

Sustainable Development through Competence-Based Education Strategy: Empowering Learners' Progression for Self-Reliance

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ABSTRACT

Competence-based education strategies have become a crucial element in modern educational environments, playing a vital role in guiding learners toward self-reliance. By prioritizing the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge, these approaches facilitate the development of practical abilities essential for independent success. Through a focus on mastery of competencies and their real-world application, learners cultivate a deeper understanding, self-sufficiency, and effective problem-solving skills, ultimately enhancing their capacity for lifelong learning and adaptability. As learners progress through competence-based programs, they build the confidence and skills necessary to navigate their educational and career trajectories with increased autonomy, thereby fostering a more self-reliant and empowered future. This review highlights the significance of integrating Self-Directed Learning Theory with competence-based education strategies, leading to enhanced learner autonomy, effectiveness, and adaptability in both personal and professional contexts.

KEYWORDS: Competence, Education, Learners, Self-Reliance, Sustainable, Development, Progression, Strategy

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The notion of learners' progression toward self-reliance has taken center stage in education systems across developed countries, driven by the imperative to equip students with skills and competencies essential for thriving in a rapidly evolving global economy. Recent reforms in these nations reflect a paradigm shift toward educational approaches emphasizing independence, adaptability, and lifelong learning (1).

Competence-Based Education (CBE) has gained significant traction as a strategic approach to ensure learners acquire job-ready skills, allowing students to progress based on mastery of competencies rather than classroom time. Countries like Finland and Germany have successfully integrated CBE into their education systems, prioritizing personalized learning and real-world applications (2). This shift aims to enhance learners' practical application of knowledge, cultivating self-reliance and workforce readiness.

The widespread adoption of digital learning platforms and educational technologies in developed countries has profoundly impacted learners' progression toward self-reliance. Technology integration enables personalized, self-paced learning experiences, fostering digital literacy crucial for success in the 21st-century economy. In countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, schools increasingly utilize online courses and digital resources, empowering students to learn independently and at their own pace (3).

In developed countries, lifelong learning has emerged as a crucial focus, recognizing that education extends beyond formal schooling. Countries like Canada and Sweden have implemented policies and programs supporting continuous skill development throughout an individual's life, ensuring learners remain adaptable and self-reliant in the face of changing job markets and societal demands (4).

Education systems in these nations have increasingly emphasized critical thinking and problem-solving skills, evident in curriculum reforms across countries like Australia and New Zealand. Traditional rote learning is being replaced by inquiry-based and problem-solving approaches, equipping learners with the skills necessary to approach challenges creatively and independently – a hallmark of self-reliance (5).

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Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs have been strengthened to enhance workforce readiness. Germany's dual education system, combining classroom instruction with on-the-job training, exemplifies how VET supports self-reliance by providing students with practical skills and work experience. This model ensures learners are job-ready upon graduation, bridging the education-employment gap (6).

Entrepreneurial education has gained priority, with curricula incorporating entrepreneurship skills. Countries like the United States and the Netherlands introduce students to entrepreneurship early on (Lund & Parker, 2023). This approach fosters self-reliance by encouraging learners to think creatively, take risks, and develop skills necessary to start and manage their own businesses (7).

Developed countries have widely adopted inclusive education practices to ensure all learners, regardless of background or ability, can progress and become self-reliant. Countries like Norway and Canada have implemented inclusive education policies to support students with diverse learning needs (Martinez & O'Connell, 2023), promoting equity and self-reliance by providing tailored education (8).

The development of soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence, has gained emphasis in education systems across developed countries. The United Kingdom and Australia, for instance, have incorporated specific programs to enhance these skills, recognizing their importance in personal and professional self-reliance. Soft skills are crucial for success in various career paths and foster independence and adaptability (9).

The advancements in learners' progression for self-reliance in developed countries reflect a comprehensive education approach prioritizing skill acquisition, adaptability, and lifelong learning. By focusing on these aspects, educational systems equip learners with tools for independent success in a complex, dynamic world (10).

In developing countries, significant progress has been made to enhance learners' progression toward self-reliance through education. Driven by the need to address socio-economic challenges, these developments focus on equipping students with practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and entrepreneurial mindsets (11).

