
Competency-based assessment in educational contexts for the integral development of meaningful learning

Evaluación por competencias en contextos educativos para el desarrollo integral del aprendizaje significativo

Avaliação por competências em contextos educacionais para o desenvolvimento integral da aprendizagem significativa

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to analyze the foundations, strategies, and importance of competency-based assessment in educational contexts, considering its contributions to meaningful learning and the challenges associated with its implementation. The research was conducted under a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical scope through a bibliographic review of specialized scientific literature on educational assessment, authentic performance, and competency-based evaluation instruments. Academic articles, books, and indexed publications related to the topic were consulted for data collection. The findings showed that competency-based assessment promotes the integration of knowing, doing, and being, encouraging contextualized learning focused on solving real-life problems. Likewise, instruments such as rubrics, projects, and evidence portfolios were identified as effective tools for strengthening formative feedback and the comprehensive assessment of student performance. However, limitations related to insufficient teacher training, difficulties in establishing clear evaluation criteria, and resistance to changes in traditional assessment practices were also identified. It was concluded that competency-based assessment constitutes a fundamental pedagogical strategy for improving educational quality and fostering the integral development of students.

Keywords: Competency-based assessment, performance, learning, education.

Resumen

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar los fundamentos, estrategias e importancia de la evaluación por competencias en contextos educativos, considerando sus aportes al aprendizaje significativo y los desafíos relacionados con su implementación. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cualitativo con alcance descriptivo-analítico, mediante una revisión bibliográfica de literatura científica especializada sobre evaluación educativa, desempeño auténtico e instrumentos de valoración por competencias. Para la recolección de información se consultaron artículos académicos, libros y publicaciones indexadas

relacionadas con el tema de estudio. Los resultados evidenciaron que la evaluación por competencias favorece la integración del saber conocer, saber hacer y saber ser, promoviendo aprendizajes contextualizados y orientados a la resolución de problemas reales. Asimismo, se identificó que instrumentos como rúbricas, proyectos y portafolios de evidencias fortalecen la retroalimentación formativa y la valoración integral del desempeño estudiantil. Sin embargo, también se reconocieron limitaciones relacionadas con la insuficiente capacitación docente, la dificultad para establecer criterios claros de evaluación y la resistencia al cambio en las prácticas tradicionales. Se concluyó que la evaluación por competencias constituye una estrategia pedagógica fundamental para fortalecer la calidad educativa y promover el desarrollo integral del estudiante.

Palabras clave: Evaluación por competencias, desempeño, aprendizaje, educación.

Resumo

O presente estudo teve como objetivo analisar os fundamentos, estratégias e importância da avaliação por competências em contextos educacionais, considerando suas contribuições para a aprendizagem significativa e os desafios relacionados à sua implementação. A pesquisa foi desenvolvida sob uma abordagem qualitativa com alcance descritivo-analítico, por meio de uma revisão bibliográfica da literatura científica especializada sobre avaliação educacional, desempenho autêntico e instrumentos de avaliação por competências. Para a coleta de informações, foram consultados artigos acadêmicos, livros e publicações indexadas relacionadas ao tema de estudo. Os resultados evidenciaram que a avaliação por competências favorece a integração do saber conhecer, saber fazer e saber ser, promovendo aprendizagens contextualizadas e orientadas para a resolução de problemas reais. Da mesma forma, identificou-se que instrumentos como rubricas, projetos e portfólios de evidências fortalecem a retroalimentação formativa e a avaliação integral do desempenho estudantil. Entretanto, também foram reconhecidas limitações relacionadas à insuficiente capacitação docente, à dificuldade para estabelecer critérios claros de avaliação e à resistência às mudanças nas práticas avaliativas tradicionais. Concluiu-se que a avaliação por competências constitui uma estratégia pedagógica fundamental para fortalecer a qualidade educacional e promover o desenvolvimento integral do estudante.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação por competências, desempenho, aprendizagem, educação.

