



Research Paper

A Critical Reflection on the Human Aspect of Competence-Based Education Competency-Based Education and its repercussion in the Mexican educational context

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ABSTRACT

To speak of competencies in the current Mexican educational context would seem to be redundant, obviating the existence of these competencies within the various educational institutions at each of their levels. Curricula, syllabuses and educational programmes include them. Courses, workshops and an infinity of training within the teaching field address them in one way or another; however, their implementation within a training period continues to be a pending task. The present work, of a documentary-descriptive nature, aims to present the positions that contradict the positive (beneficial) side of Competency-Based Education, properly focused on the productive-competitive and result-oriented sphere. Pragmatic-utilitarian aspects, used by international organizations with the political-privatizing intention, hidden under the veil of quality and educational efficiency, whose background is social exclusion, by using cheap labor in the production of a wealth of international emporiums, leaving aside the educational-humanizing aspect.

Keywords: Proficiency, development, humanize, person, democracy.

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I. INTRODUCCIÓN

There is an infinite amount of literature on the proposed topic, addressing competencies from different approaches, contexts and experiences. Without wishing to fall into the repetitiveness of terms, it is necessary to consider the human aspect of these, which seems to have been omitted in practice. Therefore, it will continue to be at the heart of the matter to be resolved, since, although the nature of the competencies themselves enables individuals to perform a task, there is also the risk of converting them into operative and mechanical entities (Cruz y Vega, 2001; Daziel, Cubeiro y Fernández, 1996).

For this reason, it is worth questioning their origin and the influence they have on human beings, particularly in their learning. So, do competencies increase one's value as a person, and does being competent imply having a greater awareness of the environment, participating in a supportive manner to preserve it, whether socially, environmentally, professionally, occupationally? What is the relationship between competencies and the educational reality of our country, achieving the intended objective? (Del Rey y Sánchez, 2011).

A medida que el proceso de globalización de las economías se fue extendiendo e imponiendo, tanto el cambiante mundo de la economía y el trabajo pusieron énfasis en controlar-elevar la calidad de la producción, lo cual requiere mejorar la efectividad de los recursos humanos involucrados (Boutin y Jullien, 2000), propiciando el debate acerca de los mecanismos con que las instituciones educativas forman los recursos humanos, junto con la necesidad de revisar los contenidos y los métodos de enseñanza.

As the process of globalization of economies spread and took hold, both the changing world of the economy and work placed emphasis on controlling-raising the quality of production, which requires improving the effectiveness of the human resources involved (Boutin and Jullien, 2000), prompting debate about the mechanisms by which educational institutions train human resources, together with the need to review the contents and methods of teaching.

However, one of the concepts used today about education is that of competencies. Competences first appeared concerning the production processes of companies, particularly in England and Germany, which sought to specify the requirements to be met by people who aspired to obtain official certification to exercise trades (Mertens, 1996). Thus, they had to possess special knowledge, which, when correctly applied, enabled a

person to perform perfectly in a trade. Over the years, this concept was expanded and incorporated into the educational sphere, however, for more than two decades, it has transformed how it is taught from basic to professional level (Valiente and Galdeano, 2009).

THE UTILITARIAN ASPECT OF COMPETENCES IN EDUCATION

As a starting point -already mentioned by many authors-, competencies arise in the industrial-business sphere to measure the performance of the worker when carrying out a specific task, i.e., how skilled an individual is to perform a certain task and how well he/she executes it (Guzmán, 2017).

This aspect has been observed and analyzed by researchers such as R. White (1959) from the psychological perspective, and MacClelland (1973) in the business field, revolutionizing human resource management. Chomsky (1969), for his part, gave a twist to the interpretations coming from manufacturing companies, using the term competence from a linguistic approach, applying it to various fields of knowledge.

This gave rise to countless pedagogues who, seeking to respond to the stage of industrial development after the Second World War, began to make their first attempts to apply competencies in the field of education. Specifically, schools in Germany and France not only implemented it to improve academic training but also as part of their recruitment and professional training processes (Vega, 2015).

