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**Integration of New Competency Skills in Teacher Education  
Curriculum at the National Open University of Nigeria  
to Meet Learners' Needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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**Abstract**

This paper discussed the integration of new competency skills in the curriculum of teacher education at the National Open University of Nigeria. Future learners were characterized as constructive thinkers that are self-directed and individuals who would seek information to create new ideas. It was pointed out that learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are expected to be effective communicators and collaborative scholars who will share knowledge to improve the society. They will therefore have to be engaged in the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, linked, chat room and understand how each medium could be used to enhance learning. The purpose of integrating the new competency skills in the teacher education curriculum is to meet the needs of learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The challenges of pursuing this were mentioned while some of the suggestions identified included the need for regular review of curriculum content and feedback from employers of labour on performance of graduates in the work place.

**Keywords:** Generic competency skills, Specific competency skills, Quality education offerings

## **Introduction**

Poor methods of teacher preparation in most institutions of learning often lead to ill-equipped products (Jegade, 2005). This assertion has for sometime created serious concern for education planners and teachers in particular moreso when graduates have to undergo intensive training and retraining in the workplace before they are able to perform duties that are expected of them. Obviously, this can be interpreted as a disconnect between the workplace and institutions of learning which must be addressed. It was however, suggested by Ipaye (2005), that part of the solution to poor performance by young employees in the workplace may lie with schools providing a more relevant work oriented education that would provide skills of language, numeracy, team work and technics to access the labour market. It is also expected that schools would be able to provide the mechanism and leverage for the internationalization of educational offerings so that graduates would be able to move with their certificates across country borders and be employed.

According to Tchombe, (2010), there would only be improvement in the standard of acquiring useful knowledge when the paradigm is shifted from teacher dominated classroom practices to that of partnership between the teacher, the learners and their peers. Tessema (2006) subscribed to a classroom where the learner is seen as an active and socially constructed agent. The classroom is therefore expected to be a place for learning and creative activities through which learners would analyze and interpret their own experiences, make connections between these experiences and those of others, and in the process, reflect on both their consciousness and understanding. The afore mentioned assertions constitute a clear pointer to the fact that academic programmes in schools should reflect the needs of the society and mirror the changing demands in the workplace which today is skills-driven.

## **Issues that Would Determine Acquisition of the New Competency Skills**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is important because it is full of challenges that require reform in teaching, learning and curriculum development that will necessitate the acquisition of new competency skills. Among some of the issues to be considered for the development and acquisition of the new competency skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are:

- Teaching contents and materials that should reflect change in the mindset of the learners who would perceive change as an inevitable reality for development. This would determine the kind of relevant skills which learners need to possess.
- Information and communication technology as a crucial tool for adoption and use with emphasis on teaching, learning, scholarship (research) with transmission of reports and its implementation.
- Openness in the method of transmitting knowledge which requires institutions of learning to come out of the insulator mode of operation, be liberal, open minded and always make the system for teaching and learning open. There would be a need for collaboration with organizations who wish to exchange ideas and contribute to the activities of teaching and learning.
- Crave to create minds that would explore areas which would bring about positive and progressive change in the society. This would require use of lifelong learning approach to

education for continuous improvement in all institutions of learning particularly in the universities and other educational institutions.

- Push to review the emphasis that has long been placed on the compartmentalization of subjects into arts/science, etc. which for sometime has made teaching and learning to be redundant instead of exploring and imbibing the interdisciplinary approach.

### **Identification and Description of Competency Skills**

Beneitone (2012) in his report on the Tuning Africa Project, identified two types of competences. The first one is the generic competences which refer to attributes and capabilities that are expected from graduates in any subject area. According to him, such competences are in the area of capacity to learn and capacity for analysis and synthesis. The second group of competences which give identity and consistency to particular degrees in teacher education programmes, are clearly linked to the world of professional practice. He further explained that in order to make graduates better equipped for the rapidly changing work environments, competences must evolve in conceptual terms in higher education. Hitherto, the nomenclature has evolved over time to include the terms Personal Transferable Skills reported by Drummond et al. (1998), Core and Generic Skills (Bennett, Dunne & Carré, 1999), Generic Capabilities (Bowden and Marton, 2000), Graduate Capability Development (Kift, 2002), Graduate Attributes Movement (Chanock, 2003), Graduate Skills (Chanock, 2004) and Generic Graduate Attributes (Barrie, 2005, 2006, 2007), Gairín and García-San-Pedro (2010). All the afore mentioned studies indicated that competence is the ability to successfully address the demands of contexts of uncertainty with the product as an original and global act; whereas according to Bowden and Marton (2002), specific competences should have the following features:

- a) be agreed to by a university community;
- b) be developed at university;
- c) transcend disciplinary knowledge;
- d) prepare graduates as agents for the social good in an uncertain future

### **Competences for Teacher Education**

The process of defining competences within the context of Teacher Education in Africa was inspired by Nelson Mandela who stated that, “education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world”. These words suggest that teachers have a great responsibility to serve as agents of change. Similarly, Beneitone (2011) posited that in the process of defining specific competences, the following should be borne in mind: (i) what change is needed in the society? (ii) What change do teachers need to mediate? There are at least two areas where change is greatly needed particularly in Africa.

These areas are:

- Socio-economic development and growth, with a precise focus on fighting poverty; and
- Conflict resolution and reconciliation for sustainable and peaceful living environments across the continent.

Seventeen key competences were identified by Tuning Africa Project (2012) as follows:

1. Subject knowledge /understanding the discipline
2. Applying Information and Communications Technologies
3. Developing resources and instructional materials
4. Critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, reflection
5. Ability to assess and evaluate, including self and others
6. Counsel, guide and resolve conflict (peace education) for complex situation
7. Interpret curriculum documents, information and sources, and see them as a roadmap
8. Project management
9. Be able to choose, use and design innovative teaching and learning strategies
10. Be able to carry out research (observe, describe, analyze, ...)
11. Understand and apply policies and regulations
12. Ability to identify and deal with students with special needs, gifted and otherwise
13. Ability to work in a team
14. Professionalism, ethics and values: ability to understand and abide by the ethics and values of the teaching profession
15. Ability to become a lifelong learner
16. Ability to develop competencies for employability in students (ability to enhance employability in one's own profession)
17. Ability to inspire self-confidence in the learners

Table 1: Student Population on the Basis of Teacher Education Programmes at the National Open University of Nigeria

S/N	Programmes	Number of Students
1	BA (Ed) Early Childhood Education	732
2	BA (Ed)English	1,090
3	BA (Ed)French	30
4	BA (Ed) Primary Education	1,411
5	B.Sc. (Ed) Biology	614
6	B. Sc (Ed) Chemistry	143
7	B.Sc (Ed) Computer Science	325
8	B.Sc. (Ed) Integrated Science	80
9	B. Sc. (Ed) Mathematics	276
10	B.Sc (Ed) Physics	103
11	B.Sc (Ed) Agricultural Science	274
12	B.Sc. (Ed) Business Education	1,968
13	M.Ed Educational Admin. & Planning	2,580
14	M.Ed Educational Technology	340
15	MEd Science Education	408
16	PhD Science Education	1

Total number of course materials in the National Open University of Nigeria is 1419 out of which 787 are made available to OER and for anybody to access. Study materials (in all formats, i.e, print, CD, Braille, web- based) are also available in all the teacher education courses. Table 1 above shows the number of programme in which teachers are produced to necessitate curricular review for the integration of the new competency skills.

### **New Competency Skills**

New competency skills refer to a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding and abilities that are responsive to the changing needs of the society which learners have built during a period of study. Some of these competency skills are,

- Ability to read, write and compute with ICT skills to reflect the needs and challenges of today
- Ability to use social media effectively for learning
- Use of initiative
- Creativity
- Determination to succeed
- Need for adventurism
- Self analysis
- Critical thinking

- Discovery
- Ability to work alone when necessary in an environment that is independent of close supervision
- Ability to work in group for acceptance of idea and exchange of knowledge.
- Ability to pose questions
- Investigate issues
- Be self-directed,
- Create new ideas
- Be an effective communicator ,

Acquisition of the above skills will entail effective use of social media such as facebook, twitter, YouTube, linked, and chat room should be encouraged. By this, learners would be exposed to becoming effective communicators and collaborative scholars who will share knowledge to improve the society.