Introduction

In recent years, educational systems have undergone profound transformations aimed at responding to the social, labor, and cultural demands of the twenty-first century. In this context, competency-based education has gained prominence due to its focus on students' comprehensive performance and their ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations. According to Pedro Víctor Jiménez (2011), this model seeks to overcome traditional teaching approaches focused exclusively on content transmission by promoting learning processes linked to problem-solving and the development of practical skills. Likewise, Luis Ramírez and Guadalupe Medina (2008) highlight that the Tuning Project contributed to the consolidation of this paradigm in Europe and Latin America by fostering alignment between academic training and professional performance.

Within this perspective, competency-based assessment is configured as an essential element for verifying not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of skills, attitudes, and values required to perform effectively in different contexts. According to Yolanda Isabel Jiménez Galán et al. (2011), this assessment approach promotes a comprehensive evaluation of the teaching-learning process through authentic evidence and performance-related criteria. Consistently, Germán Escobar Hoyos (2014) argues that assessment has evolved from models

focused on rote measurement toward formative processes aimed at understanding, reflection, and the continuous improvement of learning.

The relevance of competency-based assessment lies in its capacity to strengthen meaningful learning and facilitate its transfer to diverse academic, social, and professional settings. From the perspective of meaningful learning theory, María Luz Rodríguez Palmero (2011) points out that learning becomes meaningful when students connect new knowledge with prior experiences and real-life contexts. In this sense, assessment ceases to be merely a control mechanism and becomes a pedagogical strategy that promotes the active construction of knowledge. Furthermore, this approach encourages autonomy, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, which are essential competencies for addressing contemporary educational and societal challenges.

Nevertheless, the implementation of competency-based assessment faces several difficulties that limit its effectiveness in educational institutions. Among the main challenges are the persistence of traditional assessment practices, insufficient teacher training, and the complexity of designing valid and relevant assessment instruments. Felipe Martínez Rizo (2013) identifies that many teachers encounter obstacles in implementing formative assessment processes due to administrative workload, lack of resources, and the absence of clear performance criteria. Similarly, María José Pérez Zorrilla (2005) demonstrates that difficulties in assessing reading and cognitive competencies reflect methodological limitations that affect the comprehensive evaluation of learning.

Despite these shortcomings, competency-based assessment represents a relevant alternative for improving educational quality and promoting more inclusive and contextualized learning processes. Its implementation facilitates the recognition of students' individual capabilities and the development of learning experiences oriented toward holistic human development. Within this framework, Dina Halanoca Puma (2024) states that meaningful learning in higher education requires assessment strategies that enable students to participate actively in their own learning process. Likewise, Paola Moreira Sánchez (2019) highlights that this type of learning contributes to the cognitive and social development of adolescents by strengthening competencies necessary for interaction and decision-making.

Consequently, it is essential to reflect on the importance of designing assessment models and instruments that are consistent with the competency-based approach, capable of evaluating authentic performances and promoting continuous learning improvement. The consolidation of this paradigm requires pedagogical innovation, ongoing teacher training, and an educational vision centered on students as active agents of their own learning. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the foundations, characteristics, and importance of competency-based assessment in educational contexts, considering its main challenges and contributions to the development of meaningful learning.

Methodology

This research was conducted under a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical scope, as it enabled the interpretation and understanding of the main characteristics of competency-based assessment in educational contexts. This approach was considered appropriate because it facilitated the critical analysis of concepts, approaches, and strategies present in the specialized scientific literature. According to Edwin Carmona Escobar and Nora Pérez Valdés (2009), the literature review constitutes a fundamental procedure for systematizing knowledge and establishing relationships among different theoretical contributions. Likewise, Eduardo C. Urbina (2020) argues that qualitative research promotes a comprehensive understanding of educational phenomena through the reflective analysis of documentary and contextual information.

The information-gathering technique employed was a documentary review of scientific articles, academic books, and indexed publications related to competency-based assessment and meaningful learning. To this end, various specialized bibliographic sources addressing theoretical foundations, methodological strategies, and assessment instruments applied at different educational levels were consulted. According to Antonio Gálvez Toro (2002), literature reviews make it possible to identify relevant antecedents and generate a broad understanding of the object of study. Similarly, Juan Carlos Vilanova (2012) states that this type of review promotes the systematic organization of scientific information and contributes to the construction of solid theoretical foundations for research analysis.

