A Competency-Based Model for Teacher Identity

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Abstract:
The nature of teacher education curriculum determines the quality and competence of teachers churned out into the field of practice. Teacher competence is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of any curriculum proposal. This paper develops and discusses a competency-based model for teacher identity. It discusses four levels of teachers' professional competence, namely, professional knowledge, values, skills and reflective practice. The dimensions of each rubric or level of competence, as it relates to teachers' professional identity are also discussed. Curricular and policy implications associated with all the dimensions of teachers' professional competence have been highlighted. These include the need for the training and retraining of pre-teachers and in-service teachers through seminars and workshops, policies that offer teachers opportunities for continuous professional development and integrating certain aspects of learning into teacher education programmes.

Keywords: Teacher identity, professional capacity, knowledge, values, skills, reflection

1. Introduction
The successful implementation of any curriculum, irrespective of the level, whether basic, secondary or tertiary level of education, largely depends on the quality and competence of the teachers. Teacher quality is therefore crucial and has been globally accepted to be significantly associated with the quality of education in general and students' learning outcomes in particular (Goyal & Pandey, 2011). The policy issue at the heart of every government is to ensure the presence of "highly qualified teachers in every classroom" and to determine how best to define and prepare "qualified" teachers. Quality teachers are often seen simply as "good" teachers and are considered to be those who exhibit desirable traits and uphold the standards and norms of the profession (Zuzovsky, 2003). Quality teachers are also considered as those who bring about "student-learning". These teachers are called "effective" teachers (Berliner, 2005) or "successful" teachers (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005).
Teacher quality has been the main ambition of policy makers, educational authorities and stakeholders of education in general. Competent teachers make a profound influence in the career development of students which even stretches into their adulthood and public working life. Competence refers to the combination of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and personal characteristics, empowering the teacher to act professionally and appropriately in a situation, deploying them in a coherent way (Koster & Dengerink, 2008). On their part, Rychen and Salganik (2003) consider competence as the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources in context. That is, a complex action system encompassing knowledge (also tacit), cognitive and practical skills, attitudes such as motivation, value orientations and emotions. Teacher competence can therefore be situated within these two perspectives as the demonstration of knowledge, values, skills and reflective practice to attain a certain level of achievement along a continuum.
Teacher education is under scrutiny in virtually every country. In part, this is as a result of increasing public concern over the availability and quality of public education. Such education is seen by both individuals and states as a crucial factor in obtaining positional advantage in an increasingly integrated and competitive global economy (Bates, 2003). Teacher education refers to the professional education of teachers towards attainment of attitudes, skills and knowledge considered desirable so as to make them efficient and effective in their work in accordance with the needs of society at any point in time (Osuji, 2009). Effective attitudes and actions employed by teachers can make a positive difference on the lives of their students (Gourneau, 2010). Appropriate instructional skills are equally important segments of any teacher training programme.

2. Trends in Teacher Identity Discourse
Issues that relate to professionalism in teaching have an impact on teacher identity in that, how teachers perceive themselves in relation to the profession can affect how they perform their roles (Cheung, 2008; Beijaard, Meijer &Verloop, 2004). Teacher identity

is an important topical issue in educational discourse. Research reveals that the identity of teachers is associated with teachers' commitment (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005). When teachers develop satisfaction from their commitment, they derive a sense of pride in their profession (Nias, 1981). Other studies point to the fact that teacher identity affects pedagogy and teaching. To a large extent, teacher identity determines the way teachers teach, the way they develop as teachers and their attitudes towards educational changes (Beijaard *et al*. 2004).

Welmond (2002) is of the opinion that teacher identity involves teachers seeing themselves as whom they are, and what roles they are expected to play. Lawal (2011) describes teacher identity as reflecting a nexus of interlocking variables, through which the teacher can be understood and appreciated as a professional, as well as a social and cultural being. He identifies the duality of teacher identity as comprising personal identity and professional identity. Lawal refers to the teacher's personal identity as ascertaining who the teacher is, based on what he/she knows, does, and how he/she feels, as well as his/her reconstructive reflection on his/her knowledge, actions and values. On the other hand, he describes professional identity as teachers' beliefs, principles, and practices in relation to their social roles and responsibilities. He concludes that the intercourse between personal identity and professional identity produces teacher identity (Lawal, 2011).

