

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL CODE OF ETHICS IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the teachers' professional code of ethics and the challenges facing its implementation in Nigerian secondary schools. It highlights the roles of teacher training institutions in fostering the knowledge and practice of the ethical code. Poor training of teachers, poor facilities in secondary schools, teachers' ignorance of the content of the code and corruption in the society are identified as problems militating against the knowledge and practice of the code. High level of commitment on the part of teacher-trainers, provision of adequate facilities into schools, making the code one of the statutory records to be kept in schools and getting rid of corruption in the society are recommended as ways of making the implementation of the code effective.

Introduction

In Nigeria, human, material and financial resources are invested into education by governments and individuals with a view to training manpower that are needed for industrial, agricultural, economic and socio-political development. The resources are processed at primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions. Teachers constitute an important part of human resources because they are to implement government's policy on education at school level.

The teachers need to be competent and committed in order to discharge their responsibilities effectively. Expectedly, these qualities could be attained through

acquisition of knowledge, skills and ethical values in teaching profession. According to Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (2007), 88.2% of public secondary school teachers are professionally qualified. This shows that many teachers are expected to be competent. However, the negative behaviour of some teachers could be a reflection of their low level of competency and commitment. For example, there were cases of some secondary school principals and teachers who were involved in financial mismanagement and examination malpractices (Noha, 2003). Also, in a study conducted by Okebukola (2005), shallow knowledge of teaching subjects and poor attitude to work were identified as part of weaknesses

which graduates of education exhibited in secondary schools where they were employed. In these situations, any positive impact which education might make on the students and the society would be negated by behaviour of the principals and teachers, who were not likely to be doing their jobs well.

Consequently, moral upbringing and knowledge acquisition of the learners would be negatively affected. Also, national objectives which are expected to be achieved through education would not be actualized, while investment in education would be a waste. Therefore, guidance which teachers could derive from their professional ethics would provide an essential ingredient for imbibing the competency and commitment needed for effective job performance.

In this paper, teacher's professional code of ethics is examined. Specifically, the roles of teacher training institutions in inculcation of professional ethics and the challenges of implementing the ethics are examined.

Concept of Professional Code of Ethics

Ethics refer to a set of moral standards which are meant to guide the behaviour of an individual or a group. They are moral principles

which spell out the ideas, good practices and high standard of job performance which are expected of individuals and groups in an organization.

Ukeje, Akabogu and Ndu (1992), see an ethical code as a statement or principle governing the conduct which is not specifically spelt out by the law. This implies that an ethical code covers the rules and regulations on day-to-day operation of members of an organization. It is therefore, meant to supplement the law in order to prevent minor offences which could disrupt the smooth running of an organization. Its importance lies in the assumption that if minor offences can be avoided, it is very likely that grave offences will not be committed. In the opinion of Noha (2003), acts of indiscipline, which are regarded as minor offences, are the ones that would advance to high level corruption in the long run. Thus, Cole (2004), was of the opinion that, ethical code is a set of moral principles which are formulated and used for guidance of employees' behaviour in the performance of their duties and in relating with people in and outside the organization. It provides an explicit guidance on moral issues which might arise in the course of discharging ones duties, he concluded.

Professional ethics refer to behaviour, actions or practices

which are right or wrong for a person who belongs to a particular field of specialization. They are formulated to guide the employees in performance of their duties and in relating with people within and outside an organization. Employees are expected to comply with ethical code in order to guard against behaviour which could disrupt their job performance and consequently prevent an optimum achievement of corporate objectives. Essence of professional ethics lies in the fact that, once an individual acquires a special knowledge, he has a moral obligation to provide his services to the general public (Wikipedia). Ethics are meant to guide a professional in the use of the special knowledge he has acquired. Therefore, teachers in Nigeria are supposed to be guided by their professional ethics. The code was initially produced by the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT). Later, the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) produced another one.

Content of Teachers' Professional Ethics

a. NUT's Professional Ethics

The NUT was established in 1931 in Lagos. It became a trade union in 1943 and was joined with the Northern States Teachers Union in 1972 (Otu, 2006). It is the main umbrella association for teachers in primary and secondary schools.

The NUT provides a code of professional ethics for its members in order to encourage effective job performance. The code according to Ukeje, *et al* (1992), consists of five principles:

1. Commitment to the students: Guiding students in pursuit of knowledge and skills, and avoiding any act that can prevent them from enjoying the full benefit of education.
2. Commitment to the parents: Sharing with parents the task of shaping students' behaviour towards socially acceptable values.
3. Commitment to the community: Taking to a reasonable pattern of behaviour accepted by the community for professionals.
4. Commitment to the employer: Encouraging mutual respect, understanding and good faith between employer and employee.
5. Commitment to the profession: Making teaching profession attractive so as to encourage persons worthy of trust to take up teaching as a career; contributing actively to the support, planning and programmes of teachers' professional organizations.

b. Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria and its Professional Ethics

Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) was established by the Federal Government's Act No 31 of 1993 to control and regulate teaching profession. It is meant to serve similar functions as those performed by the Nigerian Medical Council for medical doctors. The TRCN Act section 9(6) empowers the Council to make rules which are not inconsistent with the Act, as to the practices which constitute professional misconduct. In fulfillment of this mandate 'Teachers Code of Conduct' was produced (TRCN 2004).