However, the United States was the pioneer in incorporating them into the educational sphere, followed by England with The National Council for Vocational Qualifications. Precedents that laid the foundations for what years later would be the Bologna Process, in which it was declared:

We must look, in particular, to the goal of increasing the competitiveness of the European higher education system. The vitality and efficiency of any civilization can be measured by the attractiveness of its culture to other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a degree of global attractiveness (Bologna Declaration, 1999, p.2).

Competences, in this context, have a media function: to contribute to progress, not human progress, but economic progress in particular. In line with the human capital theory that underlines the importance of universal education and its contribution to economic growth, focusing on the development of each person's productive skills, which can be measured in terms of the goods and services he or she produces (Lasnier, 2002). Therefore, consumption is the goal/end of economic activity (Chiappero and Sabadash, 2010).

From this perspective, skills have a utilitarian purpose in line with the approach of the industrial magnates (Del Rey and Parga, 2011), whose principle of profit maximation is to train skilled labor that is immediately inserted into the productive sector of goods and services, capable of innovating, creating better products at lower cost, generating higher profits.

Now, for the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the World Trade Organization (WTO), under the pretext of progress, stipulate within the policies imposed on underdeveloped countries by the loans granted, the charging of higher education, in short, privatization; In other words, the inclusion of higher education as a commodity (Espinosa, 2005).

Consequently, a higher education graduate will provide his or her services in a job in a company for financial remuneration and thus repay the debt for university studies. Thus, the commercial circle takes place: educational service - payment, professional service - payment. Consumerism in its full expression (Laval, 2003).

The ILO affirms that skills development:

Is guided by the conceptual framework on Skills to improve productivity, employment growth, and development agreed in 2008 by representatives of Governments, Employers' Associations and Workers' Associations. Research, policy advice, and pilot projects and technical cooperation programmes to apply good practices in different circumstances across its 185 member States aims to boost the employability of workers, the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises, and the inclusiveness of economic growth (ILO, 2017, para. 1).

And in that sense, the WTO argues that "historically education has been conceived as a 'public good' although in recent years it has come to be considered as a 'private good' with a price determined by the institutions providing the service" (World Trade Organization, 1998, para.3).

The origin of all this was the new economic model promoted by the United Kingdom and the United States: globalization. This is the direct cause of changes in the political and social structure of developed and emerging economies, which in turn has led to changes in public education, as the relationship that was established between the material and educational wealth of a people is disappearing in undeveloped countries, entering a vicious circle: in the absence of material wealth, the educational heritage is minimal, which affects social development and vice versa (Del Rey and Parga, 2011; Laval, 2003).

Adding to this, the lack of budgets of developing States to invest in Higher Education Institutions has facilitated the infiltration of private corporations in professional academic spaces, sacrificing rights such as free expression when this conflicts with the interests of sponsors, to mention just one aspect (Jurado, 2018).

By way of closing this first point, competencies are a response to the demands that the neoliberal market imposes on world economies. It is an adaptation to the conditions of global market competitiveness, where those who are capable of constantly innovating, producing more at a lower cost and more quickly, have a better chance of surviving.

In addition to all this, technological development has favored the immediacy of communication and the acquisition of new knowledge in such a way that learning and teaching styles have been overtaken by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (De Miguel, 2003). Consequently, competencies - or competency-based learning - enable or dispose individuals to face these great challenges; although the time it has taken for the new learning model to take hold in underdeveloped countries has been very slow, due to their socio-cultural, political and economic conditions, which in some cases are precarious.

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

To address this point, it is worth mentioning that modern economies, while it is true that it is imperative to be more competitive in the production of goods and provision of services, have also opted for knowledge, relying on new technological information systems that have been promoted within their education systems, to generate quality human capital (Campos and Chinchilla, 2009).

This becomes a nation's main asset. Therefore, citizens educated with quality knowledge guarantee the economic future of the nation. That is why it is said that the wealth of nations is no longer measured by the natural resources they possess, but by their capacity to learn and the human capital they manage to create. As Passet (1998) puts it, "the contemporary mutation is characterized by the head-on collision of two phases of technological evolution: one - at its peak - based on energy; the other - emerging - comes from the immaterial (symbols, codes, messages, organization)" (p.104). Thus, the investment that countries make in education and scientific research will provide them with greater advantages over others.