On his part, Anamuah-Mensah (2011) describes teacher identity as the subjective understanding of individuals who engage in teaching and how others perceive them. He claims teacher identity is the product of the competing conceptions of the rights and responsibilities of teachers and of our different ways of understanding what teaching effectiveness is. Sharing similar perspectives with Lawal (2011), Anamuah-Mensah perceives personal identity as the knowledge of self, which is one's strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, beliefs and values, while teacher professional identity is the interplay of this with the knowledge of the role of the teacher. Anamuah-Mensah observes that the personal or individual identity interacts to create a teacher professional identity.

The importance of the concept of professional identity lies in the assumption that who we think we are, influence what we do, thus, there is a link between professional identity and professional action (Watson, 2006). Watson further posits that the importance of the concept of professional identity lies in its relationship to professional knowledge and action, but that these links are complex. That the relationship between professional identity and practice is not a simple unidirectional one in which some essential core of self, a stable entity comprising who we think we are, determines how we act in a given situation (Watson, 2006). Irrespective of what professions people associate themselves with, it is still important that they understand the construction, transformation and commitment of their professional identities. This is particularly important for teachers since they have a significant impact on students (Robinson, Anning & Frost, 2005).

Highlighting the significance of teachers' professional identity, Sammons, Day, Kington, Stobart and Smees (2007) found a relationship between aspects of teachers' professional identity and students' attainment in English and Mathematics. Some of these aspects were knowledge of subject matter, profound instructional skills and reflective practice. Buttressing the findings of Sammons *et al*. in relation to the importance of teachers' professional identity, Chong, Ling and Chuan (2011) assert that professional identity develops over time, and involves gaining insights of the professional practices and the values, skills, knowledge required and practiced within the profession. These attributes invariably influence students' learning outcomes. The elements that constitute teacher professionalism,   that is, knowledge of subject matter, possession of relevant pedagogical skills, upholding and practicing ethical values, among others, are virtually the same elements which describe the teachers' professional identity.

3. A Competency-Based Paradigm

In Figure 1, the four rectangular boxes contain the rubrics of teachers' professional identity and competence. They are professional knowledge, professional values, professional skills and professional reflective practice. Each of these rubrics is a summation of several other indicators sourced from extant literature, curriculum and instructional specialists. Teacher competency is therefore described in terms of the four rubrics and their respective indicators. Stated differently, the equal sizes of the rectangular boxes as shown in Figure 1 communicate the idea that all the four rubrics are of equal importance and they interactively and collectively describe the identity of the ideal professional teacher in terms of competence.
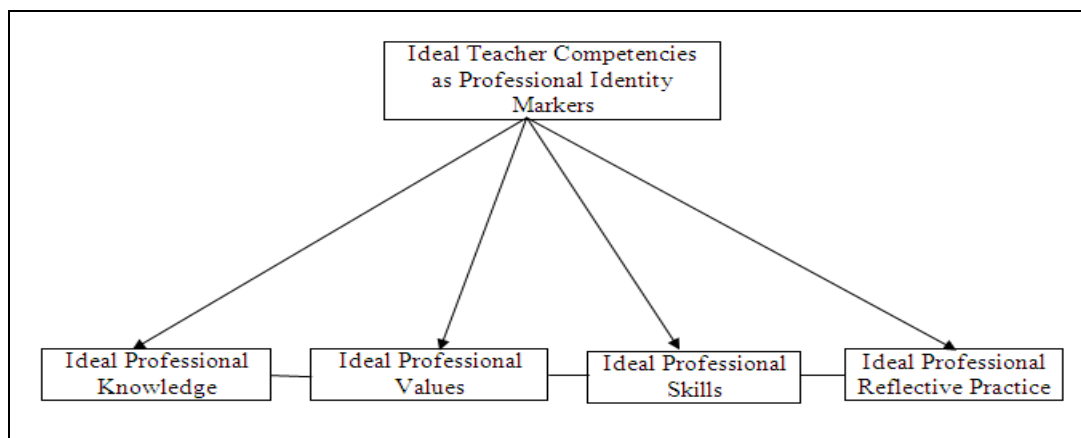