### **Strategy for Integrating New Competency Skills in Teacher Education Curriculum Development in the National Open University of Nigeria**

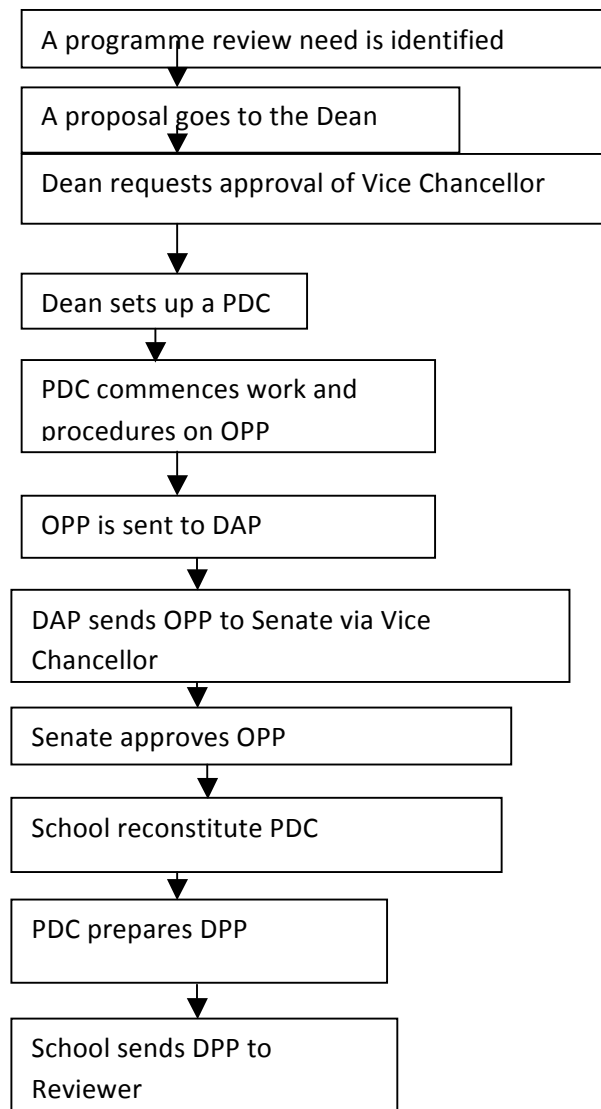
The competences enumerated above indicate a need to modernize and broaden the scope of Teacher Education curriculum so that it can become responsive to the professional needs of teachers and fulfill the expectation of students, parents, employers of labour and the society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This has to be carried out in line with the model of curriculum reform proposed by Posner, Strike and Hewson (1982 quoted in Chiromo (2011)) where it was stated that, “four conditions must be met for the successful implementation of a curriculum reform, namely:

- stakeholders (students, parents, employers and educators) must be dissatisfied with the existing curriculum and start to agitate for an alternative curriculum;
- for the stakeholders to accept the alternative curriculum, it must be intelligible, i.e., it should make sense to the stakeholders;
- the alternative curriculum must be plausible and appear to have the capacity to solve the problems generated by its predecessors; and
- the alternative curriculum must be fruitful, opening up new areas of inquiry.

The following is a description of the steps to take in carrying out the integration of the new competency skills in the teacher education curriculum of the National Open University of Nigeria:

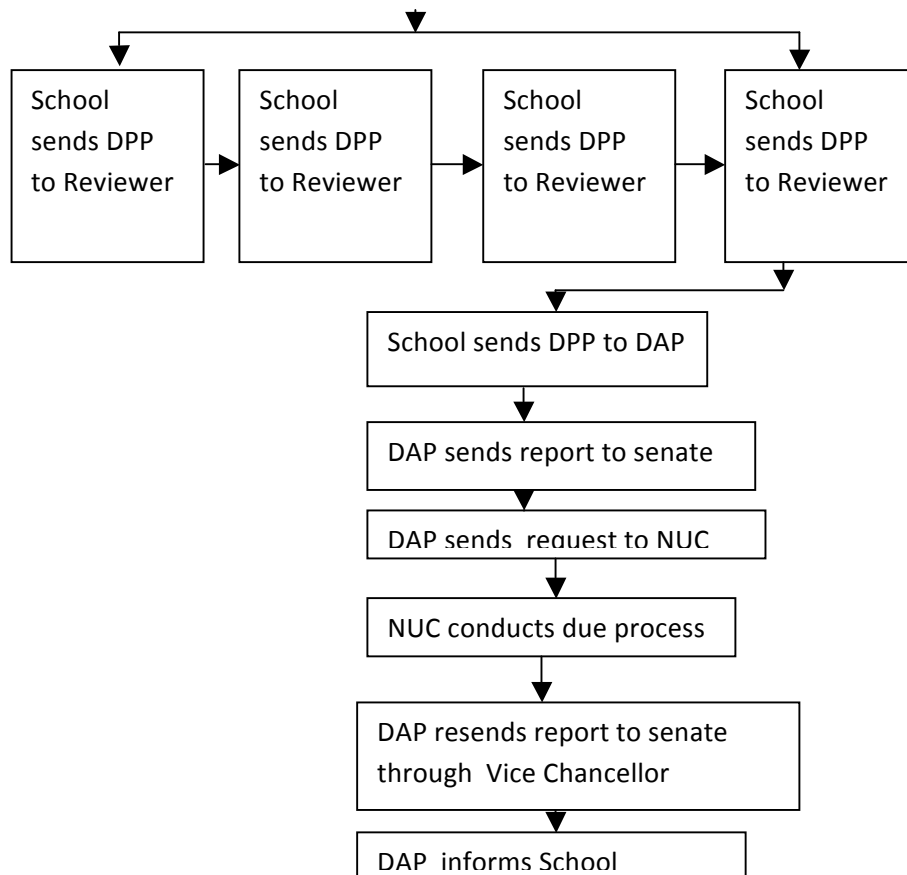
### Sequential steps in the Programme Curricular Development Process in the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

Figure 1: Outline Programme Proposal (OPP)



Source: Directorate of Academic Planning, NOUN, 2014

Figure 2: Detailed Programme Proposal (DPP)



*Source: Directorate of Academic Planning, NOUN, 2014*

Updating the teacher education curriculum is done by reviewing the programme at the request of the Head of programme to the Dean of School giving reasons why a review is necessary. Figure 1 above is a summary presentation of the procedure starting with the Outlined Programme Proposal (OPP) while figure 2 is on the Detailed Programme Proposal (DPP). The exercise which starts from the school requires the approval of the University senate for the review to be acceptable and to take effect. With the above approach one would therefore be sure that, before an academic programme is rolled out, course components are adequate and acceptable to the stakeholders.



Another strategy is structuring Tutor-Marked Assignment to reflect emphasis on the development of competences among trainee teachers. Competences can also be brazen up by ensuring that substantial percentage of practical/ project work and laboratory activities are equivalent in weight to other academic activities in teaching and learning. The contents for the course materials should be transformed properly to reflect distance mode and ensure that the unit structure is followed in the following ways:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Objectives
- 3) Content Exposition
- 4) Revision Questions
- 5) In-text Questions
- 6) Summary
- 7) Terminal Exercises
- 8) Supplementary Materials
- 9) Assignments
- 10) Suggested Readings/Reference Materials
- 11) Learning Activities
- 12) Key Words

### **Challenges**

Some of the challenges that could crop up in the process of integrating new competency skills in the teacher education development are:

- Co-operation of academics in teacher education to quickly embrace need to review the curriculum to include the competency skills
- Timely co-operation of employers of labour to provide feedback on the performance of teachers on the field of practice
- Unstable internet connectivity for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) exercises.

### **Suggestions on How to Surmount the Challenges**

To surmount the above challenges, it is important to consider the following points:

- Need for regular review of curriculum content to ensure that it is responsive to competency skills needed by learners.
- Need to include employers of labour and students in curriculum development
- Need to be current in the use of modern technology for education
- Encourage learners' use of the skills well before graduation
- Request for regular feedback from employers of labour on performance of graduates in the workplace to confirm relevance of competency skills acquired.

## **Conclusion**

The integration of competency skills in teacher education development is crucial because it would ensure the production of teachers that would be acceptable to employers and satisfy learners' needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century society.

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