

**ANATOMY OF PROFESSIONAL ETHNICS: DIAGNOSIS OF CRITICAL SYNDROMES AND PRESCRIPTIVE ANTIDOTES FOR NIGERIAN TEACHERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*No profession can be virile and effective without a code of ethics to guide the conduct of its practitioners. Although teacher ethics anatomically have clear prescriptive, prohibitive, legalistic and enforcement pillars, yet the fundamental principles of these ethics are neglected and violated by Nigerian teachers due to syndromes of ignorance, rigidity, egocentricism, hedonism, and stoicism. Although the enforcement of teacher ethics may require the dispensation of punishments and rewards, yet Nigerian teachers need to look inwards and should be personally responsible for acquiring a sound knowledge of their ethics and re-awakening their conscience so as to have the intrinsic discipline of rendering altruistic service and living up to the ethical standards of their noble profession.*

**Introduction**

Prior to the establishment of organized society, men lived in a state of nature, in which there were no laws, no authority, no sense of justice and injustice, no notion of right and wrong. Everyone pursued the satisfaction of his selfish interests and desires as the only rule of action. Man's philosophy was that whatever brought satisfaction was good and pursued and whatever a person dislikes was bad. It was a state of perpetual conflict, struggle, war and insecurity among men. There was no permanent ownership of personal belongings. Whatever a man could grab anywhere was his

own, and a stronger man could still snatch it at any time. Thomas Hobbes (1225-1275) observed that the life of man under such barbaric and primitive circumstances was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Omoregbe, 1993).

Having tasted the poisonous fruits of egocentric and hedonistic philosophy of survival of the fittest, and having experienced the fatal consequences of living in a lawless and unethical society, men decided to come together and made a contract of do's and don'ts. They agreed to renounce their rights in order to respect the rights of others and to observe this covenant of mutual trust for peaceful co-existence for an organized society. According to guest (1983), between 10,000-500 BC., kings and religious leaders in various parts of the world documented the code of ethnics that should guide societal conduct, especially as in the case of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Hebrew, Greece, Rome, China, and India among others. Thus, it is clear that societal ethics had political and religious origins as they are deeply entrenched in the constitutions {man made laws} as well as in the religious injunctions (Divinely revealed laws)

The need for professional code of ethics become necessary with the evolution of the civil service, which also has its roots in history and dates back to ancient civilizations. According to Adebayo (2004), by 462 BC, Pericles, a renowned leader in ancient Greece introduced a scheme for the compensation of officials, thus facilitating the continued participation in public service by citizens who had to work daily for their living. The ancient Chinese Empire too, during the Han Dynasty in 202 BC, recognized the need to have a permanent crop workers and officials who shall perform public service and implement government policies. With the establishment of the civil service, leading professionals in the various professions that fall under the umbrella of Civil service found it necessary to develop professional code of ethics that were specifically to guide the official conduct of their practitioners. The first professional code of ethics that was invented by Hippocras of Cos {470-37 BC), which was administered as an oath to students about enter the medical profession partly read as follows:

I swear by Apollo the physician and panacea and all the gods and goddesses that according my ability and judgement, I will keep this oath and this stipulation. That by percept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of the art according to the law of medicine..... with purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practice my art.... I will abstain from every act of corruption and from the seduction of females and

males..... as a reckoning while I continue to keep this oath inviolate, may it be granted me to enjoy life and the practice of the art respected by all men in all times. But should I trespass and violate this oath may the reverse be my lot. (Felice & Carolan, n.d. p.161).

What is deducible from the Hippocratic Oath is that medical ethics are made up of grievous promises, prescriptions, prohibitions and consequences for practitioners. There is no doubt that teaching is the oldest and noblest of professions. The history of education shows that teachers occupied the position of great honour and influence in their communities. According to Fafunwa (1974), teachers epitomized integrity, knowledge, leadership, moral rectitude and selfless service. They spearheaded the development of their communities and countries. In order to perpetuate and maintain these qualities, the teachers' code of ethics was enacted to define the minimum standards expected of professional teachers in terms of their thoughts, words and actions. The code provides a clear set of moral rules for all teachers and forecloses the possibility that any teacher will claim to be ignorant of what constitutes virtue or vices in the discharge of their professional duties.

