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THE COMPETENCIES OF THE MODERN TEACHER

Abstract

The principal aim of this study is to consider the competencies of the modern teacher. To understand 21st-century instructional skills, we researched the following issues: students' skills; levels of teachers' professional growth; teachers' pedagogical culture; pedagogical innovations, and 21st-century teaching competencies.

Keywords: teaching competencies, cultural competency, talent, innovation, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving

*Inspire creativity, critical thinking,
collaboration and communication
so that students are ready for tomorrow's world.*

We often hear about 21st-century learners and the knowledge and skills our students will need in the future. What about teachers? What instructional skills will 21st-century teachers need to prepare our students? How are they different from the skills teachers needed in the past?

In recent years, the quality of education has significantly changed. If, previously, the university's major aim was that of providing students with certain types of knowledge that they were expected to apply later, universities today focuses primarily on 'life skills'. Our aim is to teach students to obtain knowledge by themselves and to work in ways that enable them to come up with new ideas. Generating new ideas is a key tenet of modern society. We need professionals who are *culturally competent, talented, innovative and creative problem-solvers, skilled and critical thinkers*. New technologies give an opportunity to encourage *critical thinking*.

We must provide students with skills that will help them work collaboratively and sensitively in a team, become decision-makers, plan and manage their time effectively, listen to one another and choose the right communication strategy at the right time. Thereby, we have come to understand that, to meet these new teaching requirements, we need 21st-century skills.

Teacher competence

Before addressing the meaning of teacher competence, we must first establish the meaning of competence. Competency is a term used extensively by different people in different contexts; hence, it is defined in different ways. Teacher education and job performance are two contexts in which this term is used. Competencies are the requirements of a "competency-based" teacher education and include the **knowledge, skills and values** a teacher-trainee must demonstrate for successful completion of a teacher education programme (Houstain, 1987 cited in 1).

Some characteristics of a competency are as follows:

1. A competency consists of one or more skills whose mastery would enable the attainment of the competency.
2. A competency is linked to all three of the domains under which performance can be assessed: knowledge, skills and attitude.
3. Possessing a performance dimension, competencies are observable and demonstrable.
4. Since competencies are observable, they are also measurable. It is possible to assess a competency from a teacher's performance. Teaching competencies may require equal amounts of knowledge, skill and attitude, but some will not. Some competencies may involve more knowledge than skill or attitude, whereas, some competencies may be more skill or performance based.

Some scholars see "competence" as a combination of knowledge, skills and behavior used to improve performance, or as the state or quality of being adequately qualified and capable of performing a given role. The Occupational Competency movement initiated by David McClelland in the 1960s sought to move away from traditional attempts to describe competency in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes and to focus instead on those specific values, traits, and motivations (i.e. relatively enduring characteristics of people) that are found to consistently distinguish outstanding from typical performance in a given job or role. The term "competence" first appeared in an article authored by Craig C. Lundberg in 1970 (cited in 2) titled "Planning the Executive Development Program", and then in David McClelland's seminal 1973 treatise entitled, "Testing for Competence Rather than for Intelligence" (cited in 2). The term has since been popularized by Richard Boyatzis and many others.

Student skills

The manifold complexities of today's society severely challenge individuals. What do these demands imply for those key competencies that individuals need to acquire? Defining such competencies can enable us to identify overarching goals for educational systems and lifelong learning and to evaluate the range of competencies for the 21st-century teacher. At first, we need to understand the ***skills and sub-skills students require for successful communication and personal development, those that should assure them a competitive advantage in life:***

- *Thinking and Problem-Solving*
 - thinking logically
 - estimating and guessing
 - turning problems into opportunities
- *Self Direction and Learning*
 - developing memory
 - being assertive
 - making personal changes
- *Collaboration*
 - persuading others
 - working in a team
 - discussing alternatives
 - reaching compromises

- *Information and Research*
 - understanding graphs
 - taking notes on a text
 - writing surveys
 - reporting information
- *Organization and Planning*
 - making plans
 - managing time
 - setting personal goals (cited in 3).