The current production system directly affects the economic life of countries and their citizens, reflected in their per capita consumption rate, as the work processes in labor markets shape the consumption patterns of individuals. Flexibilization emerges, then, to improve the profitability of firms by reducing production costs and increasing the turnover time of firms, which requires new qualifications and labor skills (Didriksson, 2007).

Consequently, future workers require more skills, especially the ability to solve problems in less time, responding to the need to link those who identify difficulties with those who solve them, which means training individuals or professionals at a competitive level who remain in a continuous learning process. Because, nowadays, we are experiencing a major shift between given knowledge and indisputable facts, as our knowledge is becoming increasingly fragile - volatile - and provisional: our current knowledge will soon become obsolete due to the dizzying pace of scientific and technological progress (Didriksson, 2007).

In this respect, Hargreaves (1996) points out that one of the main challenges facing societies and organizations of our time, paradoxically marked by constant mobility, is to keep pace with change. Thus, a characteristic feature of postmodernity is uncertainty and unpredictability.

To cope with these demands, companies must have the capacity to learn and to adapt the fruits of that learning to themselves. Therefore, it is now necessary for organizations and institutions, and not only individuals, to learn to use the fruits of learning to continuously innovate themselves. This is why such organizations are called smart (Guzmán, 2016).

Pozo (1996) suggests that the goal of culture should be to interpret the partiality of knowledge, to understand it and to give it to others. For the same reason, it should be an educational goal, i.e. to contribute to forming a culture of understanding through critical analysis of reality, reflection on doing and the integration of some of the partial knowledge that inevitably shapes us, to rethink it, reconstruct it, give it a new form or structure (Guzmán, 2016), circumscribed not only within the university sphere.

Thus, competencies - or competency-based learning - aims to develop or enable individuals - students - to face diversity, uncertainty, the speed of continuous change, ways of grasping reality, assimilating it and applying acquired knowledge (Michea, 1999).

Humanizing the competences

The issue addressed has been supported by various proposals as pedagogical theories. In this case, the Delors report sets out the four pillars of education: learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. From the perspective of competencies, the first two would be supported, leaving the axiological aspect in second, or perhaps last, place. Nevertheless, the student is determined to develop abilities, skills, which

enable him/her to carry out specific tasks, expecting an efficient performance after the fulfilment of the same; that is, to be competent (Pont & Werquin, 2001).

However, where does the transcendental aspect of the human being underlie the term competence? It is clear that in its nature it does not exist per se, since competencies themselves are aimed at producing concrete, tangible, demonstrable and measurable results. Consequently, its existence is *per alio*, adhered to human nature. It is ad intra, within the individual, where it subsists; and this human being does not exist only as matter, as a producing mechanism, but as a thinking being, capable of creating, transforming reality, his environment and with it, giving meaning to what he does, leaving a mark, transcending.

Consequently, competencies, or rather competency-based learning, cannot be understood in isolation from human integrity. Learning and knowing inexorably carry human value implicitly. Thus, to be competent is not only to be competent to produce, to create, to innovate, but to be in oneself and to be together with others. It is to create, to transform, to be and to exist together with society and its cultural and axiological manifestations, manifested in solidarity, democratic and cooperative actions (Gallegos, 2001).

To be competent only for utilitarian mercantilism would be to depersonalize human nature itself. Leaving the subject empty and without existential meaning, since the simple fact of doing for the sake of doing leads to consumption for the sake of consumption, to the practice of mercantile utilitarianism, minimizing the condition of human nature and its transcendence; reifying it, being an object of usufruct, turning man into the wolf of man, as in *Asinaria*, a play by Plautus (250-184 B.C.) and, consequently, it would be the erroneous pretension of learning based on competences.

To rescue competencies from the media-instrumental sense to respond to the demands of the voracious, demanding and, at the same time, alienating labor market, is to stop considering them simply as skills that adapt people to perform a specific task within an organization that produces profits, to be included as a substantive part of it, which in the sum of shared effort, build it day by day, creating a sense of belonging, loyalty and commitment. Moving away from the neo-liberal individualistic vision, forming a whole in diversity (García, 2011).

