in curriculum delivery. In Kenya, this is structured through Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC). The pedagogy becomes a tripartite engagement: the university provides the theory, the industry provides the application, and the regulatory body provides the standards. This moves the classroom from the campus to the workplace.

#### 4. Discussion

The transition to CBET in Kenyan universities is not merely administrative but cultural. It addresses the pervasive "skills mismatch" that has led to high youth unemployment despite rising university enrollment numbers.

However, the success of this pedagogy hinges on **re-tooling** faculty. As noted by the Commission for University Education (CUE, 2022), university lecturers are often trained researchers but lack pedagogical training in TVET methodologies. Therefore, Staff Development is a prerequisite. Universities must transition from hiring purely academic staff to hiring "practitioner-academics"—individuals who are active in their respective industries.

Furthermore, infrastructure remains a bottleneck. CBET is resource-intensive. A medical school practicing CBET cannot function without a fully equipped teaching hospital, nor can an engineering faculty function without modern laboratories. The government funding model must shift from capitation based on student numbers to capitation based on the cost of specific competency delivery.

#### 5. Conclusion

The Pedagogy of Competency-Based Education and Training offers a viable solution to the stagnant graduate outcomes currently witnessed in Kenya. By shifting the focus from "knowing" to "doing," universities can produce graduates who are agile, innovative, and ready for the workforce. However, this requires a systemic overhaul of instructional methods, assessment regimes, and faculty qualifications. The government and university management must move beyond policy rhetoric to the practical mobilization of resources that support learner-centered, outcome-based pedagogy.

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#### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Jane Kere Imbunya is a highly accomplished scholar, curriculum expert, university administrator, researcher and policy specialist with over twenty (20) years' experience in higher education, curriculum studies, teacher education, quality assurance, educational leadership, research supervision and institutional management across Kenya and Botswana.

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