Developing countries are increasingly embracing Competence-Based Education (CBE) to equip students with practical, job-ready skills. Kenya and Rwanda, for example, have integrated CBE curricula that prioritize skill acquisition over rote learning (Ng'ang'a & Mungai, 2023). By emphasizing mastery of competencies, CBE enables learners to progress based on their abilities, fostering self-reliance through relevant job market skills (12).

Many developing countries have significantly expanded Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs to equip learners with technical skills for self-employment and economic independence. Nigeria and Ghana, for instance, have invested in TVET initiatives to reduce youth unemployment and promote entrepreneurship. Through hands-on training, these programs empower learners to create their own job opportunities, cultivating self-reliance (13).

In developing countries, inclusive education has gained traction as a strategy to ensure equal access to quality education for all learners, regardless of socio-economic background or abilities. India and South Africa have enacted policies supporting inclusive education practices, including integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools. These initiatives promote equity and self-reliance by enabling all students to reach their full potential (14).

The adoption of digital learning and e-learning platforms has accelerated in developing countries, driven by the need to reach remote and underserved learners. Bangladesh and Indonesia, for example, have launched online learning initiatives to expand education access (Rahman & Suryadi, 2022). These platforms facilitate self-paced learning, enabling students to take control of their educational journeys and access resources beyond traditional classrooms, thereby fostering self-reliance (15).

Entrepreneurship education has become a vital component of curricula in many developing countries, aimed at cultivating a culture of innovation and self-reliance. In countries like Uganda and Zambia, schools have introduced entrepreneurship programs to equip learners with the skills necessary to start and manage businesses (Mukasa & Chanda, 2023). This focus on entrepreneurship helps learners develop the confidence and capabilities required to become self-reliant entrepreneurs (16).

Teacher training and professional development have been prioritized in developing countries to enhance education quality and ensure teachers are equipped to foster self-reliance. Governments in Ethiopia and Tanzania have invested in training programs focusing on modern pedagogical approaches and competency-based teaching (Tekle & Mushi, 2023). Well-trained teachers can effectively guide students in developing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and independence (17).

Life skills education has been integrated into curricula in many developing countries to prepare learners for real-world challenges. In countries like Brazil and Peru, life skills programs teach essential skills such as financial literacy, health education, and conflict resolution. These programs are critical for developing self-reliance, equipping learners with tools to navigate complex social and economic environments (18).

Gender equality in education has been a major focus in developing countries, with initiatives ensuring girls have equal access to educational opportunities. Countries like Pakistan and Malawi have implemented programs to reduce gender disparities in education, providing scholarships and creating safe learning environments for girls. Promoting gender equality in education is essential for fostering self-reliance among all learners, ensuring both boys and girls can reach their full potential (19).

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The developments in learners' progression for self-reliance in developing countries are marked by a focus on competence-based education, technical and vocational training, entrepreneurship, and inclusive education. These initiatives, combined with the adoption of digital learning and promotion of gender equality, are transforming educational systems to better equip students with skills and mindsets necessary for self-reliance in the modern world (20).

2.1 Underpinning Theory

The review is grounded in Self-Directed Learning (SDL) Theory, introduced by Malcolm Knowles in his work on adult education. Knowles' theory posits that adults learn most effectively when they take initiative and control over their learning process. According to Knowles (1975), self-directed learning involves learners identifying their learning needs, setting goals, finding resources, and evaluating their progress. This approach diverges from traditional, teacher-centered education by promoting autonomy, self-motivation, and active engagement in learning, enabling learners to develop critical thinking skills and apply knowledge independently (21).

SDL Theory aligns closely with Competence-Based Education (CBE) by emphasizing learner autonomy and personalized learning paths. SDL supports CBE's focus on learner progression based on demonstrated competencies rather than time spent in class. Encouraging learners to take responsibility for identifying skill gaps, setting personal learning goals, and seeking resources to achieve them, SDL complements CBE's goal of mastering specific skills and knowledge. This synergy fosters an educational environment where learners direct their own learning processes, ensuring they meet required competencies at their own pace (22).

