

Exploring the Ethical Dimensions for Teaching Profession for Sustainable Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the dimensions of ethics in teaching profession. It argues that teachers should be equipped with adequate and appropriate knowledge of professional ethics. This is because teaching is a profession where ethical issues are of paramount importance. The concept of ethics in teaching profession is discussed. Core dimensions of ethical teaching are discussed. The paper argues that these ethical dimensions define the scope within which teachers are expected to discharge their teaching responsibilities for sustainable education. The paper equally discusses ethics in teaching profession vis-à-vis other professions and provides reasons why professional ethics in teaching are different from other professions. A case for teaching ethics for sustainable education is made. Recommendations were made, one of which is that ethics and values should form part of course of study in teacher education programme in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethics, teaching profession, sustainable education.

INTRODUCTION

The current craze for wealth in Nigeria has subjected people in various professions to be victims of materialistic desires and attitudes resulting to loss of societal values and virtues. Teaching profession is not insulated from this practice. The destiny of any nation is shaped in the classrooms. Consequently, teachers at all levels of education must be appropriately and adequately equipped not only with knowledge in their areas of specialization but also on ethical values. These ethical values will enhance effectiveness as they impart knowledge in students. Teaching is a profession where ethical issues are of paramount importance. Teachers, as professionals are engaged in one of the most ethically challenging jobs which is the education of the youths. This, therefore, demands that teachers should more often than not reflect on the ethics of their activities to ensure that they maintain the best ethical examples as demanded by their profession. This explains why it is important to include ethical content in pre-service teacher education programme in Nigeria. Teaching is a unique profession laced with risks and responsibilities that demand a great deal of ethical considerations from those who want to become teachers. It is a profession that

demands a lot of moral responsibilities. A teacher's belief, values and virtues must be in tandem with ethical responsibilities of teaching. Once there is a lacuna in these areas, both the teacher and teaching profession are endangered.

Concept of Ethics in Teaching Profession

Modern technology has brought about enormous challenges in the field of education. Such challenges as e-teaching, e-learning, e-transactions and e-monitoring demand proper behaviour of teachers to avoid embarrassment. This situation demands that teachers imbibe professional ethics so as to inculcate virtues and values in the society. Some writers define ethics as norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Ethical norms are learnt in various places - homes, schools, in religious doctrines, social settings [1]. It is axiomatic that moral development occurs throughout the life of human beings as they traverse through various stages of growth as they mature. However, [2] defined professional ethics as a set of self-imposed professional ideals and principles necessary for the attainment of professional excellence and self-satisfaction. He went further to note that a code of professional are usually

anchored on two principles of integrity and ideals of service to the society.

Professionals and those working in acknowledged professions demonstrate specialist knowledge and skill. The manner to which this knowledge and skills is used in the process of providing them to the public is referred to as a moral issue and is termed professional ethics. One of the earliest professional examples of professional ethics is the Hippocratic Oath to which medical doctors still adhere [3]. Various professional bodies define their ethical approach to incorporate a number of discrete components which include honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability, confidentiality, objectivity, respect, obedience to the law and loyalty [4]. The essence of internally enforced codes of practice that members of the profession must comply with is to prevent exploitation of the clients and to preserve the integrity of the profession. Disciplinary codes permit the profession to determine a standard of conduct and ensure that members of the profession meet the standard of disciplining them from the professional body anytime they breach their ethical code. This enhances public trust in the profession, thereby encouraging the public to continue to patronize their services.

Humanity and human dignity are terms that are usually associated with moral and ethical principles. These virtues demonstrate that a person possesses innate right to respect ethical treatment. The principle and value of human dignity is expected to be among the most important in the mutual relationship of the teacher towards students and vice versa. It is against this background that teachers should stress a full development of human personality and strengthening of respect for human rights. This explains why [5] opined that the teaching of teachers should enhance mutual understanding, tolerance and friendship. This particular aspect emphasizes awareness of the obligation to accept this value and exhibit respect on the part of teachers towards students. This equally encompasses the obligation or commitment within the ambit of teaching profession so that teachers lead and guide the children and youths to mutual respect and appreciation towards the human dignity of other children as well

as adults. It is axiomatic that when a teacher does not respect student's dignity, then he cannot expect his own dignity to be respected. This is because respect is reciprocal.

