

Innovations

Soft Skills for Curriculum Development towards Classroom Management in Teacher Education Practice in Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study was soft skills for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria. It aimed to determine the place of soft skills in curriculum development and how it enhances classroom management. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study with two research questions and a hypothesis that guided the study. The population was made up of 300 postgraduate students in the Faculty of Education, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba and Rivers State University, Nkpolu- Port Harcourt. A sample size of 100 postgraduate students was drawn using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 15- item questionnaire which was validated by three experts and it gave a reliability coefficient of 0.83 which was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method. The data collected were analyzed with mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was tested using Z-test. The findings showed that the lecturers have high level of soft skills and that there is significant difference between the level of soft skills among the lecturers in the north central and those in the south-south. Thus, the following recommendations were made that lecturers should consolidate on the areas of strength in soft skills that they have currently, lecturers should do well to engage in studies and other self-improvement means to be better at areas where they are weak, the students should help the lecturers improve on their interpersonal relationship skills by creating friendship opportunities etc.*

Keywords: *Soft skills, curriculum development, classroom management, teacher education.*

Introduction

Soft skills could be perceived as interpersonal characteristics and personal features possessed by a person in order to enhance competence and capabilities. For Robles (2012) soft skills is defined as individual interpersonal qualities that a person has which distinguishes the person from another person or others. Borsellino (2023) sees soft skills as intangible features that a person has carrying out his job. While Kenton, Kindness and Li (2023) say it is a character trait and interpersonal skill which a person utilizes in a working environment. The foregoing descriptions of soft skills points to an ability that is innate or developed by a person in order to have a seamless working relationship; such an attribute that allows a person to carry out a function habitually without thinking about it.

These could represent characteristics that a person uses to work in relation to interaction with others, solving problems and to manage situation without much or any difficulty. Thus, if soft skills allow an educator to interact with others seamlessly and effortlessly, then, it could find relevance in curriculum development; a practice of educators at all level of educations which they use to transmit curriculum content from one generation to another. Some of the examples of soft skills as highlighted are: leadership skill, team work skill, creativity skill, cooperation skill, communication skill, flexibility skill, presentation skills among others based on need and employer responses from a report in a study carried out by Jain (2021) who found that that employers say that most young graduates are not competent enough nor do they possess the required skills needed to be engaged for a job.

This conveys the fact that soft skills are highly desirable skills that teacher educators should crave for as they may need it to enhance their ability to help their students learn and gain learning experience optimally. This is because the interface of teacher educators and teacher trainees (students) would through the help of soft skills whether innate in a teacher educator or learned through training bring out the best in the individual; leaving such a person a polished, sharpened and an astute educator, as the process of curriculum development would not pose any challenge and the learner does not need to struggle to articulate the content delivered.

Curriculum development as idealized has to do with how a teacher educator is able to create materials and utilize certain methods for presentation of contents in order to ensure that learning takes place in the learner. But in the discourse underway the emphasis shall be on designing methods that allows the free transfer of knowledge in an instructional delivery process This conception is firmed up by the definition of curriculum development by Agwu (2009) who defined curriculum development as the development of a new means, materials and methods of presentation to make sure definite learning takes effect in the learner. Also, Obiefuna (2009) says curriculum development is the capacity of a teacher/ teacher educator to identify,

choose and arrange in an orderly form that which should be learnt and put the right means in place to teach it in order to meet a desired need.

Furthermore, (Alvior, 2014) sees curriculum development as a pursuit and utilization of the change brought about on man by the dynamic nature of the society to achieve its target by following the trend and fitting classroom simulation of what is going on in the society. Again, Roode (2019) lent a voice to this when it was divulged that considering the creeping changes being observed in the society, that, it is necessary that the teacher in carrying out curriculum development in the classroom should mirror what is going on in the society, so as to accommodate the changes brought on the classroom experience by the society. Nathani (2022) says that the step by step approach and embellishment of the classroom practice of teachers is curriculum development. Hence, what the teacher does in alliance with the learners in the classroom is curriculum development in this case. Akor, Ugboja and Okonny (2023) say curriculum development is a planned act and creation of resources to facilitate teaching and learning.