Specifically, the objective of this paper is to attempt a descriptive anatomy of teachers professional ethics; examine the critical syndromes that affect the observation of these ethics and to prescribe antidotes that could enhance lasting adherence to teacher's ethics in Nigerian schools at all levels.

### **Anatomy of teacher's professional ethics**

The anatomy of teacher's professional ethics may be described on the basis of six pillars, which supports the structure of teacher's ethics. These pillars include;

1. **The prescriptive pillar:** This pillar consists of commands that positively require teachers to act in certain ways for the progress of their profession. The prescriptive pillars are partly derived from civil service regulations of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006 ch. 4); Nigeria Teachers manual of the Teachers Registration Council (2004), and regulations governing conditions of service of teachers. This pillar prescribes that:
  - i. Teachers shall deal justly and impartially with students regardless of their physical, mental, emotional, economic, social, racial or religious characteristics.

- ii. Teachers shall set good examples to their students particularly in their dress, manners; speech and in the way they perform their duties.
- iii. Teachers shall recognise and respect the differences among students and seek to meet their individual' educational needs.
- iv. The primary consideration of teachers at all times shall be the welfare of pupils entrusted to their care.
- v. Teachers shall have respect for the child's rights and dignity and shall show maximum consideration for the feeling and circumstances of learners.
- vi. Teachers shall relate equally with all colleagues irrespective of religious, cultural, race, gender, political inclinations e.t.c.
- vii. Teachers shall seek to achieve the highest professional standards in all their works and shall be dedicated and faithful in all professional undertaking, being conscientious and dependable.
- viii. Teachers should have an enduring absolute commitment to the profession and shall render efficient and cost effective service at all times.
- ix. Teachers shall recognise and accept the authority of the school head (headmaster/principal/provost/vice chancellor), and shall be loyal to him.
- x. Teachers shall accept official responsibilities which the school head delegates to them and to discharge these responsibilities to the best of their ability.
- xi. Teachers shall obey lawful and reasonable orders of their employer.
- xii. Confidential school matters shall be kept secret.
- xiii. Teachers shall be punctual to school and to classes.
- xiv. Teachers shall keep up to date all relevant school records for which they are responsible. The documents shall be available in the school for scrutiny at any time.
- xv. Teachers shall live within their means to avoid financial embarrassment.
- xvi. Teachers shall consider it their duty to attend all professional conferences that are relevant to their work when officially required to do so.
- xvii. Teachers shall discharge their duties strictly in line with professional procedures and regulations.
- xviii. Teachers shall seek to establish friendly and co-operative relationship with parents.

- xix. Teachers shall keep parents informed about the progress of their children and to provide them with any other relevant information that will serve the interest of their children.
- xx. Teachers shall adhere to reasonable patterns of behaviour accepted by the community for professional persons.
- xxi. Teachers shall respect the community in which they are employed and shall work to raise the educational standards and strengthen the community's moral, spiritual and intellectual life.
- xxii. Teachers shall maintain active compulsory membership in professional organisations.

These prescriptive pillars provide a positive course of action for teachers.

2. **The Prohibitive Pillar:** This pillar spells out the don'ts and restraints teachers from acting in certain ways. According to TRC (2004) and Colleges of Education Manual (ch. 15), this pillar provides that:

- i. Teachers shall not exploit their students
- ii. Teachers shall not have any canal knowledge of any person they know to be a student of their school or be involved in any indecent relationship with students.
- iii. Teachers shall not make any defamatory statement or comment about their students or to members of the general public.
- iv. Teachers shall avoid all damaging comments upon a student or his home and shall not permit any student to make derogatory remarks about other teachers.
- v. Teachers shall not use their position to humiliate, threaten, intimidate, harass or blackmail any learner to submit to selfish motive or engage in sexual misconduct, drug addiction and trafficking, cultism, human trafficking and other related offences.
- vi. Teachers shall not ask for or receive any kind of gifts, bribes or gratification whatsoever from their student or parents.
- vii. Teachers shall not under any circumstances administer any corporal punishment except otherwise permitted by the school authority.
- viii. Teachers in society shall be of high moral standard and avoid indecent behaviour and social vices such as drunkenness, smoking in public, indecent dressing, breach of public peace, dishonesty, fraud, etc.