Ethical Dimensions in Teaching Profession

If we accept that schools are places that respond to and shape social behaviours of youths, it, therefore, becomes imperative that adequate understanding of ethical and moral behaviour should be an indispensable part of school-based instructional experiences. This, by extension demands that teachers should be equipped with the necessary knowledge of ethics of society. It is based on this point that [6] noted that the relevance of ethics in teaching profession is clearly discernable if we perceive education as a dynamic interaction among individuals and groups with various cultural backgrounds in which teachers and students are involved in a variety of interpersonal experiences wherein each member potentially influences the lives of any or all members.

It is these professional ethics that guide teachers in determining the right course of action in a given situation. [7] identified six core dimensions of ethical teaching for teachers:

- I. *Knowledge*: Possessing adequate and appropriate knowledge is critical in solving ethical issues. Having adequate knowledge of both the situation in question and what is expected of them assists teachers visualize various approaches to ethical dilemmas. After assessing the pros and cons of the consequences of possible actions, a teacher is equipped with facts to make a decision about how best to approach the situation.
- II. *Empathy*: Empathy refers to the ability to appreciate a situation from the point of view of those that are involved. It enhances decision-making that intends to offer the greatest unbiased benefit to all those that are involved. Empathy unveils multiple avenues for arriving at a decision that includes perceptions and views of all involved.
- III. *Reasoning*: The ability to logically and coherently analyze situations

- and perspectives is an important element of code of ethics associated with the teaching profession. It is necessary for teachers to reflect on a situation or circumstance while considering all aspects at the same time maintaining moral principles as checks for deliberation.
- IV. *Appreciation for Moral Considerations:* The ability to identify and analyze conflicting and competing moral interests involved in any given situation is very vital when confronted with ethical dilemmas. It is important to protect every person's right and no person should be deprived of what he deserves. The most critical trait in dealing with moral issues is the ability to adhere to the truth.
- V. *Courage:* The ideals of ethical teaching such as appreciation for moral considerations, reasoning and empathy are very difficult to attain in the absence of element of courage. The presence of courage is very important in order to create ethical outcomes appropriate for all those that are involved. This can assume the form of will power or tact depending on the prevailing situation. Courage occurs more naturally to some people than others. A teacher is expected to display courage in a variety of situations, sometimes on a daily basis. It is important to mention that having always the interest of students in mind will assist in guiding teachers in the right direction.
- VI. *Inter-Personal Skills:* Possessing all the above skills may not be enough for a teacher to behave ethically if he lacks the requisite communication skills to assert his position. Even when a teachers understanding of right or wrong is clear and just, and accompanied by all the qualities of being an ethical teacher, the potentials of positive outcomes in his ethical dilemmas are diminished if he lacks interpersonal skills. In ethically mixed situations, teachers are expected to know how to choose their words tactfully and how to use the correct expressions and put them forth in a frank manner so as

not to appear either biased, harsh or feeble.

The above ethical dimensions define the scope within which teachers are expected to discharge their teaching responsibilities creditably for sustainable education. When a teacher imbibes these values, his ability to act according to the dictates of the professional ethics is enhanced and he will be able to navigate the murky scenarios of moral issues in teaching profession.

Teaching Ethics and Other Professions

In the context of a profession, ethics take into consideration the complexities inherent within a practitioner's work. Ethics are designed to serve as a guide in navigating through a broad range of various situation's that emerge in work places. Codes of ethics have been important hallmarks of most professions. A vital element of any profession is the extent to which the profession has designed a mechanism to regulate itself. The absence of this self-regulating function contributes in various ways in which practitioners of that profession are undervalued as professionals.

As noted earlier, teaching is a complex profession. The complexity in teaching has made it difficult for the profession to have a rigid code of ethics like that of medicine for law. This is because strict separation does not occur in education like in medicine and law where doctors and judges must avoid relationship with patients, defendants and appellants outside their professional roles in order to protect their professional integrity. Some professions insist on this social distance for the interest of the profession. On the contrary, this type of strict separation does not exist in education. This is because teachers are relevant parts of their students' lives. Consequently, emotional bonds with students and parents are not only expected but to a great extent unavoidable.