Teaching competencies

A competency is more than just knowledge and skills; it involves the ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. Competency is essential to an educator's pursuit of excellence.

Teachers need a wide range of competencies in order to face the complex challenges of today's world. Teaching competency is an inherent element of an effective training process, one that aspires to contribute to the welfare of a particular country or the world, itself.

The central figures in the educational process are teachers. The success of training and education depends on their preparation, erudition and performance quality.

The teaching skills and life-long learning competencies of professional teachers comprise the following:

to perform complex pedagogical duties;

to be well-spoken, in good mental and physical health, stable and tolerant;

to have a propensity to work with the younger generation, good communicative and observational skills, tact, a vivid imagination, and leadership (Shmelev, 2002).

During their professional careers, teachers pass through the following ***levels of professional growth*** to achieve the acme of professional competency.

1st level: *pedagogical ability* – characterized by detailed knowledge of the subject;

2nd level: *pedagogical skill* – perfected teaching skill;

3rd level: *pedagogical creativity* – marked by implementation of new methods and techniques into educational activities;

4th level: *pedagogical innovation* – distinguished by the incorporation of essentially new, progressive theoretical ideas, principles and methods of training and education (Buharkova, Gorshkova, 2007).

Schools of education have acknowledged the urgency to develop culturally competent teachers. **Pedagogical culture** is, therefore, an integral part of a competent teacher. Pedagogical culture consists of three components:

an axiological component, meaning teacher acceptance of the values of pedagogical work;

a technological component, which facilitates solving different pedagogical tasks;

a heuristic component, which entails setting goals, planning, analyzing and self-critiquing; this is the creative part of pedagogical activity (Ivanitsky, 1998).

Pedagogical innovations

Educational innovation has drawn increasing attention around the world, and many countries have already embarked on educational reforms that aim to change both the goals and practices of education. Expectations that such innovations can be leveraged or supported by incorporating ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) into the learning and teaching process are widespread. Such innovations are fundamentally changing students' learning experiences.

Innovation alters the pedagogical system, improving the teaching process and its results. Among the aims of innovation are increased motivation in teaching and educational activity, an increased volume of material studied per lesson, accelerated training, and more effective time management.

The introduction of more progressive methods, the use of active teaching forms, and new training technologies are regular spheres of innovation.

Genuine innovations emerge from new knowledge of the processes of human development, providing new theoretical approaches and practical technologies for achieving optimal results. Pedagogical innovation demands the replacement of educational paradigms.

Another important component for the competent teacher is pedagogical experience. **Advanced pedagogical experience** can be transferred and passed on to others, as well as reproduced in training techniques and methods so as to be used by fellow teachers, providing high results without additional time expenditure (Kan-Kalik, Nikandrov, 1990).

21st-century competencies have been defined as the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be competitive in the 21st century workforce. Teacher preparation and professional development should be reworked to incorporate training in teaching key competencies. The 21st-century teacher needs to know how to provide technologically supported learning opportunities for students and know how technology can support student learning.

21st-century teaching competencies

1. Teachers demonstrate leadership

a. Teachers lead in the classroom by:

- evaluating student progress using a variety of assessment-data measuring goals;
- drawing on appropriate data to develop classroom and instructional plans;
- maintaining a safe and orderly classroom that facilitates student learning; and
- positive management of student behavior, effective communication to defuse and deescalate disruptive or dangerous behavior, and safe and appropriate seclusion and restraint techniques.

b. Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school by:

- engaging in collaborative and collegial professional learning activities;
- identifying the characteristics or critical elements of a school improvement plan; and
- displaying an ability to use appropriate data to identify areas of need that should be addressed in a school improvement plan.