Figure 1: Rubrics within a Competency-Based Model of Teacher Identity

4. Professional Knowledge and Teacher Identity

Teachers' professional knowledge is a major attribute of teacher professionalism, competence and identity. Teachers' professional knowledge has been the focus of debate for a number of years and has been analyzed for a range of perspectives. Shulman (1986) proposes seven categories of professional knowledge that make it possible for teachers to teach and deal with more than practical knowledge, that is; knowledge of content, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of students, knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. Turner-Bisset (1999) highlights 12 elements in her model of teachers' professional knowledge. They are substantive subject knowledge, syntactic subject knowledge, beliefs about the subject, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge/models of teaching, cognitive knowledge of learners, empirical knowledge of learners, knowledge of self, knowledge of educational contexts, knowledge of educational ends and pedagogical content knowledge. Liakopoulou (2011) on the basis of his perspectives identifies seven indicators of teachers' professional knowledge. They are subject knowledge, knowledge of learners, teaching methodology, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of context, and knowledge of 'self'.

By curriculum knowledge, Liakopoulou is of the view that a professional teacher should have a sound knowledge of the curriculum, textbooks, the rules and laws of the education system. General pedagogical knowledge relates to the organization of the classroom, motivating and retaining students' learning, attention, pooling resources, learning theories and pedagogical theories. Teachers' knowledge of contexts presupposes that there are no predetermined attitudes that would suit every occasion, consequently the teacher is called upon to evaluate the context in which she/he teaches and act accordingly. The knowledge of 'self' is a basic qualification of teachers, relates to their views on their roles, responsibilities, teaching and qualification rights and professional development (Liakopoulou, 2011).

It is the duty of the teacher, based on his or her knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses to inspire students through teaching and learning experience, to desirable levels. Shulman (1986) is of the view that teachers need to be familiar with the conceptions and preconceptions that students bring with them to the learning environment. Shulman asserts that to make appropriate decisions for helping and guiding students in their knowledge construction will require an understanding of their ways of thinking. Shulman argues that, a teacher who pays attention to where the students are conceptually can develop and modify their thinking and conceptions.

Teachers' professional competence is commonly associated with only the mastery of subject matter or content. A fundamental requirement for the teaching profession is a broad and strong grounding in the content knowledge of the subject to be taught. Effective teaching requires a substantial commitment to the content or subject matter. Competent teaching means having mastery of the subject matter or content. Teachers' primary responsibilities are to represent the content accurately and efficiently. Learners' responsibilities are to learn that content in its authorized or legitimate forms (Pratt & Collins, 2013). Content knowledge refers to the amount of knowledge in the mind of the teacher. Especially important is content knowledge that deals with the teaching process, including the most useful form of representing and communicating content and how students learn content. Mastery of subject matter does not necessarily ensure teacher competence. Closely associated with content knowledge is pedagogical content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge identifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching. It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction (Shulman, 1986; Turner-Bisset, 1999; & Liakopoulou, 2011).

A teacher's knowledge in other subject areas enriches his or her professional competence. There are numerous important problems, phenomena and concepts that defy understanding or resolution when approached from single disciplines, climate change and world poverty are some few examples (Goldring, 2009). An interdisciplinary approach to teaching such topics requires that the teacher possesses knowledge in other related subjects. The qualities that can ensure teachers' competence are not the sum total of his or her knowledge, but rather the link between the different types of knowledge he or she possesses (Liakopoulou, 2011). These types of knowledge do not simply coexist; they should form a complete, inseparable unit of knowledge (Kennedy, 1990). In addition, the hallmark of a competent professional teacher is that he or she should have a sound knowledge of how to learn from teaching in an ongoing way, how to pose and address new problems and challenges that do not have existing answers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) and how to integrate and link different kinds of knowledge to the complex problems of schools and classrooms (Hammerness, 2006). Through inquiry, teachers integrate new knowledge and understanding of student learning and classroom instruction into their existing knowledge of professional practice. Teachers who engage in inquiry can expand and refine their professional knowledge base about what it means to be a teacher (Turner-Bisset, 1999).

5. Professional values and Teacher Identity

Teachers' professional values refer to the preservation, sustenance and practice of certain standards in relation to teacher behaviour and conduct. Teacher professionalism is about the quality of practice (Nixon, 2001). The teaching profession is a designation which requires resilience, competitiveness and good leadership skills. Competent teachers are those who are experts in the teaching of the subject assigned them, demonstrate professional values and skills and occasionally reflect on their practices (Mustafa, 2013). This aspect of the paper discusses some indicators of teachers' professional values that enhance the professional competence of the teacher.