The analysis procedure was carried out through the identification, classification, and interpretation of the main assessment approaches, strategies, and instruments found in the reviewed literature. In the first phase, scientific documents related to competency-based assessment, formative assessment, and meaningful learning were selected. Subsequently, an analytical reading process was conducted to identify thematic categories associated with student performance, assessment practices, and pedagogical feedback. This process facilitated the comparison of different theoretical and methodological perspectives on educational assessment, allowing the identification of similarities, differences, and relevant contributions to the study.

Finally, the information collected was organized and synthesized through an interpretative analysis aimed at understanding the importance of competency-based assessment in contemporary educational processes. The methodology employed made it possible to integrate conceptual contributions and theoretical evidence from different academic studies, thereby strengthening the validity of the research. Furthermore, the descriptive-analytical approach enabled a critical examination of the limitations and challenges involved in implementing this assessment model, highlighting the need to develop pedagogical practices focused on meaningful learning and the holistic development of students.

Development

Foundations of Competency-Based Assessment

Competency-based assessment is grounded in a comprehensive vision of learning, in which students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also develop practical skills and attitudes oriented toward solving real-world problems. This approach promotes the integration of *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* as essential dimensions of the educational process. According to Fabián Darío Rodríguez Aguilar-Gordón (2019), the integration of knowledge fosters more dynamic and contextualized educational processes, enabling students to connect different areas of knowledge in order to construct meaningful learning. Likewise, Ángel Fernando Rodríguez Torres and colleagues (2019) highlight that integrative knowledge projects constitute relevant strategies for strengthening autonomy and reflective learning.

In this context, competency-based assessment prioritizes authentic performance as the primary evidence of learning. This type of assessment seeks to ensure that students demonstrate their abilities through activities linked to real-life situations and contextualized problems. Claudia Lucía Ordóñez (2010) argues that authentic performance involves the effective application of knowledge and skills in meaningful tasks that reflect everyday or professional scenarios. Similarly, María Elena Ramírez Villanueva and José Antonio Gutiérrez Herrera (2024) emphasize that rubrics make it possible to assess such performances through clear criteria and achievement levels that promote objectivity and formative feedback.

Another fundamental aspect of this approach is contextualized assessment, which considers environmental characteristics and students' specific needs throughout the evaluation process. From this perspective, assessment activities should be connected to real-life experiences that allow learners to demonstrate competencies applicable to different situations. Sandra Juliana

Velásquez Luna and colleagues (2017) affirm that contextualized assessment strengthens the development of mathematical competencies through strategies closely linked to students' realities. Consistently, William Andrés Largo Taborda and Diana Henao Díaz (2022) maintain that formative assessment promotes contextualized learning and supports the continuous improvement of teaching practice.

Assessment Strategies and Instruments

The strategies and instruments used in competency-based assessment make it possible to collect evidence of students' comprehensive performance and evaluate the achievement of meaningful learning outcomes. Among the most widely used instruments are analytical and holistic rubrics, which facilitate the objective assessment of complex tasks through previously established criteria. Carolina Neil and colleagues (2022) highlight that analytical rubrics enable the detailed evaluation of different dimensions of student performance. Likewise, Ana Lucía Arenas Landínez and Karen Juliana Gómez Jiménez (2013) consider assessment matrices to be useful tools for planning and implementing competency-centered evaluation processes.

Projects and case studies also represent relevant strategies within this assessment approach because they promote real-world problem-solving and the practical application of knowledge. These methodologies allow students to analyze complex situations and strengthen competencies related to critical thinking, decision-making, and collaborative work. According to Linda Morra and Anthony Friedlander (2001), case studies facilitate an in-depth understanding of specific phenomena through the contextualized analysis of evidence. Likewise, María Dolores Fernández Tilve and collaborators (2009) indicate that curriculum innovation projects supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) foster more participatory and meaningful learning experiences.