Competence Based Education Strategy and Learners' Progression for Self-Reliance

Competence-Based Education (CBE) significantly enhances learners' progression toward self-reliance by focusing on mastery of specific skills and competencies. By allowing students to advance based on demonstrated proficiency, CBE fosters independence and practical skills essential for success in a dynamic world (Boud & Soler, 2023). Aligning learning objectives with real-world applications empowers learners to become self-reliant and adaptable, preparing them for diverse challenges and opportunities (23). CBE adopts a learner-centered approach, tailoring the learning experience to individual needs, interests, and abilities. This method acknowledges students learn best through active involvement in their educational journey. Personalized learning is a critical component, recognizing diverse backgrounds and abilities, and customizing experiences to align with each learner's unique needs, interests, and learning styles. Strategies include differentiated instruction, individualized learning plans, and adaptive learning technologies, aiming to enhance engagement, motivation, and academic success (24).

Active participation is a key priority in CBE, involving students in decision-making about their learning. This learner-centered aspect encourages deep engagement with material, questioning, and peer collaboration. Research indicates that student control over learning promotes critical thinking skills and deeper content understanding. This participatory model fosters ownership of the learning process and develops lifelong learning skills (25).

Self-paced learning enables students to progress through educational content at their own speed, ensuring mastery of each competency before advancing. This approach supports differentiated learning by accommodating various learning speeds and styles, leading to better retention and understanding. By moving at their own pace, students can devote more time to challenging areas and quickly advance through easily grasped concepts, promoting a personalized and effective learning experience (26).

The learner-centered approach, emphasizing personalized learning, active participation, and self-paced progress, provides a flexible and responsive educational framework addressing diverse student needs. By implementing these strategies, educators can create engaging and effective learning environments fostering student autonomy and mastery (27).

FOCUS ON MASTERY OF COMPETENCIES

In competency-based education, well-defined learning outcomes play a crucial role by providing a clear framework of the specific skills and knowledge learners must acquire. These outcomes serve as precise benchmarks guiding instruction and assessment, ensuring educators and learners understand the goals and track progress effectively. This clarity enables targeted interventions and assessments aligned with educational objectives (28).

Mastery-based progression ensures learners advance only after demonstrating thorough understanding of each competency, addressing knowledge gaps before progressing to complex material. Research highlights that mastery-based learning facilitates deeper concept grasp by focusing on achieving proficiency and preventing incomplete learning. By requiring mastery of each competency, this method supports more effective and enduring learning outcomes (29).

Prioritizing quality over quantity in education involves emphasizing high learning standards rather than covering vast amounts of material. This approach ensures learners achieve proficiency and deep understanding in each area. Hattie and Yates (30) stress that focusing on learning quality achieves better educational outcomes by meeting rigorous standards and engaging deeply with content. This method promotes thorough understanding and mastery of competencies, essential for meaningful and effective education.

INTEGRATION OF REAL-WORLD SKILLS

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Project-based learning (PBL) immerses learners in real-world scenarios, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. By connecting academic concepts to authentic contexts, PBL facilitates deeper learning, empowering students to tackle complex problems. This approach cultivates critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration as students develop and present solutions in a professionally relevant manner (31).

Modern education prioritizes problem-solving skills development to enhance critical thinking and analytical abilities. This focus enables learners to effectively approach and resolve complex issues. Integrating problem-solving into curricula equips students with essential competencies to analyze challenges, devise solutions, and make informed decisions, crucial for navigating today's dynamic world (32).

Educational institutions forge strategic partnerships with the business sector to provide learners with practical experiences and industry insights aligned with current workforce demands. Collaborations include internships, mentorships, and industry-driven projects, enabling students to acquire real-world skills and knowledge. These partnerships are vital for making education relevant and preparing students to meet evolving job market needs (33).

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Formative assessments are ongoing evaluations that monitor students' progress, providing immediate feedback to guide their learning. These assessments identify areas for improvement, supporting skill and knowledge development throughout the learning process. By offering timely feedback, formative assessments enhance student learning, helping learners understand their strengths and weaknesses and make necessary adjustments to improve performance (34).

Reflective practices encourage learners to think critically about their learning experiences and outcomes, gaining insights into their own learning processes. This reflection helps students recognize areas for improvement, set goals for future development, and evaluate their experiences to learn from mistakes. Through fostering deeper learning, reflective practices contribute to ongoing personal and academic growth through enhanced self-awareness (35).