Attitude is a strong component of the human personality. In any profession, negative or positive attitude affects productivity and the overall achievement of predetermined goals (Brown & Richard, 2008). The word attitude (*from Latin aptus)* is defined within the framework if social psychology as a subjective or mental preparation for action. It defines outward and visible postures and human beliefs. Attitudes can be positive (values) or negative (prejudice). The attitude of a teacher is a significant predictor of competent

teaching practices. Teachers' professional attitude is the demonstration of their likes or dislikes, feelings, emotions or behaviour towards teaching and learning practices in the realm of education. Research shows that teachers with positive professional attitudes perform better in teaching and learning (Ahmad, Said, Zeb, Sihatullah & Rehman, 2013). A competent professional teacher should therefore develop a positive attitude towards the teaching of his/her subject.

Teaching is considered to be one of the most stressful occupations, especially because it involves daily work based on social interactions where the teacher must make great efforts to regulate not only his or her own emotions, but also those of students, parents and colleagues (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Unfortunately, teachers more often experience negative emotions (Emmer, 1994). Negative emotions, for example, anxiety, interferes in our cognitive capacity for processing information (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992), while positive emotions increase our creative capacity for generating new ideas and therefore our ability to handle difficulties (Frederickson, 2001). Positive emotions in teachers can increase teacher wellbeing and also, students' level of adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1996). This positive effect may also produce a spiral effect which in turn facilitates a more suitable climate for learning (Sulton & Whealey, 2003). In order to maintain their professional competence, teachers should develop the capacity to identify, understand and regulate both positive and negative emotions (Palomera, Fernandez-Berrocal & Brackett, 2008).

Competent, professional teachers demonstrate enthusiasm and affection towards their students. Teacher enthusiasm has been widely acknowledged as crucial when it comes to the identification of competent teachers (Feldman, 2007). It has been identified as hospitable teacher behaviour that affects student learning positively (Carlise & Phillips, 1984). Saunders and Gosenpud (1986) posit that enthusiasm is a valuable quality for anyone, regardless of the kind of work one does. They claim the word 'enthusiasm' is derived from a combination of Greek words meaning "possesses by a good". In their view, an enthusiastic person is someone who literally, is inspired by a powerful force. They opine that in the literature on enthusiastic teaching, enthusiasm usually means "stimulating" "animated" "energetic" or "mobile". They therefore conclude that an enthusiastic classroom environment is a more interesting and stimulating place to learn than in a dull or a stolid environment (Saunders & Gosenpud, 1986).

It is a professional necessity for teachers to be committed to their work, for without this emotional connection, teachers face the constant danger of burnout in an increasingly intensified work environment (Nias, 1996). The level of teachers' commitment is considered to be a key factor in the success of the current educational reform agenda as it heavily influences willingness to engage in competitive, reflective and critical practice (Elliot & Crosswell, 2012). Commitment can also be viewed as loyalty to teaching as a profession (Tyree, 1996). Such a view refers to the taking on board "of values, norms or roles entailed in teaching" (p.296). Teachers who are committed are thought to view teaching to be not "just a job" (Day, 2000, p.125). They remain loyal to the moral purpose of the profession even though this may entail a significant personal cost (Crosswell, 2006).

Nofziger (2010) is of the view that competent teachers are an inspiration to students and their profession. A teacher who inspires students towards high level achievement and performance is demonstrating one of the indicators of teachers' professional values. The required characteristics of a motivating teacher are obvious concern and caring for students (Eggleton, 2010). In support of this assertion, Vasquez (1988) claims that "student perceptions of whether the teacher cares for them have meaningful effects on their performance" (p. 248). While love and caring seem to be the most important characteristics of a teacher to exhibit, some researchers include humane and high expectations of students.

6. Professional Skills and Teacher Identity

A skill is a capability for a smooth sequence of co-ordinated behaviour that is effective relative to its objectives. Skills are more or less well developed within the range of a person's ability. Teaching skills are defined as a group of teaching acts or behaviours intended to facilitate students' learning directly or indirectly. The identity of a teacher is partly derived from the uniqueness of his or her skills that are used to perform assigned roles. Professional skills refer to teachers' demonstration of expert instructional practices and behaviour, that are consistent with acceptable professional standards. Teachers' professional skills as a domain of their identity is made up of the skills of instructional planning, skills of instructional implementation and skills of assessment (Lawal, 2011).

