

## Online Teaching Skills and Competencies

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### ABSTRACT

This paper sheds light on the skills and competencies required for teaching online courses in higher education. The paper started with an overview of the issues related to online learning and teaching. Reviewing and analyzing literature in this topic were performed to confine skills and competencies that instructors need to effectively teach in online learning environments. These skills and competencies are classified into six categories: (a) pedagogical skills, (b) content skills, (c) design skills, (d) technological skills, (e) management and institutional skills, and (f) social and communication skills.

### INTRODUCTION

Being a university professor is a dream for graduate students who desire to embark on a career in academia. Despite the relatively low average salary (US \$74,000 per year) (The United States [US] Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2014), teaching remains one of the most prestigious jobs in the US (Pollack, 2014). Moreover, CareerCast (2014) ranks the tenured university professor career as the second-best job in 2014, as it is more stable and less stressful than most of the other careers on that list.

The CareerCast list was created by analyzing data from the BLS and other government agencies based on the environmental, income, outlook, and stress aspects of each career (CareerCast, 2014). According to the BLS (2014), teaching in postsecondary institutions has a low unemployment rate and a projected growth-in-employment rate of 19% from 2012 to 2022. Although the stability of a job makes it less stressful, the nature and responsibilities of teaching may be stressful and could put pressure on those who choose to pursue a career in this field.

The landscape of higher education has changed dramatically in the last twenty years (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). The rapid growth in higher education enrollment and employment has been steady. In the fall of 2013, about 1.5 million individuals were responsible for teaching almost 21 million students at more than 7,000 postsecondary institutions in the US (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2014a, 2014b). This growth is also associated with changes in the intellectual, institutional, and technological aspects of higher education (Scobey, 2012).

The characteristics of higher education institutions, employment, and students have altered over the last decade. Today, there is more variety in the tiers and types of programs and degrees offered by different levels and types of institutions (i.e., public, private for profit, private nonprofit, four-year and higher, two-year, and less-than-two-year) (Ginder et al., 2014b). The number of full-time instructional faculty members is now almost equal to the number of those who teach part-time (Kena et al., 2014), and the typical image of traditional undergraduate students has changed to include those who were previously known as nontraditional. Global, social, political, economic, cultural, technological, and educational factors have spurred these changes (Palloff & Pratt, 2013; Siemens & Matheos, 2010).

The ubiquity of information technology and communication has significantly reshaped the structure of learning in higher education. Classroom boundaries have exceeded the realms of time, location, and physical presence (Barber, Donnelly, Rizvi, & Summers, 2013). It is the era of anytime and anywhere learning (Paulson, 2002). New teaching pedagogies, learning skills, and assessment methods have emerged to adapt to these changes (Barber et al., 2013). In addition, new formats of learning have thrived. A large number of courses, certificates, and degrees have been earned through attending open universities, online education, or massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Siemens & Matheos, 2010).

These changes represent challenges that may burden instructional staff in higher education who have to keep pace with the innovative paradigms of higher education, new approaches to research and accreditation, and new methods of teaching and learning (Siemens & Matheos, 2010). This includes being aware of who the students are, what they need to learn, how to teach them, as well as the skills that they, as instructors, need to master in order to effectively execute their role (Palloff & Pratt, 2013; Scobey, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to

provide an overview of the skills and competencies that can help instructional staff and educators to cope with the contemporary paradigms of learning in higher education.

### **THE TRANSFORMATION OF LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Much has been written about how the goals and policies of higher education have transformed over the decades. This shift is legitimate. As with any other phenomenon in life, education is impacted by surrounding factors and influences (Siemens & Matheos, 2010).

Education outcomes are shifting from focusing solely on cognitive development toward personal, social, and economic development (Eckel & King, 2004; Hanson, 2014; Trapp, 2012). Financial issues, which include the cost of attendance, tuition, and fees, have various themes and patterns (Ginder et al., 2014b). Consequently, the concepts of teaching, learning, and being a teacher or learner have been remodeled (Trapp, 2012). Different models of teaching impact the relationship between the teacher and the learner and describe the teaching and learning processes (Groccia, 2012). However, the following question may arise: What is the most effective model of teaching?