In this sense, competencies acquire an inclusive sense, where their development involves the totality of the human being: the intellectual, the experiential, the mental and the spiritual. Thus, educating in competencies implies educating comprehensively in all aspects of life: cultural, social, cognitive, etc. Therefore, one is competent to the extent that one is full, and such fullness is expressed by forming relationships of rational, equitable, respectful and tolerant coexistence of differences that build unity: an expression of full freedom.

It implies leaving neoliberal egocentrism behind to build otherness (Vallejo, 2012), which includes: educating with respect, contributing to the development of social awareness/unity, which today is anomie and meaninglessness. Education is the vital medium where changes emerge, innovations that guarantee not only the well-being of people, but also human well-being, building a better future by forging people - graduates - who are creative and competent, but aware of and committed to the role they play in the historical moment in which they live (Martínez, 2013).

The reality of Competency-Based Education in Mexico

Six years after six years, since the 1970s, the quality of education in the SEN (National Education System) has been the recurrent argument during the changes of government, using pretended mechanisms to give it so-called full compliance through educational reforms. This is a key element of political legitimation, but of unnecessary transformation and progress of substance, making what was new an element (ephemeral or obsolete), while the model in vogue surpasses or disqualifies the previous one. All this, not under the assumption of doing things better, since things are neither done nor are they done better.

This is the ideal scenario for the establishment of international policies imposed by the IDB, WB, OECD, ILO, Tunning Europe project, Tunning LA, paving the way for the application of the competency-based approach:

Quickly and insufficiently to promote change in the official state strategy, with a meagre and biased impact on educational processes. It has not been an approach that links the national reality and its socio-educational needs with the concept of CBE itself. Nor has it delimited its pedagogical meaning and did not propose concrete alternatives for its application in the country's educational sphere, according to its socio-cultural needs (Arellano, 2016, para. 3).

Thus, in September 2012, the Secretary General of the OECD, José Ángel Gurría, delivered to President Enrique Peña Nieto:

The "book" of what should be "taught" in Mexico. However, after more than a dozen approaches (not models, that would be the maximum educational option to which we can still aspire, but which we do not have) in the SEN, no relevance and feasibility study [has] been found that concludes that what Mexicans require to obtain a quality education is CBE (Arellano, 2016, para. 5).

From this perspective, Arellano (2016) mentions that "quality and innovation are supported by the incorporation of advanced instruments (...), following the functioning of the education system, are the product of technological evolution that surpasses the proposals in education and teaching made behind the desk" (para. 7).

In this regard, Delors (1996) cited by Blanco (2013) states that excessive reformism nullifies the intended objective, disarticulating the objectives of the previous ones, without having assimilated the spirit for which they were created, without achieving that:

The agents of [these are] in a position to participate in it. Moreover, [...] many reformers adopt an overly radical or overly theoretical approach and fail to capitalize on the useful lessons learned from experience or to reject the positive *acquis* given [in] the past. This disturbs teachers, parents and pupils and consequently conditions their willingness to accept and subsequently implement reform (p. 22).

By way of recapitulation, in the 1970s, the modular curriculum or curriculum by areas of knowledge, group dynamics, curricular programming by objectives, and the organization of higher education by departmental models prevailed and continued until the 1980s. In the 1990s, teaching under the constructivist approach, the flexible curriculum, the notion of collaborative learning, situated teaching, learning based on problem-solving and the use of simulators in teaching prevailed.

It was not until the first decade of the 21st century that the Competency-Based Education (CBE) model was adopted, imposed under the influence of international organizations, accepting the labour requirements of companies as its guidelines, whose aim was the privatization of (higher) education (Arellano, 2016).

On the other hand, since the application of the PISA test, the internal evaluations of the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) and the PLANEA test, the results have been negative, giving rise to the demonstration of students and teachers, without them being directly responsible, but rather the reflection of bad education, far from an effective national project. Since, at no time, when the new model was established was both the teaching community and specialists in the field considered, implying exclusion of the State's responsibility (Márquez, 2017, Arellano, 2016; Expansion, 2016).

