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COMPETENCY-BASED ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF MAHARASHTRA: TEACHERS' PREPAREDNESS, CHALLENGES, AND CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the theoretical and practical dimensions of competency-based assessment (CBA) as it is being adopted in secondary schools of Maharashtra, within the broader vision of the National Education Policy 2020. It explores how far teachers feel prepared to shift from marks-based testing to outcome-based, skill-oriented evaluation, and it identifies the structural and attitudinal barriers that slow this transition. Drawing on Indian education literature and state curriculum documents, the paper builds a conceptual framework connecting policy intent, teacher capacity, and classroom practice. It argues that CBA in Maharashtra remains partially implemented, constrained by training gaps, workload pressure, and an entrenched examination culture. The paper concludes with suggestions for structured teacher training, contextualised rubrics, and phased monitoring to strengthen genuine competency-based learning in the state.

KEYWORDS: Keywords not detected.

Competency-based assessment; NEP 2020; Maharashtra secondary education; teacher preparedness; classroom implementation; formative evaluation; State Curriculum Framework

INTRODUCTION

Indian school education has, for decades, relied heavily on summative, memory-based examinations to judge a student's worth. This approach, while administratively convenient, has often failed to capture what a learner can actually do with knowledge in real situations. The National Education Policy 2020 responds to this concern directly by calling for a shift from rote assessment towards competency-based assessment, where the focus moves from how much a student remembers to how well a student can apply, analyse, and create using the knowledge gained. Maharashtra, being one of the larger and more diverse states in terms of school density, medium of instruction, and socio-economic spread, offers a rich setting to study how this policy vision is translating into everyday classroom reality.

The State Curriculum Framework prepared in line with NEP 2020 places considerable emphasis on learning outcomes, holistic report cards, and continuous and comprehensive evaluation. However, policy documents alone cannot guarantee classroom change. Teachers are the final link

in this chain, and their preparedness, confidence, and working conditions decide whether competency-based assessment becomes a meaningful practice or remains a paper exercise repeated during examination time. This paper therefore looks closely at three interconnected questions relevant to secondary schools in Maharashtra. First, what does competency-based assessment mean theoretically, and how does it differ from the traditional testing model that most teachers grew up practising themselves. Second, what specific challenges do secondary school teachers in Maharashtra face while attempting this shift. Third, how is implementation actually unfolding in the classroom, and what support structures could strengthen it further.

Theoretical Framework of Competency-Based Assessment

Competency-based assessment rests on the idea that learning should be judged through observable, demonstrable abilities rather than through recall alone. Unlike traditional testing, which is largely confined to the knowledge domain, CBA works across three connected domains, namely knowledge, skill, and disposition or values. Knowledge refers to the conceptual understanding a student holds, skill refers to the ability to apply that understanding in a task or problem, and disposition refers to attitudes such as collaboration, ethical reasoning, and persistence that shape how a student uses knowledge and skill in real life. In the Maharashtra context, this framework aligns closely with the graded, outcome-based approach recommended in the State Curriculum Framework, which asks teachers to move away from single end-of-term papers and instead build a continuous picture of a learner's growth.

The diagram below sets out how national policy, state curriculum guidance, and classroom assessment are theoretically connected. It shows that competency-based assessment is not a standalone classroom technique but the outcome of a layered policy-to-practice chain, where each domain of learning feeds directly into how teachers plan their classroom implementation.