Adaptive assessments adjust to the learner's pace and level, ensuring fair and accurate evaluations of their abilities. By modifying question difficulty based on learner responses, adaptive assessments provide personalized measures of knowledge and skills. Valuable for accommodating diverse learning needs, adaptive assessments ensure each student is assessed appropriately, enhancing evaluation accuracy and supporting individualized learning (36).

DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS

Effective communication training is vital for professional and personal success, enabling individuals to convey ideas clearly, engage in meaningful interactions, and build strong relationships. Communication skills are essential for career advancement and personal growth, enhancing one's ability to articulate thoughts, listen actively, and collaborate with others effectively (37).

Collaboration and teamwork are critical components of most professional environments, requiring individuals to work effectively with others to achieve common goals. Education that emphasizes these skills helps learners develop collaboration, conflict resolution, and positive team dynamics. Teamwork skills are essential for enhancing productivity and fostering a cooperative work environment, crucial in many career fields (38).

Emotional intelligence development cultivates self-awareness, empathy, and social skills to navigate various life situations effectively. Emotional intelligence is key to managing one's emotions, understanding others' feelings, and building strong interpersonal relationships. It significantly contributes to personal and professional success by enabling individuals to handle stress, resolve conflicts, and engage meaningfully with others (39).]

PROMOTION OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Equipping learners with effective learning strategies, or "learning to learn," is essential for cultivating a lifelong desire to acquire new knowledge. This approach enables students to develop metacognitive skills, enhancing their ability to manage their learning processes and adapt to diverse educational contexts. By learning to learn, individuals acquire the tools to continually seek out and integrate new information, a crucial skill for personal and professional development in a rapidly changing world (39).

Education that fosters adaptability prepares learners to effectively handle new situations, technologies, and challenges. In a world of constant technological advancements and global changes, adaptability is crucial. By promoting flexibility and resilience, education helps students navigate and thrive in diverse and evolving environments (40).

Encouraging a growth mindset empowers learners to embrace challenges and view failures as opportunities for growth. This mindset supports resilience and continuous improvement by recognizing that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and perseverance. By fostering a growth mindset, learners persist in the face of difficulties and continuously strive to improve, leading to greater academic and personal success (41).

INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY

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Blended learning combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods, offering flexibility and accessibility for learners. This approach provides a personalized and adaptable educational experience, leveraging the strengths of both in-person and online learning environments. By integrating face-to-face instruction with digital resources, blended learning enhances learning opportunities and accommodates diverse student needs (42).

Digital literacy is crucial for developing skills to effectively use technology for learning, communication, and problem-solving. As technology becomes increasingly integral to education and daily life, equipping learners with digital literacy skills is essential for their success. Digital literacy encompasses competencies such as navigating digital environments, critically evaluating information, and using technology to collaborate and solve problems (43).

Virtual simulations utilize technology to create controlled environments where learners can practice and develop competencies. These simulations offer experiential learning opportunities that replicate real-world scenarios, allowing students to apply knowledge and skills in a safe and immersive environment. Virtual simulations provide valuable hands-on experiences that enhance learning outcomes and prepare students for practical applications in their future careers (44).

STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Mentorship programs pair learners with experienced mentors, providing guidance, support, and advice throughout their educational journey. These programs enhance personal and professional development by offering insights and encouragement from individuals with relevant experience. Mentorship programs effectively help students navigate academic and career paths, improving confidence and success rates through personalized support and practical advice (45).

Peer support networks foster collaboration and mutual support among students, creating a community of learners sharing knowledge and experiences. These networks promote a sense of belonging, enhancing the learning experience and academic outcomes. By sharing diverse perspectives and experiences, peer support networks encourage active learning and problem-solving within the academic community (46).

Counseling services provide emotional and academic support to help learners overcome challenges, maintaining focus on educational goals. These services address issues like stress, anxiety, and academic difficulties, impacting student performance and well-being. Effective counseling contributes significantly to student success by offering targeted support and resources to navigate and resolve challenges (47).

FLEXIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Offering learners flexible learning pathways enables them to tailor their educational experiences to their interests and career aspirations, enhancing engagement and motivation. By pursuing areas they are passionate about, students can align their studies with future goals, leading to better outcomes and higher satisfaction (48).

Utilizing various learning modalities, including online, in-person, and hybrid formats, accommodates different learning styles and preferences, enhancing education's effectiveness. By providing multiple modalities, educational systems cater to diverse needs, enabling learners to engage with content in the most effective ways for them. Integrating multiple learning modalities ensures education is accessible and engaging for all students, fostering a more inclusive learning environment (49).

Designing inclusive and accessible learning environments ensures all students, regardless of background or ability, have the necessary resources and support to succeed. This involves adapting materials and methods to meet diverse learning needs and providing equitable access to educational opportunities. Creating accessible and inclusive environments is crucial for fostering educational equity, ensuring every learner can achieve their potential (50).

CAREER READINESS AND EMPLOYABILITY

Competence-Based Education (CBE) incorporates work-based learning opportunities like internships and apprenticeships, providing learners with hands-on experience in real-world settings. This practical approach enhances students' understanding of their field and prepares them for the workforce by applying theoretical knowledge in practical environments. Work-based learning bridges the gap between classroom instruction and professional practice, making students more competitive and job-ready (51).

Career planning and guidance are essential components of CBE, helping learners identify career goals and develop strategies to achieve them. This includes support with resume building, interview preparation, and networking skills, crucial for securing employment. Effective career guidance equips students with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate the job market and make informed career decisions, enhancing their employability (52).

CBE emphasizes entrepreneurial skills development by encouraging learners to innovate, take risks, and manage their own ventures. This focus on entrepreneurship prepares students for self-employment and fosters a mindset geared towards creativity and problem-solving. Integrating entrepreneurial education into curricula helps students acquire the skills necessary to start and sustain their own businesses, contributing to economic growth and personal empowerment (53).

CONCLUSION

CBE plays a pivotal role in fostering learners' self-reliance by integrating various educational strategies that emphasize practical skills and real-world application. Through work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and apprenticeships, CBE provides students with hands-on experience, effectively bridging the gap between classroom instruction and professional practice. Additionally, career planning and guidance support self-reliance by helping learners set career goals and develop essential job market skills, including resume building and interview preparation. Moreover, CBE fosters entrepreneurial skills by encouraging innovation and risk-taking, equipping students with the tools to start and manage their own ventures. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach not only prepares learners for employment but also empowers them to become proactive, self-sufficient individuals in their professional and personal lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance learners' self-reliance, educational programs should integrate work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and apprenticeships. These real-world experiences allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, gaining valuable hands-on experience that bridges the gap between academic learning and professional practice. By incorporating these opportunities into curricula, educational institutions can better prepare students for the workforce, making them more competitive and adaptable to industry demands.

Educational systems should place a strong emphasis on career planning and guidance to support learners' self-reliance. Providing comprehensive support in areas such as resume building, interview preparation, and networking skills helps students navigate the job market more effectively. Implementing robust career services within educational institutions can ensure that learners are well-equipped to identify their career goals, develop actionable plans, and successfully transition into the workforce.

To prepare students for a rapidly evolving job market, educational programs should foster entrepreneurial skills by encouraging innovation, risk-taking, and venture management. By integrating entrepreneurial thinking into the curriculum, educators can help learners develop the mindset and skills necessary to start and manage their own businesses. This approach not only supports self-employment opportunities but also equips students with problem-solving abilities that are valuable across various career paths.

Educational systems should promote lifelong learning as a core component of fostering self-reliance. Encouraging learners to adopt a growth mindset and embrace ongoing learning opportunities can help them adapt to new technologies and challenges throughout their careers. By teaching strategies for effective learning and instilling a desire for continuous improvement, educational institutions can ensure that students remain adaptable and proactive in their professional and personal development.

Ultimately, by incorporating these elements - work-based learning, career planning, entrepreneurial skills, and lifelong learning - educational systems can empower learners to become self-reliant, proactive, and successful individuals. This comprehensive approach prepares students to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce, achieve their career goals, and continuously grow and develop throughout their lives.

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