Interestingly, in the educational literature, the examination of the effectiveness of a model or method of teaching is always introduced as a comparison with traditional learning or teaching. In a large body of literature, traditional learning has been considered an antonym of new types of learning, such as e-learning, as well as virtual, cyber, hybrid, and online learning (Gaytan & Pasaro, 2009; Moazami, Bahrapour, Azar, Jahedi, & Moattari, 2014; Muniasamy, Ejalani, & Anandhavalli, 2014). Other researchers have used the term traditional learning to draw a conclusion regarding the employment of a specific method of teaching, such as cooperative learning (Basak & Yildiz, 2014; Khan & Ahmad, 2014), problem-based learning (Deo, 2014; Mughal, et al., 2014; Pourshanzari, Roohbakhsh, Khazaei, & Tajadini, 2013; Stefanou, Stolk, Prince, Chen, & Lord, 2013), project-based learning (Bell, 2010; Çibik & Yalçın, 2013; Isik & Gucum, 2013), and game-based learning (Liao, 2011; Ronimus, Kujala, Tolvanen, & Lyytinen, 2014). This leads one to wonder what traditional learning is.

There is no consistency in the literature regarding the precise definition of traditional learning (sometimes conventional). McInnerney and Roberts (2004) refer to the idea of the sage on the stage as a common description of traditional learning. In such a model, the instructor is the active party who transfers information to the learners through lectures and printed materials via a kind of interaction between the learners and both the instructor and the content. Lee and Tsai (2011) define traditional learning as “delivering learning material face-to-face with no use of the Internet for teaching and learning” (p. 908). Targamadzé and Petrauskienė (2010) consider traditional learning as “a process of learning that takes place under the supervision of a teacher in a physical learning environment when using physical tools of learning and direct synchronous communication” (p. 171). Allen and Seaman (2014) label as traditional only those courses that lack any online technology. These definitions imply that traditional learning is a process of learning, a method of teaching, and a medium of delivering instruction. The instructor and learner synchronously interact and communicate, as they are physically and simultaneously present in the same room without the facilitation of the Internet and online technology.

However, the actual situation surrounding higher education classes differs from this image. The latest report by the Babson Survey Research Group states that only a very small number of institutions in the US have no online offerings (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Moreover, almost all public institutions fall outside of this small number (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Students come to the classroom holding in their hands their own devices that are connected to the Internet through cellular data plans or the Wi-Fi offered by the institution (Palloff & Pratt, 2013; Parker, Lenhart, & Moore, 2011). E-books, wikis, YouTube videos, and social media are available as learning and teaching materials and resources (Fulton, 2012; Ravid, Kalman, & Rafaeli, 2008; Reuben, 2008; Siemens & Matheos, 2010). Instructors use learning management systems (LMSs) to upload the syllabus and as a testing and grading portal (Georgouli, Skalkidis, & Guerreiro, 2008; Palloff & Pratt, 2013). Both the instructor and the students need to have access to the Internet in what is known as the traditional classroom.

In addition to traditional courses, Allen and Seaman (2014) provide a classification for courses according to how Internet technology contributes to their delivery. Web-facilitated courses are face-to-face courses that use the Internet to deliver less than 30% of the content by posting the learning materials and assignments to an LMS. When less than 80% of the course content and activities are presented through the Internet, the course is called hybrid or blended. Online courses are completely delivered and taught online. Thus, it may be the right time to argue in favor of switching to a new paradigm for traditional learning. Indeed, it may be useful to consider web-facilitated or blended learning as the new traditional learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2013).

## **ONLINE LEARNING AT A GLANCE**

Definitions of Online Learning: Since the flourishing of online learning, a large number of terminologies and definitions have been used to describe it. Examples of the terms that are commonly used to describe online learning include e-learning, virtual learning, cyber learning, Internet learning, distributed learning, web-facilitated learning, web-based learning, distance learning, computer-based learning, resource-based learning, and technology-based learning (Ally, 2008; Anohina, 2005; Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011; Moore & Kearsley, 2011; Rudestam & Schoenholtz- Read, 2010). The term online learning will be used throughout this paper. The wide variety of terms results in different definitions of online learning as well.