The evil is already done. The implementation of CBE has been a mere response to neoliberal-utilitarian pressures and imposition. Both teachers and students are immersed in this educational model, without having the slightest idea of what competence is, without the slightest intention of how to educate based on it, without understanding why subject content must now be taught in this way. There is nothing left but to row against the current, looking for the appropriate ways to guide students to develop them in a relevant way, under the hopeful premise: that teachers manage to be the ideal means to do so.

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL OUTLOOK

It was commonly thought that a graduate of a professional career, after an excellent academic performance and obtaining good grades, would find it easier to find a well-paid job; however, the first thing a company does when assessing a candidate is to check what their values are. Thus, according to Planels (2013):

Personnel departments subject applicants for vacancies to a series of tests that show how they behave in different critical emotional situations, to see whether the skills they present in their student record were acquired based on attitudes towards life that give them a clear goal of healthy personal and social development (para.2).

Emphasizing:

The school seems not to have understood that message and continues to bet on seriously assessing only cognitive competencies, assigning grades and awarding credits and honors to those who score best in a long series of subjects [...]. The grading of attitudes or values does not appear in the school yellow pages [...] (Planels, 2016, para. 4).

In this sense, Olmedo (2016) believes that both technical and specialized knowledge does not have the expected significance, given that:

They become controlled by an increasingly narrow global elite; on the other, because work processes are so generic that they require no more than an elementary basis and the ability to learn by working. What Karl Marx called "abstract labor" replaces "concrete labor". The "art" or the personal ability of the worker matters less and less because work processes allow anyone to be replaced (para. 7).

Thus, the idea is to start training future workers at an early age, when they are still children or young people. Therefore, the emphasis on education must change, it is no longer so much about learning as such: technical or professional knowledge, but about attitudes, "because what private companies ask of schools is to provide them with docile and malleable personnel, capable of facing critical situations without rebelling" (Olmedo, 2016, para. 8).

Consequently, for companies and skills training, the values and attitudes they wish to promote are a function of docile submission to the will of the business world. That, in a technocratic scheme, critical capacity, i.e. reflective and comprehensive, is of no interest. And, although there is talk of promoting dialogue, the civic

struggle for rights, which young people of past generations led as a rebellion against political and corporate repression, is condemned.

Olmedo (2016) calls it the "pedagogy of the oppressors"; that is, to form a docile and manipulable student, which is why the aim is to eliminate those subjects that help to reflect on social reality, which the business world does not want to continue to be taught: philosophy, history, sociology, etcetera; since for the logic of educational competences, the contents of these courses are dead knowledge, with no use for practical (utilitarian) life; whose interest is oriented more towards the student knowing English and how to handle a computer, than the capacity for logical argumentation or the history of his or her country.

Prospectively, academic qualifications will be devalued, and their validity will be temporary, in a capitalist world that imposes precarious employment on workers. From the logic of professional skills, in the medium term, it will be irrelevant whether the degree says teacher, sociologist or economist, in short. What is essential is that the graduate has a good attitude to adapt to the will of the company.

As Fiori quoted by Freire (1968) says, in a dominant regime where those who work the most are least able to express themselves and the multitudes do not have the conditions to work:

The dominators maintain the monopoly of the word, with which they mystify, massify and dominate. In this situation, the dominated, to speak their word, have to struggle to take it. Learning to take it from those who withhold it and deny it to others is a difficult but essential apprenticeship: it is 'the pedagogy of the oppressed' (Olmedo, 2016, para. 21).

PROPOSAL

1. Returning to the opinion of teacher Llamas (2014) about the social detachment of education and its axiological loss, by art. 3 of the Constitution:

[Education] shall tend to develop harmoniously all the faculties of the human being (...)", therefore, fragmenting knowledge into portions is not the best way to achieve it, nor is subordinating knowledge to know-how, or limiting it only to what is significant for the student, since, with this reductionist vision of education, the level of our students is increasingly lower (para.7).

3. Thus, it is necessary to think about establishing differentiated educational models that take into account the socio-economic conditions of the population, where interculturality prevails as a transversal axis (Krainer and Guerra, 2016), incorporating innovative management and teaching practices that have proven to be effective in various realities in specific international contexts.

4. Raise the need and possibility of building an education-oriented towards the humanization of society, which, as Hidalgo (2013) states, "[ensures] that students acquire the necessary competencies to become subjects of their development, and apply them effectively in the search for constant improvement of their material and non-material conditions of individual and collective life" (p. 2).