The code categorized teachers into four classes. 'A' class teachers are holders of Ph.D. in Education and Ph.D. in other fields with Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) or Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Holders of the University of Ilorin newly introduced Post Doctoral Diploma in Education (PDDE) are also included in this category.

'B' Class consists of holders of Masters Degree in education and Masters in other fields with education (PGDE or NCE).

'C' Class consists of holders of Bachelors Degree in Education or

Bachelors in other fields with education (PGDE or NCE).

'D' Class consists of holders of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) or equivalent.

These qualifications indicate the attainment of required knowledge and skills in teaching. In addition, a teacher must register with the TRC, be of good character and not have been convicted of fraud or dishonesty. He is also expected to be familiar with and abide by the provision of other relevant laws such as the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of 1947, the Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Act of year 2000 and the Child Rights Law of year 2003.

The code also spelt out a teacher's relationship with colleagues, learners, parents, society and employers. His roles as an administrative leader are also highlighted.

Roles of Training in the Development of Teachers Professional Ethics

In Nigeria, teacher training institutions such as colleges, faculties and institutes of education, National Teachers' Institute and schools of education in the polytechnics are to produce teaching manpower for the nation. As stated by the Federal

Government, the institutions are to "produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004 p.39). Therefore, the institutions have the following vital roles to play in the development of teachers' professional ethics.

Admission/selection of teacher-trainees: Admission of trainees is the first step in the determination of caliber of teachers. Right caliber of trainees in terms of academic quality and positive attitude to teaching is essential.

Preparation of prospective teachers in terms of knowledge and skill acquisition: Teacher-Trainees must acquire adequate knowledge on teaching subject, methodology and control of teaching-learning environment.

Opportunities to practice during training: Teaching is a practical exercise. Hence, teacher-trainees should have adequate opportunities to practicalise what they learn.

Proper assessment of learning outcome: Level of knowledge and skill acquisition should be assessed in order to determine the extent of achievement of teacher-training objectives. This should be reliable, thorough and comprehensive. It should not be for mere certification.

Prospective teachers' all-round development: Teacher-Trainees are to be involved in a variety of co-curricular activities such as sports, voluntary organizations and subject associations. This will give further opportunities to practicalise knowledge and skills acquired; enhance social, physical, moral and spiritual development after training and keep them usefully engaged during their free periods.

High sense of discipline among students: The institutions are supposed to encourage punctuality, commitment, honesty and obedience to authority among students.

Challenges Facing the Implementation of Teachers' Professional Code of Ethics

One of the challenges in the implementation of the code of ethics for teachers emanates from the process of training. Teacher training institutions are supposed to initiate their products into the profession and provide them with necessary skills. The institutions are not discharging their responsibilities effectively as many of their products are morally and intellectually deficient (Noha, 2003; Okebukola, 2005). Ethical standards of the teachers who pass through the training institutions are likely to be poor.

Also, many secondary schools are lacking in teaching-learning and recreational facilities. In this situation, teaching, counselling, assessment of learning and other school programmes would not be properly executed. This implies that the teachers' obligations to students and parents, as demanded by their professional ethics, would not be fulfilled.

Another challenge to the implementation is that many trained and untrained teachers seem to be ignorant of the content of their professional code of ethics. Knowledge of the code is not yet a part of the requirements for teaching appointment. In practice, many aspects of the code are contravened due to ignorance.

Moreover, corruption seems to be on increase in the society despite the Federal Government's efforts to curb it. As part of the society, teachers are influenced by what happens in their environment. In this regard, their behaviour could be at variance with expectations of their professional code of ethics.

Conclusion

The following conclusions could be drawn from the discussion in this paper.

- Existing code of ethics is capable of providing guidance to teachers.

- Societal influence could render teachers' professional ethical code ineffective.
- It is the responsibility of school-heads and supervisors to promote ethical values in secondary schools.

Recommendations

Teacher-trainers should be more committed to their duties and ensure that necessary skills are imparted to the trainees. This is essential in order to be able to produce quality, competent and well behaved teachers.

It is also recommended that Government and other stakeholders should provide adequate facilities into schools. This will enhance teachers' job performance and learners' acquisition of appropriate guidance.

Moreover, awareness of existence and proper application of the code are important to teachers. It is therefore recommended that code of ethics should be made one of the statutory records to be kept in schools. Regular seminars should also be held on teachers' professional ethics to remind teachers of their roles.

Finally, the Government should increase its commitment towards fighting corruption in the society

and encourage teachers to play their roles as models in the society.

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