Authors, researchers, theorists, and educators have defined online learning in a variety of ways and from the angles of various perspectives and disciplines. Means, Toyama, Murphy, and Baki (2013) define online learning as learning that occurs entirely (purely online learning) or partially (blended learning) through the Internet. In another publication, Bakia, Shear, Toyama, and Lasserter (2012) view online learning as “instructional environments supported by the Internet” (p. 2). Ally (2008) describes online learning as a learning experience that allows for growing, acquiring knowledge, and constructing personal meaning by providing access to learning materials through the Internet; interacting with the content, instructor, and other learners; and obtaining support during the learning process.

Moreover, new formats of online learning, such as mobile learning and MOOCs, have emerged. Mobile learning is “learning that takes place in learning environments and spaces that take account of the mobility of technology, mobility of learners and mobility of learning” (El- Hussein & Cronje, 2010, p. 20). MOOCs are a combination of online learning and open educational resources (Bali, 2014). MOOCs are free of charge, open, and non-credit courses that are offered by some higher education institutions over the Internet (Allen & Seaman, 2014).

## **BENEFITS OF ONLINE LEARNING**

The debate regarding the effectiveness of online learning has been raging for decades. Both technological optimists and skeptics have argued over whether moving toward online learning would yield better learning outcomes than face-to-face learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2013). Yet, it is apparent that online learning has been popularized as a substantial component at the majority of higher education institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Furthermore, almost three-quarters of academic leaders believe that the learning outcomes of online learning are similar to or better than those of face-to-face education (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Bell & Federman, 2013).

Remarkably, the trends in online learning research have now moved toward investigating how different elements and features of online learning influence its effectiveness (Bell & Federman, 2013).

Some reported benefits of online learning for the learners include offering more flexible learning experiences, opening channels for synchronous and asynchronous communication and interaction, allowing for more collaboration and interaction with peers, providing access to learning resources in various formats, and promoting authentic and situated learning (Ally, 2008; Davies, 2014; Fuller & Yu, 2014). Bell and Federman (2013) argue that online learning has the potential to afford and support access to higher education for those who have socioeconomic, academic, and health issues that prevent them from attending on-site classes. Keengwe, Schnellert, and Kungu (2014) add to the noted benefits the potential of online learning to offer cross-cultural experiences in which learners can learn about and communicate with people from other cultures. They also cautiously mention feeling anonymous as another benefit of online learning. Although anonymity may have some disadvantages, it can give the learners more freedom to participate in the learning activities.

Online instructors can also benefit from online learning. The advantages that they may gain include more flexibility in regard to teaching location and hours; being able to reuse and immediately update the learning materials; increasing the number of ways to individually communicate, supervise, and direct learners; and enhancing their ability to determine learners’ educational needs and design personalized learning experiences accordingly (Ally, 2008).

Alman and Tomer (2012) note that teaching online may provide opportunities for online instructors to learn about the principles of instructional design and technology, online pedagogies, and emergent technologies. Online teaching, therefore, would help faculty members to expand their professional community, exchange best practices and feedback, and enhance their teaching and career portfolios (Alman & Tomer, 2012).

## **CONCERNS ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING**

Along with amassing evidence in favor of the usefulness of online learning, concerns about the problems that might emerge in online environments have grown. First, it is important to note that online learning is not a replacement for face-to-face education (Palloff & Pratt, 2013). Moreover, educators should be aware that there is

no sole online learning format that is suitable for all faculty and students (Palloff & Pratt, 2013). Cheating and plagiarism are among the most pressing concerns about online learning (Fuller & Yu, 2014) and acts as a threat to students' academic integrity (Bell & Federman, 2013).

Institutions have made efforts to minimize concerns about cheating in online courses. For instance, exams can be taken on campus or at testing centers, types of assessment other than exams can be employed, questions can be randomized or pooled from question banks, and adherence to the policies of academic integrity and dishonesty should be declared (Bell & Federman, 2013; Fuller & Yu, 2014). Another concern relates to learners' retention in online learning environments. Dropout rates are higher in online courses than face-to-face ones. This is primarily due to technical and access problems (Bell & Federman, 2013). More to the point, faculty, students, and administrators must be educated about the pedagogical, administrative, technological, and technical aspects of online learning to face and solve any problems and concerns they may encounter (Palloff & Pratt, 2013).