The concept of curriculum development could then be said to be one of any of the following:

- a. The planned action a teacher educator intends to take
- b. The act and art of presenting what has been planned to the learner
- c. The process of relating resources that would facilitate learning experience in the classroom
- d. The strategies, approaches, techniques and methods used in ensuring that the learner learns.

So, on this note one could say that curriculum development is a practice and process aimed at ensuring that a planned content is delivered, understood or assimilated, and utilizable by the learner in solving the problems of the society. For the researchers, this statement above seems to typify or show a cloak of integration between soft skills, curriculum development and classroom management in such a way that is result oriented. An assertion that perhaps points to curriculum development to mean a practice based on the nature of the learner, knowledge of how the environment that could drive the teaching and learning process is as well as the management of classroom for the purpose of effectiveness. This is coming on the ground that curriculum content cannot deliver itself to the learner and by extension the society but that the teacher (teacher educators) need to design, redesign and present whatever is meant to be learnt in an acceptable manner in an environment that would accommodate such.

Classroom management is an intentional practice carried out by teachers in order to ensure a hitch free teaching and learning process. Igbokwe (2009) sees classroom management as the progressive plan of action organized by the teacher educator in order to bring about orderliness, engagement of the learner and learning in a

classroom situation. This definition pointed out some vital ideas: progressive plan, order and learner engagement. These three concepts are the crux of the definition/description given of classroom management that is very essential to what is done in the classroom by the educators. Igboabuchi (2006) had said that the practice of classroom management is teacher centred, thus, the full personality of the teacher must be engaged to capacity for desirable objective attainment to be arrived at.

This is what is said to be the greatest determinant of curriculum development as it would ensure that the classroom environment is friendly and adjusted adequately for the learner to obtain maximum benefit from it. Perhaps, the reason, Foster (2022) says that classroom management is a specific arrangement, order and state of action designed to enhance teaching and learning process. This too points to the fact that the teacher would be required to do anything practically possible to allow a learner benefit from what he/she has been taught. So, Future Study (Fs, 2023) defined classroom management as an act adopted or adapted by the teacher to keep the learner on the path of learning in the classroom. Therefore, classroom management may be construed as a planned action, adopted or adapted by the teacher/ teacher educator to keep the learners on the path of learning in a classroom environment

This means that the teacher educator needs to bring in the paraphernalia of skills (soft skills and technical skills), knowledge, attitudes and values to bear on carrying out curriculum development in order to reach the target audience (learner) maximally and ensure they benefit from the process. This again, points to the fact that a teacher would be unable to reach this level of attainment if such a person has not been trained to utilize every competence and capacity to reach the student being taught but the training from the university teacher education process must be adequate; this would make a teacher to be ready to give the best available to the students in his/her custody.

Usually, the expectation is that curriculum contents that a learner is exposed to should bring out the best in the learner but more often than not, it is not automatic. So, the place of the teacher education process is meant to help polish or further improve on the knowledge and skills possessed by a teacher and even the teacher educator himself. This is so because when teacher educators model the most appropriate and apt curriculum development practice, those they teach become better teachers/educators in the future, hence, teacher education practice must be deliberate in its processes. The deliberate professional process and practice of helping people gain knowledge on teaching and acquiring needed skills to teach is called teacher education. Akor, Ugboja and Okonny (2023) defined teacher education as a process of working on and developing individual's teaching skills to be better refined. Akor, Okonny and Pepple (2023) say that teacher education is the process of equipping, training and developing professional personality and skills

in people to take up the job of teaching upon leaving school/university. These definitions have it that when the professional personality and skills of a teacher trainee is exposed to sharpening and polishing in such a way that it is acceptable by the society for the society, then teacher education is in place. Since, there is no specificity as to the type of skill desired, one could say that apart from technical skills taught to the students in the school, soft skills are also needed and that it could be overtly or covertly delivered to them through the teaching and learning process, perhaps, a hidden curriculum content or as attained curriculum considering that it so much sought after by the employer of labour in recent times, thus, when imbibe would make the teacher trainee much more suitable to be engaged for work in the wider society in the now or in the future.