Similarly, the evidence portfolio has become an effective instrument for collecting and analyzing student progress throughout the learning process. This resource makes it possible to document achievements, reflections, and products developed during learning, thereby promoting self-assessment and continuous improvement processes. Juan Antonio García Fraile and Margarita Rojas Aguilera (2018) emphasize that the portfolio constitutes a teaching strategy that strengthens the integration of teaching, learning, and assessment. Furthermore, this instrument facilitates the evaluation of competencies from a holistic perspective, considering both academic performance and students' reflective and critical capacities.

Challenges in the Implementation of Competency-Based Assessment

Despite its contributions to educational improvement, the implementation of competency-based assessment faces various challenges that hinder its consolidation in educational contexts. One of the main difficulties concerns establishing clear and coherent criteria that allow performance to be assessed objectively. Felipe Martínez Rizo (2013) points out that many teachers encounter difficulties in developing formative assessment processes due to the lack of clarity in performance indicators and standards. Similarly, Elena Cano (2015) warns that the inappropriate use of rubrics may lead to excessively mechanized assessment practices, limiting the comprehensive understanding of competencies.

Another important challenge is related to insufficient teacher training for implementing strategies and instruments aligned with this approach. Limited preparation in competency-based assessment makes it difficult to design authentic activities and apply effective feedback methods. Carmen García Padilla et al. (2015) argue that many teachers require specific professional development processes to strengthen their assessment competencies. In the same vein, Diana Elizabeth Chillogalli Puzhi and collaborators (2022) demonstrate that insufficient training in the use of technologies and innovative methodologies negatively affects both professional and academic performance.

Finally, resistance to change in traditional assessment practices constitutes a significant barrier to the effective implementation of this model. Many educators continue to rely on methods centered on memorization and quantitative grading due to cultural, institutional, and administrative factors. Nadia Beatriz Alquati and Daniel Ricardo Schulman (2024) highlight that resistance to change is associated with the need to strengthen teacher training and promote educational innovation processes. Likewise, Luis Miguel García (2014) argues that traditional assessment practices generate tensions and paradoxes within the university context, hindering the consolidation of approaches focused on meaningful learning and the comprehensive development of competencies.

Discussion

Competency-based assessment represents a significant transformation in contemporary educational processes, as it shifts the traditional focus from memorization toward the comprehensive evaluation of student performance. The findings of this analysis reveal that this model promotes the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, enabling learning to be connected to real-life situations and meaningful contexts. In this regard, Rodríguez Aguilar-Gordón (2019) argues that the integration of knowledge fosters more dynamic and interdisciplinary educational processes, while Rodríguez Torres et al. (2019) highlight that integrative projects strengthen autonomy and reflective learning. These perspectives concur that competency-based education contributes to the development of capacities applicable in diverse academic and social contexts.

Likewise, the theoretical discussion identified authentic performance as one of the fundamental pillars of competency-based assessment. The evaluation of contextualized activities linked to real-life experiences enables students to demonstrate their abilities in a meaningful and functional manner. According to Ordóñez (2010), authentic performance promotes more participatory learning processes that are closely aligned with the demands of social and professional environments. Similarly, Ramírez Villanueva and Gutiérrez Herrera (2024) indicate that rubrics contribute to the assessment of such performances through specific criteria that enhance objectivity and feedback. Consequently, it becomes evident that authentic assessment not only measures outcomes but also evaluates the processes involved in the construction of learning.

Another relevant aspect identified in the study concerns the importance of contextualized assessment as a strategy for strengthening meaningful learning. The literature review revealed that assessment activities become more effective when they are connected to real-world problems and the specific needs of the educational environment. In this regard, Velásquez Luna et al. (2017) argue that contextualization promotes competency development through experiences closely related to students' realities. Likewise, Largo Taborda and Henao Díaz (2022) affirm that formative assessment encourages continuous improvement in both learning and teaching practice. These contributions demonstrate that assessment should be oriented toward flexible and relevant processes that respond to the characteristics of each educational context.