### **TEACHING IN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

Instructors in higher education face challenges due to the previously mentioned changes and circumstances. They may experience feelings of discomfort when dealing with technology-enriched classrooms and related issues (Palloff & Pratt, 2013). Some of the issues that might deter faculty members from teaching online include wondering if they are qualified to teach online, how to maintain their own identities and attributes as instructors, what the learners' demographic might be, how to meet discipline-related demands, what kind of training they would need, how to be successful online instructors, how to assess and evaluate learning outcomes, and how to deal with stress and feelings of frustration while making the transition to online learning environments (Alman & Tomer, 2012; Palloff & Pratt, 2013).

Generally speaking, faculty members receive very little training and preparation for teaching in higher education (Palloff & Pratt, 2013). Having said that, the impact of this lack of preparation is magnified in online learning environments. Teaching online and technology-enriched courses requires adapting pedagogical practices that are more compatible with the integration of technology at the postsecondary level (Bailey & Card, 2009). The principles of feedback, andragogy, constructivism, and transformative learning seem to be more appropriate to proclaiming the learner-centered approach, which is one of the online learning foundations (Bailey & Card, 2009). Online instructors must pay attention to what they need to create, develop, and manage their online courses and how to effectively communicate with the learners in the absence of physical presence and interaction. For both instructors and learners, it is crucial to consider time management issues. It is also important to note that the sense and control of time have different patterns in online courses (Alman & Tomer, 2012).

The roles, characteristics, competencies, and skills that one requires to be a competent and successful online instructor should be identified and highlighted by educational institutions, online learning organizations and authorities, and online learning theorists. Online faculty members need a framework and guideline that support them, improve their skills, and help to design adequate training programs (Munoz-Carril, Gonzalez-Sanmamed, & Hernandez-Selles, 2013). Furthermore, Bawane and Spector (2009) develop a general framework to help design and create professional development programs for teachers. According to this framework, determining the goals and inputs of training programs correlates with understanding the instructor's roles and tasks and then identifying the required skills and competencies (Bawane & Spector, 2009). In addition, online instructional staff might better understand their role as online faculty if they are introduced to examples of exemplary online instructors and consider them role models (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2013).

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXCELLENT ONLINE INSTRUCTOR**

The excellent online instructor should understand the nature of both face-to-face and online learning and the differences between them and should employ this understanding in implementing and facilitating online classes (Palloff & Pratt, 2011). Teaching online necessitates a commitment to the principles of online learning in order to be able to create and maintain a teaching, social, and cognitive presence. Successful online instructors promote and facilitate students' active communication, interaction, collaboration, and engagement throughout the online course (Palloff & Pratt, 2011). These instructors should possess personal traits such as being highly motivated, supportive, visible, organized, analytical, respectful, approachable, active, responsive, flexible, open, honest, compassionate, and able to lead by example (Keengwe et al., 2014; Savery, 2005).

### **THE ROLES OF ONLINE INSTRUCTORS**

Faculty members who decide to teach online courses are apt to carry out roles and responsibilities other than merely providing instruction. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed five sets of standards "for learning, teaching and leading in the digital age" (ISTE, 2014, para. 2). One group of

standards is the ISTE standards for teachers, which depicts the exemplar teaching with technology. These standards affirm that instructors should (a) facilitate and inspire student learning and creativity, (b) design and develop digital-age learning experiences and assessments, (c) model digital-age work and learning, (d) promote and model digital citizenship and responsibility, and (e) engage in professional growth and leadership (ISTE, 2008).

Goodyear, Salmon, Spector, Steeples, and Tickner (2001) identify eight roles for an instructor in online teaching: researcher, content facilitator, technologist, designer, manager or administrator, process facilitator, advisor or counselor, and assessor. Similarly, Bawane and Spector (2009) and Munoz Carril et al. (2013) classify the roles of online instructors into eight categories: (a) pedagogical, (b) social, (c) evaluative, (d) administrative, (e) technological, (f) personal, (g) advisory, and (h) researching. They view being an instructional designer, course developer, content expert, tutor, organizer, facilitator, and professional as secondary roles within the pedagogical role.

### **ONLINE TEACHING COMPETENCIES**

Competencies for online instruction have been categorized at different levels in the literature, and several approaches have been adopted to classify them. Salmon (2003) describes and groups the qualities or competencies of e-moderators into five categories: (a) understanding the online process, (b) technical skills, (c) online communication skills, (d) content expertise, and (e) personal characteristics. ISTE's (2001) standards for technology facilitation compile competencies that aid technology facilitators to execute their duties. These competency groups include (a) technology operations and concepts; (b) planning and designing learning environments and experiences; (c) teaching, learning, and developing the curriculum; (d) assessment and evaluation; (e) productivity and professional practice; (f) social, ethical, legal, and human issues; (g) procedures, policies, planning, and budgeting for technology environments; and (h) leadership and vision. These standards have been extensively employed in myriad online projects and studies.