To buttress the above point further, the description of (FRN, 2016) covered much on it as it says that teacher education is a procedure for producing highly motivated, conscientious classroom teachers to teach and achieve set goals and objectives of education. This was re-echoed by Amadioha (2017) who opined that schools who engage teachers seek those who are self-motivated persons, that are talented to do their jobs and produce the type of result that the school sought prior to engaging such individuals. According to the national policy on education (FRN, 2016), the goals of teacher education among others are:

1. Encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers
2. Help teacher fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.
3. Provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations.

These goals of teacher education re-emphasized the drive of this discourse based on the intention to make the teacher trainee a better asset to the society upon graduation from the university but this is only achievable with the help of the teacher educator who should expose teacher trainees to experiences formally or informally in order to build in what the society expects as the output of his work to make them capable, fully functional in the future and infact with creativity. Thus, it does not have to be only things learnt in the classroom but any other learning experience, trait or character and even learned skills that may be of great help to such persons are welcomed in the classroom in order to achieve the desired result. Therefore, the university teacher educators need to from time to time study the content of the national policy on education on teacher education in order to be abreast of the demands and follow to help actualize the yearnings of the society through innovative practice for the society who yearns for such persons at the moment.

It has been found that avid readership, discipline and character supports adequate curriculum development and effective classroom management (Akor, Ugboja and

Okonny, 2023; Amemtenaan, 2023). With the knowledge of the above, the researchers believe every teacher educator should imbibe cultures that would boost competence even though observation seem to be saying the contrary that most teacher educators, once after acquiring the highest certificate in education, stop being studious and leave themselves to rust only to depend on the old knowledge they received while in school, thus, making their curriculum development skills inadequate and classroom management ability weak, hence, they lag behind in professional practice. Therefore, the study soft skills for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine the level of soft skills needed among lecturers for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria.
2. Determine the level of soft skills among lecturers in North Central and the South-South for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in in universities in Nigeria.

The following are the research questions guiding the study:

1. What is the level of soft skills needed among lecturers for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria?
2. What is the level of soft skills among lecturers in North Central and the South-South for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria?

This hypothesis guided this study ($P=0.05$)

1. There is no significant difference between the level of soft skills among lecturers in North Central and the South-South for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in in universities in Nigeria.

Research Method

The study was carried out in Nigeria, particularly, in Prince Abubakar Audu University (North Central) and Rivers State University (South-South). The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population for the study was 300 postgraduate students in the faculty of education of the two universities (150 each) while the sample size for the study was made up of 100 students who were drawn using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique from different departments of the faculty of education in the two institutions. The instrument used by the researchers for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Questionnaire on Postgraduate Students' Perception of Soft Skills for Curriculum Development Towards Classroom Management in Teacher Education Practice in Universities in

Nigeria (QPSPSSCDTCMTEPN)) which was constructed by the researchers. It consists of 15-items which were arranged in two sections A and B. Section A contains the biodata, while section B consists of two subgroups: level of soft skills needed and level of soft skills among lecturers in North Central and the South-South. The questionnaire was built on a modified four-point Likert Scale, namely: Very High Level (VHL), High Level (HL), Low Level (LL) and Very Low Level (VLL) and the levels of responses are weighted as 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The instrument was face validated by three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit and one from Curriculum and Instruction unit of the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State and another one from Educational Technology unit of the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University. The suggestions given were used in producing the final copy of the instrument. Cronbach alpha was used in calculating the reliability to determine the internal consistency which gave an alpha value of 0.83 which was considered high after ten (10) copies of questionnaire were administered on Post graduate students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt. The instrument was administered and collected by the researchers on the spot. The data obtained were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for answering the research questions. Hence, $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$. Therefore, items whose mean were less than 2.5 were seen as low level (LL) responses while those whose mean were 2.5 and above were seen as high level (HL) responses. The decision rule on the null hypothesis was to reject the hypothesis with calculated Z-value lesser than the critical Z-value but otherwise accept.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of soft skills needed among lecturers for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Soft Skills Needed Among Lecturers for Curriculum Development Towards Classroom Management in Teacher Education Practice in Universities in Nigeria