5. Following the expression of Latapí (2009) education:

Must be oriented towards the quality of life and not only reflect the ideology of efficiency and business [...] it must be educated to understand pain, one's own and that of others; [...] to affirm hope or to face death with fortitude [...]. Concerning ethics, we must go beyond justice and penetrate the world of gratuitousness, the gift and the gift; [...] the search for meaning in the face of the absurd (p. 304).

6. To build an emancipatory education, in search of a progressive education that develops in opposition to the interests, values and contents of hegemonic globalization, to build a participatory democracy that implements alternative production systems that care for biodiversity and a new labor internationalism (Platero, Del Río, and Celorio, 2016).

7. In the words of Hidalgo (2013) "to train subjects with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are truly necessary [...] to contribute effectively to the process of deep democratization of our society" (p.5).

8. Ensure the development of more complex skills, motivate students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate useful information to reverse the deterioration of their living conditions, teach them to think and read everyday reality to transform it [...], as opposed to rote, mechanical and repetitive education (Hidalgo, 2013).

9. To awaken in students the learning to:

- Be human beings.
- Live and coexist as citizens who are members of a community.
- Unlearn and learn to transform themselves and to transform.
- Learn to govern themselves and to govern.

II. CONCLUSION

• It is naïve, or perhaps perverse, to claim that the literal transfer of models for educational change designed for developed countries will be sufficient to ensure the relevance and pertinence of education in our

country, since such hegemonic models, their technology directly impacts on productive systems and international markets, subjugating emerging economies and causing oppression of the weakest.

- The great risk of CBE is to train students only for performance, under standardized criteria and results, similar to the mass production of goods. It is impossible to homogenize the personalities of individuals since they contain within themselves a whole loaded with cultural, social, psychological, emotional and cognitive experiences that cannot be pigeonholed into a model with a fixed structure.
- The level of consumerism to which every human being is exposed today is overwhelming and leads to egocentrism. CBE runs the serious risk of inducing the spread of this, since it offers training with a view to students achieving high levels of performance, better than others, according to the demands or requirements of the productive sector for which they have been prepared, used by companies and also by educational institutions.
- Educating through competencies includes the bonus of life training, without being reduced to the fulfilment of a specific task, but rather to the constructive awareness of a society that lives under the volatility of knowledge or uncertainty. Although technology, with its advances, has made great contributions to humanity, it cannot replace the essence of human value, since it does not become obsolete.
- If we want to have thinking and critical citizens, with the mission of building a better society, it is necessary to begin by rescuing knowledge that has been eliminated from the curriculum and to return to methods with which the student truly learns, guaranteeing a truly integral education.
- Many teachers do not have a clear idea of why they should or have to change their teaching style to a competency-based model. This is because they are also unaware of the basis on which they are based and the impact it has on the present or the immediate future.
- How the Mexican state has implemented the CBE model has been without due premeditation, without appealing to the real conditions of citizens, teachers, institutions, educational management and the entrenched trade unionism that make its effective application impossible.
- Educating by competencies implies, first of all, learning to guide or educate by competencies; that is, changing one's mentality, one's own culture, leaving behind archaic schemes to make way for new ones that inspire a rethinking of one's work. In other words, an awareness of work as a trainer and forger of people who in the distant future will play a preponderant role in Mexican society.
- The educational model in question propagates exclusion, discrimination, insecurity and violence, where private interest is opposed to the common good, injustice is opposed to peace. In this way, the capitalist system, by replacing universal values with competitive individualism, simulation and complicity, is sustained by a hierarchy of ignominy, while the political classes divide up the positions of power and public resources, impoverishing the majority and burying the most vulnerable in misery.
- Finally, much remains to be reflected upon, and even more to be done. What is certain is that amid the uncertainty of training students with skills that will enable them to perform effectively, but with a clear awareness of being more humane towards themselves, in solidarity with their fellows and committed to the living environment in which they develop. Those public policies are established for social growth, taking into account citizen participation, taking into account both strengths and weaknesses, threats and areas of opportunity; that they are inclusive and not exclusive.

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