- c. *Teachers lead the teaching profession by:*
 - participating in professional development and growth activities; and
 - developing professional relationships and networks.
 - d. *Teachers advocate for schools and students by:*
 - implementing and adhering to policies and practices positively affecting students' learning.
 - e. *Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards.*
- 2. Teachers establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students**
- a. *Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults by:*
 - maintaining a positive and nurturing learning environment.
 - b. *Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world by:*
 - using materials or lessons that counteract stereotypes and acknowledge the contributions of all cultures;
 - incorporating different points of view in instruction; and
 - understanding the influence of diversity and planning instruction accordingly.
 - c. *Teachers treat students as individuals by:*
 - maintaining a learning environment that conveys high expectations of every student.
 - d. *Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs by:*
 - cooperating with specialists and using resources to support the special learning needs of all students; and
 - using research-verified strategies to provide effective learning activities for students with special needs.
 - e. *Teachers work collaboratively with families of students and other significant adults by:*
 - communicating and collaborating with the home and community for the benefit of students.
- 3. Teachers know the content they teach**
- a. *Teachers develop and apply lessons based on an effective course of study by:*
 - integrating effective literacy instruction throughout the curriculum and across content areas to enhance student learning.
 - b. *Teachers honor the content appropriate to their teaching specialty by:*
 - demonstrating an appropriate level of content knowledge in their specialty; and
 - encouraging students to investigate the content area to expand their knowledge and satisfy their natural curiosity.
 - c. *Teachers show they recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/discipline by:*
 - demonstrating a knowledge of their subject by relating it to other disciplines; and
 - relating global awareness of the subject.
 - d. *Teachers make their instructions relevant to students by:*
 - integrating 21st-century skills and content in instruction.

4. Teachers facilitate learning for their students

- a. *Teachers show they know the ways in which learning takes place and the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students by:*
 - identifying developmental levels of individual students and planning instruction accordingly; and
 - assessing and using those resources needed to address the strengths and weaknesses of students.
- b. *Teachers plan instruction appropriate to their students by:*
 - collaborating with colleagues to monitor student performance and making instruction responsive to cultural differences and individual learning needs.
- c. *Teachers show their acumen and versatility by:*
 - using a variety of methods and materials suited to the needs of all students.
- d. *Teachers display their awareness of technology's potential to enhance learning by:*
 - integrating technology into their instruction to maximize student learning.
- e. *Teachers help students grow as thinking individuals by:*
 - integrating specific instruction that helps students develop the ability to apply processes and strategies for critical thinking and problem solving.
- f. *Teachers help students to work in teams and develop leadership qualities by:*
 - organizing learning teams for the purpose of developing cooperation and student leadership.
- g. *Teachers reach their students best by:*
 - using a variety of methods to communicate effectively with all pupils; and
 - consistently encouraging and supporting students to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively.
- h. *Teachers best assess what students have learned by:*
 - using multiple indicators, both formative and summative, to monitor and evaluate student progress and to inform instruction; and
 - providing evidence that students are attaining 21st-century knowledge, skills and dispositions.

5. Teachers reflect on their practice

- a. *Teachers analyze student learning by:*
 - using data to provide ideas about what can be done to improve student learning.
- b. *Teachers link professional growth to their professional goals by:*
 - participating in recommended activities for professional learning and development.
- c. *Teachers function effectively in a complex, dynamic environment by:*
 - using a variety of research-verified approaches to improve teaching and learning (cited in 8).

Conclusion

Ideally, then, educators should demonstrate the following competencies:

1) *effective classroom management*, maximizing efficiency, maintaining discipline and morale, promoting teamwork, planning, communicating, focusing on results, evaluating progress, and making constant adjustments. A range of strategies should be employed to promote positive relationships, cooperation, and purposeful learning. Organizing, assigning, and managing time, space and activities should ensure the active and equitable engagement of students in productive tasks.

2) *effective teaching practices*, representing differing viewpoints, theories, “ways of knowing” and methods of inquiry in the teaching of subject matter concepts. Multiple teaching and learning strategies should help engage students in active learning opportunities that promote the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance capabilities while helping them assume responsibility for identifying and using learning resources.

3) *effective assessment*, incorporating formal tests; responses to quizzes; evaluation of classroom assignments, student performances and projects, and standardized achievement tests to understand what students have learned. Assessment strategies should be developed that involve learners in self-assessment activities to help them become aware of their strengths and needs and encourage them to set personal goals for learning.

4) *technology skills*, knowing when and how to use current educational technology, as well as the most appropriate type and level of technology to maximize student learning.

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