S/N	ITEMS	Mean (x)	SD	N	Remark
1	Lecturers possess adequate communication skill	2.85	2.05	100	HL
2	Lecturers possess adequate presentation skill	2.85	1.61	100	HL
3	Lecturers possess adequate time	2.85	2.15	100	HL

	management skill				
4	Lecturers possess adequate leadership skill	2.9	2.42	100	HL
5	Lecturers possess adequate interpersonal relationship skill	2.5	2.12	100	HL
	Grand Mean and Standard Deviation	2.79	2.07		

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 results shows the responses of postgraduate students to the items on the questionnaire and it indicates positive affirmations on all the items. The result showed that the level of soft skills in terms of leadership possessed by the lecturers in Nigeria was at high level. This is an indication that the lecturers have great qualities representing the ability to lead others. The soft skills of communication skill, presentation skills and time management skills are at par and at high level too. Nonetheless, the least output on the result table was on interpersonal relationship skills which the lecturers may need to improve upon even though it is at high level. The grand mean and standard deviation (2.79 and 2.07) are high enough and indicative of the fact that the error level from the responses was marginal.

Research Question 2: What is the level of soft skills among lecturers in North Central and South-South for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on Soft Skills Among Lecturers in North Central and South-South for Curriculum Development Towards Classroom Management in Teacher Education Practice in Universities in Nigeria

S/N	Items	North Central			South-South			N
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark	
1.	Lecturers possess adequate communication skill	2.8	1.9	HL	2.9	2.21	HL	100
2	Lecturers possess adequate presentation skill	2.6	1.51	HL	3.1	1.7	HL	100
3	Lecturers possess adequate time	2.6	2.1	HL	3.1	2.21	HL	100

	management skill							
4	Lecturers possess adequate leadership skill	3.1	1.92	HL	2.7	2.92	HL	100
5	Lecturers possess adequate interpersonal relationship skill	2.5	2.12	HL	2.5	2.12	HL	100
6	Lecturers possess adequate change management skill	2.6	1.55	HL	2.3	2.03	LL	100
7	Lecturers possess adequate creativity skill	2.0	2.45	LL	2.7	2.02	HL	100
	Grand Mean and Standard Deviation	2.6	1.93		2.75	2.17		

The results on table 2 indicated that the response on the lecturers soft skills were on the affirmative note except for two items (one each from the two institutions). The results showed that the soft skill among lecturers in north central that was most pronounced was leadership with mean (3.1) while their counterparts in the south-south are said to possess presentation skill more with mean (3.1). The least soft skill mean was for creativity skill (2.0) for north central lecturers while their south-south counterparts have challenge with change management (2.3) both being at low level in the institutions. However, the grand mean and standard deviation (2.6, 2.75 and 1.93, 2.17) for both institutions indicated that there was high level of soft skills among lecturers in Nigeria. But the north central lecturers must work on their ability to be creative while those in the south must develop skills for change management for a better output in the future.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the level of soft skills among lecturers in North Central and the South-South for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in in universities in Nigeria.

Table 5: Z-test on Level of Soft Skills Among Lecturers in North Central and South- South for Curriculum Development Towards Classroom Management in Teacher Education Practice in Universities in Nigeria

Gro	Mean	SD	N	df	Z _{calculated}	Z _{critical}	Decision
North Central Lecturers	2.6	1.93	50	98	0.3658	1.98	Rejected
South-South Lecturers	2.75	2.17	50				

Source: Field data, 2024.