Constructivists consider learning as an active process. Proponents of this learning theory claim that knowledge is constructed from experience. In line with this theory, teachers are expected to apply the necessary skills that actively involve students in the teaching and learning process. By implication, the constructivists favour, student-centered approaches to teaching. To ensure active student participation, teachers must become highly skilled questioners (Duron, Limbach & Waugh, 2006). The crucial elements of skilled questioners are that they pose brief and concise questions, are prepared to rephrase questions, and are prepared to draw further responses from participants, use a variety of techniques, redirect questions and responses, provide feedback and reinforcement without repeating answers, and spread questions around the class.

Skills of classroom management are equally important indicators of teachers' professional competence. Classroom management refers to all those activities necessary to create and maintain an orderly learning environment such as planning and presentation of materials, organization, decoration of the classroom and certainly the establishment and enforcement of routines and rules (Tan, Parsons, Hinson & Sardo-Brown, 2003). It refers to all the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time and materials to foster student involvement and cooperation in all classroom activities and to establish a productive working environment.

The art of asking questions is one of the basic skills of good teaching (Khan & Inamullah, 2011). Questioning is at the heart of the teaching and learning process.   Questioning is one of the strategies a teacher adopts to actively involve students in the teaching and learning process. Borich (1992) is of the view that questions account for eighty percent of classroom talk and that, some teachers ask more than one hundred of them per hour. Questions posed to individual students, develop an active approach, stimulate students,

structure the task, diagnose difficulties, communicate expectations, help students to reflect, develop thinking skills, help group reflection, provoke discussion and show interest in students' ideas (Khan & Inamullah, 2011).

Communication skills involve the transmission of a message that involves the shared understanding between the contexts in which the communication takes place (Saunders & Mills, 1999). Communication skills are applied in teachers' classroom management, pedagogy and interactions with their students. Communicative competence is the ability to communicate successfully in a wide variety of circumstances. Research suggests that nonverbal behaviour plays an important role in the overall communication, process (Gregersen, 2002).

7. Reflective Practice and Teacher Identity

The purpose of teachers' reflection is to identify problems during the process of teaching which are important for teachers to gauge students' understanding of lessons and how teaching might relate to that understanding. When discussing teaching practices, the definition varies in many aspects. These practices include all activities carried out during instructional sessions in classrooms.

Ideally, professional teachers are expected to reflect on all the dimensions of their cognitive (knowledge), affective (values) and psychomotor aspects of their professional practices (Lawal, 2011). Space constraints may not allow an exhaustive discussion of these dimensions. In specific terms, professional teachers are expected to periodically reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in terms of the content knowledge of the subjects they teach. Teachers need to see how ideas connect across fields and to everyday life. This kind of understanding provides a foundation for pedagogical content knowledge that enables teachers to make ideas accessible to others (Shulman, 1986). This includes reviewing, reconstructing, reenacting and critically analyzing one's own teaching abilities and then grouping these reflected explanations into evidence of changes that need to be made to become a better teacher. Walkington (2005) posits that the formation of teacher identity is assisted by the process of 'reflection on action'. Reflective teaching demands that teachers are subject - conscious as well as standard - conscious because it promotes the individual as responsible for identifying subject content deficiencies and, through the act of reflection and being autonomous, take steps to address such deficiencies (Minott, 2006). Teachers who reflect on their strengths and weaknesses become aware of and control their teaching by actively assessing what they already know, what they need to know and how to bridge that gap.

Teachers' skills of communication influence to a large extent, the effectiveness of any instructional session. Teachers' reflection on their skills of communication could lead to adjustments or improvement thereby facilitating the effectiveness of instructional delivery. Reflection, or the ability to step back from an experience and consider it critically, in an analytical, non-subjective manner, is an essential aspect of problem solving and decision making, and also of effective communication with clients and colleagues (Adams, Nestle, &Wolf, 2006). The outcome of teachers' reflection could suggest the need to reconsider the choice of words, phrases and expressions used in class. Ambiguities are also addressed. Gestures, body language, and demonstrations are all aspects teachers' skills of communication. Teachers' critical reflections on these aspects will enable them to determine their judicious and appropriate use.