Some researchers briefly list online competencies as personal, social, pedagogical, and technological in addition to a set of competencies related to the content, design, communication, and management (Baran & Correia, 2014; Guasch, Alvarez, & Espasa, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2011; Smith, 2008). Dubins and Graham (2009) examine 17 online learning programs to formulate eight competency categories: (a) content management system (CMS) skills, (b) other technical skills, (c) instructional design, (d) social processes and presence, (e) managing assessment, (f) orienting students, (g) institutional knowledge, and (h) pedagogy and andragogy.

Other researchers go further by developing a framework that classifies and summarizes a cluster of competencies. The framework developed by Abdous (2011) in Figure 1 illustrates three stages. The first stage contains before-teaching practices that included preparing, planning, and designing. During the teaching stage, there is facilitating, interacting, and providing and seeking feedback competencies. Finally, online instructors have to demonstrate the competencies of reflecting and drawing on lessons learned. Bigatel, Ragan, Kennan, May, and Redmond (2012) specify the competencies based on successful online teaching tasks into seven categories:

(a) active learning, (b) administration and leadership, (c) active teaching and responsiveness, (d) multimedia technology, (e) classroom decorum, (f) technological competence, and (g) policy enforcement.

In 2008, Maryland Online (MOL) constructed a professional development project titled Certificate for Online Adjunct Teaching [COAT] for online faculty. COAT develops competencies for online teaching, including (a) orienting students to online learning, (b) technology skills, (c) LMS skills, (d) basic instructional design principles, (e) pedagogy and andragogy, (f) social process and presence, (g) Internet safety for k-12; (h) managing assessment, and (i) legal and institution-specific policy and procedure (MOL, 2014). A number of institutions other than Maryland have adopted this program to prepare their instructional staff for online teaching.



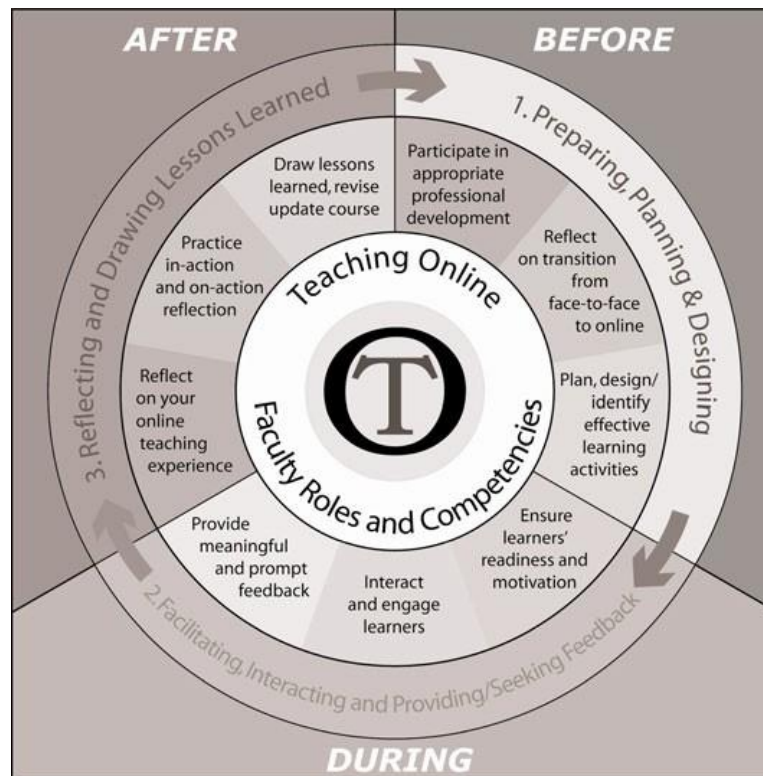


Figure 1. A framework for acquiring online teaching competencies. Adapted from M. H. Abdous (2011), “A Process-Oriented Framework for Acquiring Online Teaching Competencies,” *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 23(1), p. 65.

