INTRODUCTION

Since taking office, Ghana’s new government and President have strengthened their commitment to teacher education. In President Akufo-Addo’s State of the Nation Address in February 2017, he declared high quality education for all Ghana’s children as his government’s priority, with “teachers and their professionalisation at the centre.”

Over the past two years the Ministry of Education and its agencies - in collaboration with education stakeholders - initiated a consultative process to reform the teacher education sector in the country. The purpose is to design an innovative curriculum framework that will drive the teacher education curriculum reforms in Ghana. In addition, a number of policies will be initiated to facilitate the envisaged reforms to ensure that teacher training institutions in Ghana produce teachers who are fully prepared to teach the school curriculum when they first take up their posts in the classroom; understand and address the language needs of their students; use a learner-centred pedagogy and inclusive approach; and create a safe and productive learning environment.

This brief lays out how the elements of teacher education and curriculum reform fit together and what is now being done to ensure that high quality teaching and learning is embedded in Ghana’s education system to sufficiently prepare teachers for the demands of modern-day basic education for all.

The teacher education curriculum reforms seek to build on the Pre-Tertiary Professional Development and Management (PTPDM) policy and in addition, strengthen existing policies and institutions established to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Ghana.
Two key policy initiatives have been introduced to facilitate the process of modernising teaching and learning in Ghana through these teacher education and curriculum reforms:

1. NATIONAL TEACHERS’ STANDARDS

In 2015, the National Teaching Council (NTC) with support from the Transforming Teacher Education and Learning Programme (T-TEL) initiated activities to create a set of coordinated National Teacher Standards (NTS), to ensure Ghana’s teachers consistently demonstrate standards of excellence across the country.

The Standards were developed by the NTC in close collaboration with Ghanaian Education policy makers, researchers and stakeholders, with the recognition that high quality education cannot be delivered without teachers knowing and understanding the set of competencies and skills expected of them to deliver high quality, vibrant and modern education to pupils.

These Standards sets the minimum criteria of professional values and attitudes, knowledge and skills expected of a teacher working in early childhood, primary, junior high school and senior high school. The Standards will be used for licensing teachers into the teaching profession after their initial training.

They are also to be used as a professional tool to guide College of Education tutors, student teachers and in-service head teachers, teachers (mentors) and district education officials to identify in clear and precise terms what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. They equally contain qualities teachers are expected to possess and behaviours they are supposed to exhibit. The Standards are realistic, achievable and embedded in the Ghanaian context.

Figure 1.0 The three domains of the National Teachers’ Standards

2. A NEW CURRICULUM FOR PREPARING TEACHERS – NEW FRAMEWORK NEEDS A NEW FORM OF TEACHER ASSESSMENT

Through extensive consultation with national education sector stakeholders, it was agreed that a National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (NTECF) should be designed based on the National Teachers’ Standards (NTS). The framework outlines the essential elements of initial teacher training that should be applied by ALL institutions in the business of training teachers for the pre-tertiary sector, as part of the process to reform the teacher education sector in Ghana. The Framework will also be used to guide the writing of new teacher education curricula for training pre-tertiary teachers, and in particular a new Degree in Basic Education (B.Ed) curriculum to be implemented in Colleges of Education across the country.

The framework has received full endorsement from the Ministry of Education as a policy document, and it is thus required that going forward, all Curricula for training pre-tertiary teachers must align with the Framework before it can receive accreditation in Ghana.

The essential elements of the NTECF are:

1. SUBJECT AND CURRICULUM KNOWLEDGE

   Secure content knowledge for specialism and subjects is the key to teaching the school curriculum.

2. LITERACY STUDIES (GHANAIAN LANGUAGES AND ENGLISH)

   Language is the key to success in education and life. Getting this right is the most critical issue for our children’s future and for education in Ghana.

3. PEDAGOGIC KNOWLEDGE

   Knowledge of instructional and assessment strategies is key to supporting the learning and progress of all pupils.

4. SUPPORTED TEACHING IN SCHOOL

   Extended, guided and assessed teaching which enables trainee teachers to apply their knowledge and the key to improving their teaching.

The framework also contains guidance on cross-cutting issues vital to the needs of modern-day learning of school children. These include equity and inclusivity, professional values and attitudes, assessment strategies, core skills, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), specialism pathways and quality assurance.
REVISION OF THE DBE CURRICULUM – THE NEXT STEP IN TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM

In pursuit of the Ministry of Education’s objective to reform teacher education in Ghana through T-TEL, it is expected that the current DBE Curriculum will be revised to reflect the requirements of the NTS and the essential elements of the NTECF.