The selection of instructional techniques that ensure the active involvement of students in a lesson depends on the skills and competence of the teacher. In line with best professional practice, the teacher is expected to occasionally reflect on his/her selection and use of instructional techniques that ensure the active participation of students in the teaching/ learning process. Active learning techniques are those activities that an instructor incorporates into the classroom to foster active student learning (Faust & Paulson, 1998). Active learning is any learning activity other than listening passively to an instructor's delivery. The importance of teacher reflection on these techniques is to critically examine their relevance to specific instructional objectives. Stated differently, teacher reflection on these techniques is to determine their validity in terms of specific predetermined learning outcomes. Effective teaching is not a set of generic practices, but instead a set of context-driven decisions about teaching. Effective teachers do not use the same set of practices for every lesson. Instead, what effective teachers do is to constantly reflect on their work (including their techniques of instruction), observe whether students are learning or not, and, then adjust their practice accordingly (Glickman, 1991). Teachers' critical reflection on these instructional techniques could also result in adjustment, thereby enhancing quality in teaching.

8. Curriculum and Policy Implications

The four rubrics of teacher competence and identity discussed in the preceding pages have implications in respect of educational policy formulation and teacher education curriculum. The obvious policy implication relates to the training and retraining of teachers in line with the insights associated with the various dimensions of teacher competence. In-service teachers will require in-service programmes in the form of workshops and seminars to update all dimensions of their professional knowledge, values, skills and reflective practice. Pre-service teachers on the other hand stand to benefit from revised teacher education curriculum that will enhance their competence. The various ramifications of teachers' professional knowledge should be reflected in all teacher training curricular. Shulman (1986) reinforces this idea by suggesting that all three types of knowledge; content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge should be included in pre-service training programmes.

The integration of technology in the curriculum of pre-service training institutions could also improve the competence of teachers in terms of their professional knowledge. Teachers do not only need to know how to use computer and software, but also be aware of the strategies to incorporate ICT tools to enhance student understanding of a particular subject's content. In much the same way, inquiry-based instruction should form part of the pre-service training of teachers. This will offer teachers the opportunity to learn from their teaching, thereby expanding the scope of their professional knowledge.

Teachers' commitment and positive attitude towards the teaching profession are variables that fall under the realm of professional values. To a large extent, they influence teachers' level of competence. When teachers are motivated they derive job satisfaction,

become committed, and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their work. This therefore suggests the need for policy formulation that motivates teachers. Learning is enhanced by attending to: the psychological variables of cognition and classroom management, as well as the quality of student-teacher interaction regarding instruction, a positive social environment; and support of the home environment. Hence, the role of values in quality instruction is quite obvious. Student improvement is linked to positive student-teacher interaction. This suggests the need for the values education programme of preservice teachers to be tailored towards imbuing teachers with a sense of humour towards their students and colleagues which may eventually create a positive social environment for effective teaching and learning.

The policy implication associated with teachers' skills is the need for stakeholders in education to provide in-service teachers with opportunities for continuous professional development. This may enable them to update their professional skills as they relate to their day-to-day instructional duties. Curriculum reforms may suggest the need for teachers to acquire additional skills that may facilitate instructional delivery. This may require the retraining of teachers to acquire such skills.

9. Conclusion

The concept of teachers' professional competence is multidimensional. Indicators that describe teachers' competence, namely; knowledge, values, skills and reflective practice are virtually the same as those which define teachers' professional identity. Teachers' strict adherence to prescribed code of conduct that relate to his/her teaching profession is an identity indicator that relates to values. The preservation, sustenance and practice promote quality teaching and effective learning. Teachers' professional knowledge is dynamic and should not be confined to the three traditional aspects like content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge. Teachers' knowledge of current trends and developments in his/her subject area and knowledge in techniques of inquiry could enhance their competence in terms of professional knowledge.

The social context of any classroom is recognized as being too complex for a set of principles or disparate theories to be of any practical use for a teacher. Teacher education programmes are hereby moving away from prescriptive approaches and focusing on engaging prospective teachers in extensive questioning, reflecting and constructing knowledge. The emphasis is on reflective practice as the central aim of teacher education. Reflective practice is an emerging trend that is associated with teachers' professional competence. Teachers undertake self-learning through reflection on their instructional practices. Adjustments or modifications are made where necessary, which eventually improves the quality of instruction. It is reiterated that, in order to sustain teachers' professional competence, opportunities should be created for continuous professional development.

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