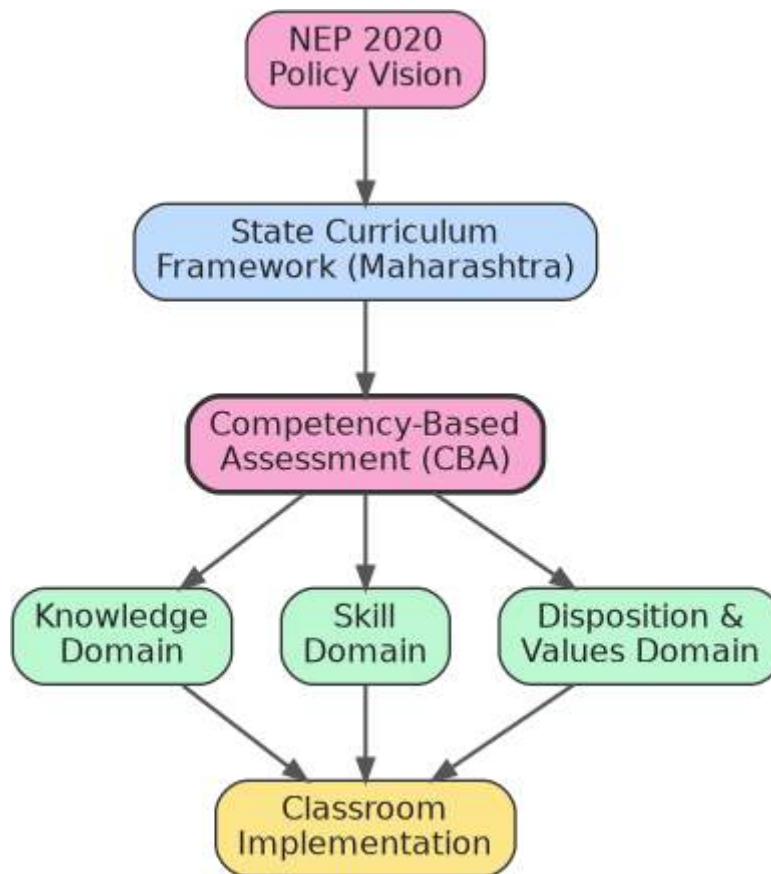


Figure 1: Conceptual flow from NEP 2020 to classroom competency-based assessment

It is worth noting that this theoretical model assumes a fairly linear and well-resourced pathway from policy to practice. In reality, Indian classrooms, and Maharashtra's secondary classrooms in particular, are far more layered, with wide variation in school type, medium of instruction, and available infrastructure. This gap between the clean theoretical model and messy ground reality is precisely what makes teacher preparedness such an important variable to study.

Teachers' Preparedness for Competency-Based Assessment

Preparedness here refers to a combination of conceptual clarity, technical skill in designing assessment tools, and psychological confidence to depart from familiar testing routines. Many secondary school teachers in Maharashtra were themselves trained and assessed under a largely examination-centric system, and this personal experience shapes how comfortable they feel designing rubrics, performance tasks, or portfolio-based evaluation. Several teachers report that while they understand the broad philosophy of competency-based assessment as explained in orientation sessions, they struggle when it comes to translating a learning outcome into a fair, gradable classroom task, particularly for larger sections with sixty or more students, which remains common in many government and aided schools across the state.

Preparedness is also shaped by subject context. Language and environmental studies teachers often find it comparatively easier to design competency-based tasks because these subjects naturally allow for projects, presentations, and applied writing. Mathematics and science teachers, on the other hand, frequently express difficulty in moving beyond numerical testing towards demonstrable problem-solving or inquiry-based tasks, largely because they have fewer contextualised exemplars to draw upon and limited laboratory or digital resources in many schools, especially in rural talukas of Maharashtra.

Key Challenges in Classroom Adoption

The challenges facing teachers are not isolated but interconnected, forming a web of constraints that collectively slow down genuine competency-based practice. Training exposure remains uneven, with many teachers receiving only short orientation workshops rather than sustained, hands-on capacity building. High student-teacher ratios in secondary sections limit the time a teacher can spend observing individual performance tasks or providing personalised feedback. Many teachers also report limited familiarity with rubric design, often reducing competency-based assessment to a renamed version of the same objective-type test, marked against vague descriptors rather than clear performance indicators.

Beyond these structural issues lies a deeper attitudinal challenge, namely the persistence of an exam-oriented mindset among students, parents, and even school administrations, all of whom continue to measure success primarily through board examination results. This creates a disconnect

where teachers may value competency-based assessment in principle but feel pressure to prioritise content coverage and test practice as the final board examination approaches. Added to this is the diversity of medium of instruction across Marathi, English, Urdu, and other languages used in Maharashtra schools, which affects how uniformly training materials and assessment resources reach every classroom.