- ix. Teachers shall not disregard any lawful instruction of any union or association.
- x. Teachers shall not conduct themselves in any manner that is injurious to the honour of the teaching profession. They shall do nothing to bring shame or disgrace to their person.
- xi. No teacher shall under normal circumstance be absent from work without the express permission of the school head.
- xii. It is unethical for teachers to conduct classes for their students outside school hours for a fee or at unapproved venue.
- xiii. Teachers shall not reveal examination questions to anyone. In marking the scripts they shall not be partial, biased or unfair to any student. They shall not condone or connive in examination malpractice.
- xiv. No teacher shall participate in, condone or encourage acts of indiscipline in the school.
- xv. On no account shall teachers use their position to further their political aspirations or spread the ideology of any political party.
- xvi. Activities unrelated to the normal school duties shall not be undertaken during working hours except with the expressed permission of the school head.
- xvii. Teachers shall not take any form of alcoholic drinks during school hours. They shall not smoke in the classroom or any student's assembly.

These prohibitive pillars imply that teachers are expected to abstain for any improper conduct that can tarnish the image of the profession.

3. **The reward pillar:** Embodied in teachers professional ethics is a system of rearwards which may take the form of:
  - i. Respect by students, fellow teachers and community.
  - ii. Recognition and commendation by school authority.
  - iii. Special merit awards and satisfaction of teachers' conscience.
  - iv. Higher responsibilities and greater authority in running the affairs of the school.
  - v. Accelerated promotion as a special privilege due to professional excellence.
  - vi. Salary increase.
  - vii. Having an impeccably clean record of service.
  - viii. Job security and longer years of service.

Apart from these, there is the feeling of satisfaction that one has done his job with fulfilment.

4. **The punishment pillar:** The TRC Act in section 9 established the Teachers Investigation Panel (TIP) and the Teacher Disciplinary Committee (TDC) to discipline teachers found guilty of professional misconduct. Teachers shall submit themselves to the TIP and TDC.

As an integral part of the component of ethics, is the pillar of sanctions which stipulates penalties for the violation of the ethics. Such sanctions as may be meted out may take the form of:

- i. Oral caution.
  - ii. Reprimand.
  - iii. Written warning.
  - iv. Query.
  - v. Reduction in salary as result of demotion.
  - vi. Deduction of salary for absenteeism and dereliction of duty.
  - vii. Withholding of salary in grievous situation.
  - viii. Placement on half-pay due to interdiction pending court ruling.
  - ix. Deferment of salary increment.
  - x. Adverse annual report for possible retrenchment.
  - xi. Denial of promotion.
  - xii. Demotion (reduction in rank or grade level).
  - xiii. Suspension pending investigation.
  - xiv. Compulsory retirement or forced resignation.
  - xv. Termination of appointment
  - xvi. Discharge from service for those on probation.
  - xvii. Summary dismissal without benefits.
5. **The pillar of legitimacy:** This is the component that gives professional ethics their authority and lawful demand for compliance by teachers. According to Omoregbe (1993), professional ethics derive their legitimacy from a combination of the following:
1. The constitution.
  2. The National Policy on Education.
  3. Legislative Acts in form of statutes, Edicts, By-laws and ordinances.
  4. Judicial opinions of courts (Common :aw)
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5. Professional codes of conduct.
6. School rules and regulations.
7. Respected customs and traditions of society.
8. Revelations of Holy Scriptures.

Teachers shall familiarise themselves with all the relevant laws of their profession and are bound to be liable for acts of omission or commission that run contrary to professional standards, or fall short of commonly held values, practices and norms.

6. **The pillar of enforcement:** Professional ethics are enforceable by law. This pillar ensures compliance to prescriptive and prohibitive pillars through dispensation of punishments and rewards by the school head and other authorities empowered to do so.