Most stakeholders in Ghana’s teacher education sector agree that the current DBE Curriculum will no longer deliver the kind of teacher required for Ghana’s basic education system. But what exactly needs to be changed in the current DBE curriculum? Through T-TEL’s work with Colleges of Education and other stakeholders, a number of key areas have been identified:

• The current DBE curriculum does not allow students to build knowledge that is essential to effective teaching. Sufficient attention is not given in the curriculum to the development of teachers’ knowledge and skills in subject-specific pedagogy. This is particularly evident in the STEM subjects and in literacy.

• The exam-driven approach to assessment of the current DBE curriculum is a significant constraint on the development of high quality teachers based on the requirements of both the NTS and NTECF for Ghana. Student teachers are taught the information they are required to reproduce in the exam. Incentives to learn to teach are not provided by the assessment system, and thus are (at best) extremely weak.

• Student Teaching Practice in schools forms a third of the current Curriculum, but doesn’t provide adequate and effective support to student teachers in the development of their teaching skills. The mentoring system is weak, and contributes very little to the final assessment of trainees. The backwash effect of school-based teaching practice that is not assessed has contributed to the reduced effectiveness of cluster training for mentors supported by T-TEL, and evident in the reticence of some tutors and mentors to change from their existing practices.

With the endorsement and approval of the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework, education stakeholders agree that the next step is to reform the existing DBE using the NTECF to address these issues.

LESSONS GATHERED BY T-TEL TO GUIDE CURRICULUM REFORM GOING FORWARD

Through M&E and research, T-TEL is contributing to a growing body of evidence on the impact of teacher education reforms. T-TEL’s evidence provides valuable insights into effective practices, but also offers a deeper understanding of the systemic constraints that prevent the current development of effective teachers. These include:

• Effective reform requires working at all levels of the teacher education system, and in all sub-systems. The achievement of T-TEL’s results provides evidence that coherent interventions across the system are required for effective reform. A review of international research literature confirmed that developing curriculum without reference to other educational sub-systems can be ‘a disastrous waste of resources and even push improvement process back by several years’.

• Policy inconsistency and contradictions constrain quality. Policy inconsistency and unaligned teacher education policy environment can limit improvements in colleges, and in the quality of teaching and learning. These currently include the staff transition issues, payroll of tutors of Colleges of Education and qualification policies for tutors.

• Improvements in teacher education in the absence of curriculum reform benefits only the most talented and motivated tutors, mentors and teachers. Majority of student teachers, tutors and mentors consider new and innovative teaching, learning and assessment strategies which are not linked to the existing curriculum as an inconvenient workload. T-TEL activities that do not directly support the current DBE curriculum can be viewed as irrelevant and distracting, and there is no requirement for all tutors to use best practice. Good practices must be mainstreamed within the new (B.Ed) curriculum itself if they are to be accessible to all student teachers, and used by all tutors and mentors. Attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Colleges of Education will have limited impact if they are not relevant and assessed in the new curriculum.
Next Steps - Stakeholder Engagement

Addressing these issues requires coordinated involvement and endorsement of stakeholders. There was broad consensus during the national consultation process on key issues and the direction of the curriculum reform agenda. These include:

- The curriculum reform should draw upon expertise of educationists from across the Ghanaian teacher education system (including academics).
- Key stakeholders, especially the Colleges of Education, tutors, teachers, teacher unions and the Ministry of Education must be involved in the curriculum writing through a consultative process.
- T-TEL will provide support for the curriculum reform process, specifically in terms of: policy and regulation; curriculum writing and development and preparation for the implementation of the new Curriculum.
- T-TEL will also work with the relevant government agencies to address specific teacher education issues and the technical support required in other areas such as gender and inclusion, communications and learning, funding and management.

What You Can Do

Reforming teacher education and the DBE curriculum to ensure high quality teaching and learning across Ghana will require all stakeholders working together with the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service-College Principals, Tutors, Student Teachers, District Education Officers, University leaders and others must all play their part to ensure the new (B.Ed) curriculum delivers for all Ghana’s children, whatever their background or level of learning.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, T-TEL is committed to supporting all stakeholders to make this happen. Specifically, actors need to:

- Ensure all stakeholders are clear that the new B.Ed curriculum fully reflects both the new National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework and the National Teachers’ Standards.
- Support Colleges of Education to be able to incorporate the new B.Ed curriculum into their daily teaching and learning practices.
- Support partner schools and mentors to be able to support the curriculum reform changes happening in colleges and teaching practice schools.
- Ensure school communities and bodies – parents’ associations, civil society organisations – can help the changes come into effect.
- Ensure new teacher education policies are used to inform and develop practice across the teacher education sector.
- Communicate these changes to different audiences to ensure the nation is informed and united behind curriculum reform.

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