To some extent, the above-mentioned categories illustrate the high expectations among online instructors to possess varied competencies and perform different roles and tasks. Although this issue seems rational, practically, it is difficult for online instructors to focus equally on all the identified roles. Simplifying this somewhat, the competencies of online teaching have to be labeled and prioritized according to the roles the instructors will actually execute (Bawane & Spector, 2009). Institutions might offer technical support for using LMSs and other technologies, and this might reduce the online instructors’ load. However, it is important to acquire sufficient knowledge of how to troubleshoot and handle technical problems (Alman & Tomer, 2012).

Table 1. *Categorization of Online Teaching Competencies*

Researcher(s)	Communication	Pedagogy	Technology	Design	Management	Instructional	Social	Assessment	Orienting students	Institutional	CM S/LMS	Personal	Content	Professional
ISTE (2001)		X	X	X	X		X			X			X	X
Salmon (2003)	X	X	X									X	X	
Simth (2008)	X	X	X	X	X									
Dubins and Graham (2009)		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			
Guasch et al. (2010)		X	X	X	X		X							
Abdous (2011)	X	X	X	X	X									

Paloff and Pratt (2011)	X	X						X	X
Bigatel et al. (2012)	X	X	X				X		
Baran and Correia (2014)	X	X							X
COAT (2014)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Competencies from previous studies are organized in Table 1 to allow for the inspection of which categories are more frequently displayed in the literature. Pedagogy, technology, design, content, management, institutional, communication, and social have received more focus in a larger number of studies. It also seems that communication and institutional competencies are used interchangeably with social and management respectively to imply a similarity in competencies. This result is compatible with Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), which was developed by Koehler and colleagues. TPACK is an enhanced version of the pedagogical content knowledge built by Lee Shulman. According to TPACK, effective teaching with technology occurs when teachers have a body of knowledge that resulted from a complex interaction among the knowledge of content, pedagogy, and technology (Koehler, Mishra, & Cain, 2013).

In this paper, online teaching skills are, therefore, itemized as task or performance statements belonging to one of these six categories (i.e., pedagogy, technology, design, content, management and institutional, and social and communication).

### SKILLS FOR ONLINE TEACHING

**Pedagogical Skills:** Effective online instructors should understand the fundamentals of online teaching and pedagogy. They must demonstrate this understanding through applying a large number of principles and strategies. These principles and strategies include:

- Learning theories, such as learning styles, the adult learning theory, the learner-centered approach, and collaborative learning;
- Designing and implementing appropriate instructional strategies, as well as classroom assessment and student engagement techniques;
- Organizing and facilitating students’ participation and providing guidance and support as needed;
- Using criterion-based assessment to evaluate individual and group performance;
- Motivating students and showing enthusiasm and interest;
- Encouraging knowledge construction based upon learners’ prior knowledge and life experience;
- Fostering learners’ self-assessment and reflection; and
- Promoting group interaction, collaboration, and teamwork.

(Abdous, 2011; Bailey & Card, 2009; Bailie, 2011; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Craddock & Gunzelman, 2013; Munoz Carril et al., 2013)

**Content Skills:** Online instructors must be able to do the following:

- Expressing and mastering extensive knowledge of the content;
- Stating learning goals and objectives that coincide with learners’ levels and characteristics;
- Drafting and developing learning and assessment activities that align with learning goals and objectives;
- Developing a course outline that includes all course components and elements;
- Designing a teaching proposal at the general level and identify each of its phases or elements;
- Developing and selecting appropriate and varied learning resources that accommodate different learning styles and preferences;
- Linking the subject and content with scientific, social, cultural, and any other relevant phenomena; and
- Developing an inventory of existing content and resources and any additional content and resources that will be needed.

(Abdous, 2011; Bailie, 2011; Bailey & Card, 2009; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Munoz Carril et al., 2013)

**Design Skills:** Designing and developing online courses is a demanding task. It requires having a design and production team, which consists of an instructional designer, instructional technologist, graphic and media designers and production team, and librarians (Abdous, 2011). These individuals work collaboratively to produce high-quality online courses (Haughton, Sandt, & Slantcheva-Durst, 2014). However, online instructors must be able to do the following:

- Understanding and applying instructional design principles, models, and theories;

- Organizing and presenting the learning materials in different formats;
- Cooperating with the production team to design learning activities and select appropriate tools and techniques to present these activities; and
- Using students' previous feedback to develop and design new courses and assess the course design quality by using quality assurance tools and instruments, such as the Quality Matters Rubric.