The result of table 3 shows that Z-calculated value 0.3658 is lesser than the Z-critical value 1.98 at 0.05 level of significance at 98 degree of freedom showing that there is significant difference in the level of soft skills among lecturers in the North Central and the South-South. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference is rejected as there is significant difference.

Discussion of the Findings:

The results on table 1 revealed that soft skills is a key component of curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria especially with some basic characteristics of soft skills like communication, presentation, time management, leadership and interpersonal relationship skills and they all showed high level of appropriation by the lecturers as perceived by the postgraduate students which indicated a display of high ability in the discharge of their responsibilities as seen from the result on above. The result indicated that leadership skill was the strongest strength of lecturers both from the north central and the south-south while interpersonal relationship skill seem to be the weakest strength from the result, yet they possess above average level of it in them, however, it needs to be strengthened further as it helps in building cooperation and enhancing interaction pattern between the lecturers and their students in any teaching and learning situation as well as solidifies classroom management. These findings are confirmed by the findings of Ariratana, Sirisookslip & Ngang (2015) who found that the level of leadership soft skills among administrators of school was high but that they needed to improve on their interpersonal relationship skill. Also, Humpherys & Lazrig (2021) found that time management skills reduce the rate students miss assignment, and brings improvement the grade they make both at the graduate and post graduate levels. Hence, lecturers are encourage to keep up with the level of output they generate currently when soft skills is apply in curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities and where possible improve on it.

The result on table 2 indicated that soft skills application by lecturers produced commendable output. The lecturers in the north central and those in the south-south

were at par in certain areas and differed not too significantly in others areas. While leadership and communication soft skills were the strongest points for the lecturers in the north central, those in the south-south had communication and presentation skills as their strongest points. On both ends of location, the lecturers had averagely perceived abilities in interpersonal relationship skills which the researcher believed can be improved upon as it a major area that firmly strengthens learning experience during curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in the universities. But the result also revealed a very weak creativity skills for lecturers in the north central and weak change management skills for lecturers in the south-south. The hypothesis result indicated that there issignificant difference between the level of soft skills among lecturers in the north central and those in the south-south, thus, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected. The findings of the result are confirmed by the findings of (Majid, Liming, Tong & Raihana, 2012; Levasseur, 2013; Kumar, 2020; Webster, 2020; Allwyn & Kumar, 2022) who respectively found that time management soft skills enhance students' academic performance, change management soft skills brings about self-awareness, communication skills development, collaboration skills development and leadership skills development. Alsofoundwas that communication soft skills use, leads to leadership display, inspiring learners to excellence in practice and encourages stakeholders' participation in education as well as that presentation skills boost confidence in the students while creativity in educational practice makes it relevant and appropriateness of use enhance it in all stages of life. Therefore, lecturers are encouraged to increase their areas of strength and raise the weak ends in soft skills for curriculum development towards classroom management in teacher education practice in universities in Nigeria.

Conclusion:

Based on the findings of this study, a conclusion can be drawn that lecturers in Nigeria have high level of soft skills and maximize known ones but needs to strengthen areas where they are not doing too well currently. Moreso, it was found lecturers in the north central and those in the south-south do differ significantly in the level of soft skills they possess for curriculum development towards classroom management in university teacher education in Nigeria.

Recommendations:

The following are the recommendations supporting this study based on the findings:

1. Lecturers should consolidate on the areas of strength in soft skills that they have currently.
2. Lecturers should do well to engage in studies and other self-improvement means to be better at areas where they are weak.

3. The students should help the lecturers improve on their interpersonal relationship by creating friendship opportunities.
4. University management should create opportunities for training and retraining programmes for the lecturers to boost their competencies in the cultivation and application of soft skills.
5. Education stakeholders should support lecturers by funding conferences and workshops they organize to boost their competencies and capacity in soft skills.

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