Regarding assessment instruments, the results indicate that rubrics, projects, case studies, and evidence portfolios constitute essential tools for comprehensively assessing competencies. Rubrics enable the establishment of clear and transparent criteria that guide student performance and facilitate self-assessment and peer assessment processes. Neil et al. (2022) highlight that analytical rubrics make it possible to evaluate different dimensions of learning in detail, while Arenas Landínez and Gómez Jiménez (2013) consider that assessment matrices strengthen the planning and organization of performance-based assessment. Likewise, García Fraile and Rojas Aguilera (2018) point out that evidence portfolios promote reflective processes and document students' continuous progress.

Nevertheless, the analysis also identified significant challenges in the implementation of competency-based assessment. One of the main difficulties concerns the establishment of clear and coherent assessment criteria, a situation that may affect the objectivity and validity of evaluation processes. Martínez Rizo (2013) argues that many teachers face limitations in applying formative assessment due to the lack of precise benchmarks and appropriate methodologies. In agreement, Cano (2015) warns that the excessive or inappropriate use of rubrics may transform assessment into a mechanical procedure that limits the comprehensive understanding of competencies. These challenges highlight the need to strengthen the development of relevant and contextualized assessment criteria.

Finally, the theoretical review demonstrates that teacher training and resistance to change continue to be determining factors in the effective implementation of this assessment approach. García Padilla et al. (2015) indicate that many teachers require specialized training to design assessment instruments and strategies aligned with competency-based assessment. Similarly, Alquati and Schulman (2024) argue that resistance to modifying traditional assessment practices limits the incorporation of innovative methodologies within educational institutions. Consequently, it is essential to promote processes of pedagogical updating and teacher support that foster an assessment culture centered on meaningful learning, critical reflection, and the comprehensive development of competencies.

Conclusions

Competency-based assessment has become established as an educational approach aimed at the holistic development of students by prioritizing the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes within authentic learning contexts. The analysis conducted revealed that this model overcomes the limitations of traditional assessments focused exclusively on memorization, fostering more dynamic, reflective, and meaningful learning processes. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that the assessment of authentic performance strengthens students' ability to apply acquired knowledge in concrete situations, contributing to the development of competencies required to meet contemporary academic, social, and professional demands.

Likewise, the study demonstrated that the implementation of strategies and assessment instruments such as rubrics, projects, case studies, and evidence portfolios promotes more objective, participatory, and learning-oriented evaluation processes. These resources enable the collection of authentic evidence of student performance and facilitate formative feedback as a key element in strengthening autonomy and critical reflection. In addition, contextualized assessment was recognized as an essential component in promoting meaningful learning, as it connects assessment activities with the needs and experiences of the educational environment.

However, significant challenges that limit the consolidation of competency-based assessment in educational institutions were also identified. Among the main difficulties are insufficient teacher training, the complexity of establishing clear assessment criteria, and the persistence of traditional practices resistant to pedagogical change. These limitations highlight the need to strengthen continuous professional development and institutional support processes that enable educators to develop assessment competencies aligned with current educational demands. Consequently, it is essential to promote an assessment culture centered on meaningful learning, pedagogical innovation, and the holistic development of students as a fundamental pillar of educational quality.

Limitations of the Study

This research was conducted through a qualitative bibliographic review; therefore, its findings were primarily based on the analysis and interpretation of previously published documentary sources. In this regard, one of the main limitations was the absence of fieldwork and direct empirical evidence that would have allowed the theoretical findings to be contrasted within

specific educational contexts. Furthermore, some of the studies reviewed presented conceptual and methodological differences regarding competency-based assessment, which complicated the standardization of criteria for the comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon under investigation.

Future Studies

Future research is recommended to deepen the empirical analysis of competency-based assessment through field studies conducted across different educational levels and contexts. Likewise, it would be valuable to develop studies aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of strategies and instruments such as rubrics, portfolios, and integrative projects in strengthening meaningful learning. Further research is also encouraged to explore the impact of teacher training and the use of digital technologies on the implementation of innovative and contextualized assessment practices.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no personal, academic, professional, or financial conflict of interest related to the preparation and publication of this study.

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