(Abdous, 2011; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Munoz Carril et al., 2013; Newby, Eagleson, & Pfander, 2014)

**Technological Skills:** Although online learning relies heavily on technology, there is no imperative need for online instructors to be technologically advanced. Online instructors have to possess adequate technological literacy skills to be able to do the following:

- Accessing various technological resources and tools, such as email, Internet browsers, LMSs, text and video chat applications, and productivity software and applications;
- Understanding the learning and teaching capabilities and limitations of these tools;
- Being aware of the technical potential of, and procedures used to create, e-content, such as e- books and instructional videos; and
- Being alert to the latest updates and renovations of educational technology and software. (Abdous, 2011; Alman & Tomer, 2012; Bailie, 2011; Bailey & Card, 2009; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Munoz-Carril et al., 2013)

**Management and Institutional Skills:** As classroom management is an important aspect of face-to-face education, managing courses and learning is essential in online learning environments. An awareness of institutional policies and norms is also an important aspect of being a successful online instructor. Skills and tasks related to these two aspects include the following:

- Being able to clarify the roles and expectations of the instructor and the learners;
- Managing the course time and applying time-saving techniques;
- Demonstrating leadership, management, mentoring, and coaching skills, as well as knowledge of administrative qualities and procedures;
- Tracking course and students' progress on a regular basis;
- Establishing and declaring rules and regulations for participation, submission of assignments, timeliness, sending and seeking feedback, and communication protocols;
- Conducting research on classroom teaching then interpreting and integrating research findings and results;
- Understanding and demonstrating commitment to institutional policies;
- Maintaining contact and networking with online teaching and administrative teams; and
- Complying with legal, ethical, and copyright issues and standards.

(Bailie, 2011; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Craddock & Gunzelman, 2013; Munoz Carril et al., 2013).

**Social and Communication Skills:** Active communication and social presence are vital to engaging online learners. Using different communication tools (e.g., email, video chat, text messages, etc.), online instructors have to efficiently communicate and promote interactivity among the learners. Some activities to achieve this include the following:

- Facilitating and maintaining interactive discussion and information exchange;
- Using sufficient and commonly understandable language;
- Respecting and considering cultural differences;
- Clearly requesting information and asking questions;
- Clarifying the purpose and meaning of messages and feedback;
- Emphasizing the important points using font colors and effects;
- Ensuring the quality and accuracy of written messages and feedback and detecting typographical and grammatical errors;
- Personalizing messages and feedback and making them more lively by adding the appropriate sense of humor when possible;
- Using different communication methods to ensure accessibility among the instructor and learners, and the learners with their peers;
- Maintaining a warm, friendly, and inviting collegial atmosphere;
- Creating and developing respectful relationships and a sense of community among the learners;
- Showing sensitivity and empathy when communicating online;
- Resolving conflicts and misunderstandings amicably; and
- Offering advice and suggestions and clarifying doubts and suspicions.

(Abdous, 2011; Bailie, 2011; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Craddock & Gunzelman, 2013; Fuller & Yu, 2014;



Munoz Carril et al., 2013)

All these skills, tasks, and competencies can help in designing and creating professional development opportunities for online educators. Needs assessment analysis tools and instruments may be built based on these qualities to determine professional development goals and procedures (Baran & Correia, 2014). Online instructors can also use these to self-evaluate their competencies and then recognize their own learning and training needs as adult, self-regulated, and self-determined learners (Baran et al., 2013). Finally, competencies can serve as a protocol to ensure instructors' readiness and qualification to teach in online learning environments.

## CONCLUSION

Online teaching is demanding. Faculty members might feel uncomfortable teaching online courses due to the multiple roles and responsibilities of teaching online. Online teaching skills and competencies have to be determined in order to help design professional development programs for online instructors. These skills and competencies are classified into six categories:

(a) pedagogical skills, (b) content skills, (c) design skills, (d) technological skills, (e) management and institutional skills, and (f) social and communication skills. Online faculty can use these sets of skills to self-evaluate their abilities to teach online and identify their training needs.

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