#### **Critical syndromes affecting teachers' ethics.**

Thomas (1998) defined syndrome as a group of concurrent symptoms of a disease. Teachers' professional ethics are indeed suffering from the teaching job. The diagnosis of symptoms should be within the framework of teachers' attitudes and behaviours that have crippled the fundamental pillars of their ethics, which renders the teaching service virtually unfit and unworthy to be regarded as a noble profession. In this regard the following syndromes are identified:

1. **Syndrome of ignorance:** Some teachers have acute ignorance of professional prescriptions, prohibitions, legalities and enforcement mechanisms of their professional ethics. Many teachers do not bother to seek for the correct knowledge of their professional ethics through constant research. Such teachers will continue to commit culpable errors in their professional conduct due to ignorance, resulting from their negligence and refusal to get adequate information. According to Socrates (479 – 399 BC), knowledge is a virtue and ignorance is the root cause of evil, wickedness and misfortune (Lee. Trans, 1956).
2. **Syndrome of rigidity:** This is situation where some teachers with a good intension, stubbornly cling to ways of doing things even if such actions are actually wrong and unethical. Such teachers commit inculpable error in their professional conduct. An inculpable error is when a person is unaware of his mistake and is convinced that what he is doing is the right thing to do.



According to Francis Bacon, (1600), man has a tendency to see things the way he wants to see them and to rigidly cling to what he believes already. He stubbornly rejects whatever seems contrary to his opinions, beliefs or ways of doing things (Sharpman 1984). Some teachers would continue to violate professional ethics because of their rigid refusal to take correction.

3. **Syndrome of geocentricism:** According to Epicurus (50-138 AD.), man is by nature selfish and would always seek for personal benefit in everything he does. That man's hope for reward or profit is what prompts him to take action or desist from taking action (Omogbe, 1993). Some teachers have a tendency to comply with ethics because they expect to be rewarded by so doing. Other teachers would continue to disregard and violate professional ethics if they feel that their effort are not recognised and rewarded.
4. **Syndrome of hedonism:** Human actions tend to be directed toward the derivation of pleasure and avoidance of physical, mental and emotional pain. According to Benedict Spinoza (1652-1677) actions are carried out or avoided out of fear of punishment in this world or in the hereafter, not because one feels that they are right or wrong (Sharman & Thyland, 1984). Some teachers abide by their professional ethics out of fear of punishment, while others would continue to violate professional ethics with impunity, so long as they are not brought to book.
5. **Syndrome of stoicism:** This is where a person's actions are strongly controlled by passions and emotional sentiments, which makes him/her to knowingly and calculatively violate ethical principles against all reason. According to Aristotle (384-222 BC), passion leads man astray and to vulgar and immoral ways since a person controlled by passion will not listen to arguments intended to dissuade him from doing evil (Lee, trans, 1956). Under the control of passion some teachers would continue to deliberately suppress and overrule their conscience in order to violate professional ethics.

### **Prescriptive antidotes**

The following prescriptive antidotes are hereby recommended as preventive and curative strategies for the resuscitation, reservation, and upholding of teachers ethics in Nigeria.

1. Nigeria teachers must take up the personal responsibility of acquiring a thorough knowledge of their professional ethics through research, academic forums and personal interactions.
2. Teachers must have the intellectual flexibility to view things from different perspectives and to accommodate better interpretation of their ethics for correct observation.
3. While teachers should render altruistic service to humanity, they should equally be recognised and adequately rewarded for professional excellence and faithful compliance to ethics.
4. Teachers who deliberately and consistently violate professional ethics should be given appropriate punishments without fear or favour so as to serve as deterrence and to reform the offender.
5. Teachers must re-awaken their conscience so as to have the intrinsic discipline that will enable them to use their reason to overrule their passions for unethical behaviours.

### Conclusion

Teachers in Nigeria have very good professional ethics but these ethics are largely neglected and violated by the practitioners. Teachers must look inwards and rise up to the challenge of living up to the standards and requirements of the professional ethics.

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