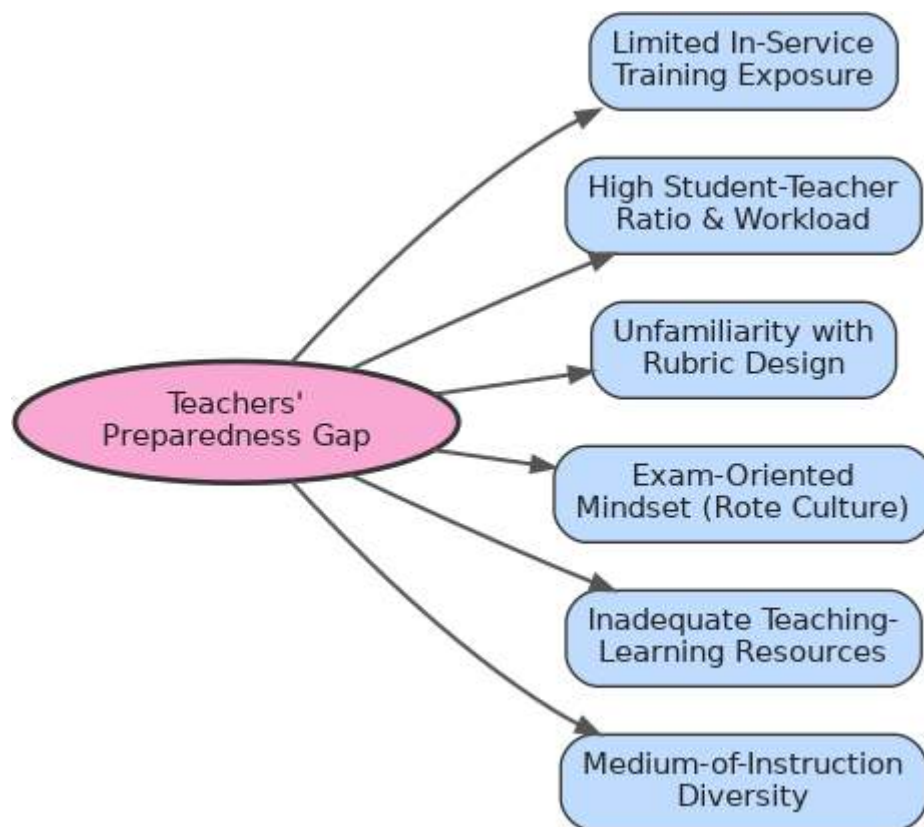


Figure 2: Interconnected challenges affecting teachers' readiness for competency-based assessment

These challenges rarely act in isolation. A teacher facing a large class size is also more likely to fall back on familiar objective-type testing simply to manage the marking load, which in turn reduces opportunities to practise rubric design, further weakening confidence over time. Addressing one constraint without attention to the others is therefore unlikely to produce durable change.

Classroom Implementation: An Iterative Cycle

Where competency-based assessment is being implemented with some success in Maharashtra's secondary schools, it tends to follow a recognisable cycle rather than a single event. Teachers begin by identifying the specific learning outcome expected from the syllabus or State Curriculum

Framework, then design a task or classroom activity aligned to that competency, such as a group project, oral presentation, or applied problem set. This is followed by classroom administration, where the teacher observes the task being carried out, and rubric-based recording, where performance is documented against pre-agreed indicators rather than a single numerical score. The final and often neglected stage is feedback and remedial action, where the teacher uses the evidence gathered to guide the student towards improvement, before the cycle begins again with the next learning outcome.

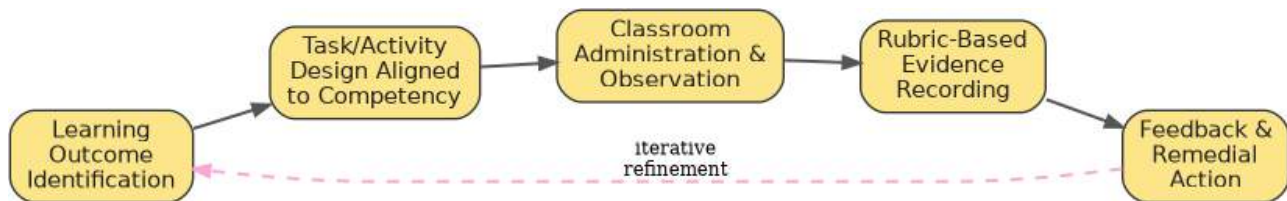


Figure 3: The iterative classroom implementation cycle of competency-based assessment

This cyclical understanding matters because it treats competency-based assessment as an ongoing classroom process rather than a one-time examination event. Schools that have shown stronger implementation in Maharashtra tend to be those where school leadership actively protects time for this cycle, for instance by building project weeks into the academic calendar or by encouraging peer observation among teachers, rather than treating competency-based assessment as an additional burden layered on top of existing examination schedules.

Discussion and Way Forward

Taken together, the theoretical framework, teacher preparedness, and observed challenges point towards a transition that is genuinely underway in Maharashtra but still uneven and fragile. Strengthening this transition would require sustained, subject-specific training rather than one-time orientation, so that mathematics and science teachers receive as much practical support in designing performance tasks as language teachers currently enjoy. School-level moderation exercises, where teachers jointly review sample student work against a shared rubric, could help build shared understanding of what counts as evidence of a competency, reducing the current tendency to treat competency-based assessment as a relabelled objective test. Finally, easing the pressure of board examination culture, even gradually, by giving continuous assessment genuine weight in promotion and reporting decisions, would help align classroom incentives with the spirit of NEP 2020 rather than working against it.

CONCLUSION

Competency-based assessment represents a meaningful shift in how Indian education, and Maharashtra's secondary schools in particular, define and measure learning success. This paper has argued that while policy intent under NEP 2020 and the State Curriculum Framework is clear and well theorised, classroom reality is shaped by uneven teacher preparedness, structural constraints such as class size and resource availability, and a persistent examination-oriented culture among stakeholders. The conceptual framework, challenge map, and implementation cycle presented here together suggest that competency-based assessment cannot be strengthened through

policy documents or short workshops alone. It requires sustained subject-specific training, school-level moderation practices, and a gradual rebalancing of how continuous assessment is valued alongside board examinations. Future research could usefully extend this theoretical discussion through empirical fieldwork across Maharashtra's diverse districts, comparing urban, rural, and tribal-belt schools, to build a more granular, evidence-based understanding of what genuine competency-based assessment looks like in practice.

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