There are inherent risks-ethical, practical and in some cases legal risks that confront both teachers and students on daily basis. These risks are not found in other professions.

[8] discussed such risks as follows:

Other professional, essentially provide a narrow service to address a single problem such as illness for doctors and legal challenge for legal practitioners. On

the contrary, teachers are expected to address not just learning but equally a broad range of societal issues ranging from behavioural, moral to equipping students with the skills with which to be functional members of the society.

Medical or legal practitioner's interpret knowledge to help individuals they are serving. In education, teachers assist students not only to meet but also to go beyond their knowledge base in a given field by becoming active partners in learning.

Medical and legal practitioners are discouraged from developing relationship in the course of discharging their responsibilities. From the inception of their training, teachers are taught that strong interpersonal relationship with students are effective ingredients in teaching and learning.

Various professionals essentially offer services to a single client at a time. But teachers provide services for a whole classroom of children at once, each having different academic, social, cultural and emotional needs that must be handled simultaneously for effective learning to occur.

From the above, one can see that while teachers are involved in a culture of close relationship with their students, other professions indulge in a culture of social distance. Students form integral components of teachers' lives as long as the school year lasts. Even outside the classroom, teachers are expected to offer services, such as mentoring and counseling. All these put teachers in vulnerable situations.

What is apparent from the above discussion is that teaching is a profession whose vulnerabilities have to be acknowledged. The unenviable truth is that teachers are in a high-frequency risk position where seemingly little missteps can wreck havoc, irreparable damage to students, school, teachers, the community and even the integrity of the profession. This explains why teaching like medicine and law requires a framework that recognizes the challenging situation in which teachers usually find themselves.

Teaching Ethics for Sustainable Education in Nigeria

Sustainable Education (SE), Education for Development Sustainable (EFS) and Education for Sustainable Development

(ESD) are interchangeable terms adopted for describing the practice of teaching for sustainability (Wikipedia 2018). However, ESD is the term mostly used internationally and by the United Nations. UNESCO defined education for sustainable development as integrating major sustainable development variables into teaching and learning. These variables may include instruction about climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction and sustainable consumption. It equally demands participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviours and take action for sustainable development. ESD consequently promotes competencies such as critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative manner (Wikipedia, 2018). [9] identified the following skills as vital for sustainable education (SE):

- *Envisioning*: Being able to imagine a better future. This presupposes that if we understand where we want to go, we will be better placed to work out how to get there.
- *Critical thinking and reflection*: Learning to question our current belief systems and to recognize the assumptions underlying our knowledge, perspective and opinions. Critical thinking skills assist people to learn to assess economic, environmental, social and cultural structures in the context of sustainable development.
- *Systemic thinking*: Acknowledging complexities and searching for links and synergies when attempting to find solutions to problems.
- *Building partnerships*: Promoting dialogue and negotiation, learning to work together.
- *Participation in decision-making*: Empowering people.

The above discussion on the concept of sustainable education and education for sustainable development underscores the relevance of ethics in teaching profession. Sustainable education cannot occur in an environment devoid of ethical principles. Teaching ethics are the catalysts that propel quality education at all levels and in all social contexts. It is the ethical dimensions as exhibited by teachers and transmitted to students that

transform society by reorienting education towards the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and behaviours necessary for sustainable development. The imbibing of ethical principles by teachers is indispensable for sustainable education.

Ethics are very critical elements in teaching and play a vital role in enhancing quality education. A teacher's ethical disposition determines how he evaluates his students, interacts with students, colleagues, principals and members of the community. A teacher is said to be fair when he is ethically dedicated to promoting equality or he is motivated by concepts of justice or caring because he has a universal respect for human life (The Ethics of Teaching, 2018) These are manifestations of ethical behaviours that enhance quality and sustainable education.

Ethics and values are the pedestals on which quality education rests. Once there is disorientation in these principles, quality education cannot be sustained. In teaching, there is no clear-cut distinction between teachers on-and off-duty behaviour. This, therefore, demands that teachers must comport themselves in their private lives in a manner that does not undermine their competence as teachers, damage their integrity, bring the school system under disrepute or cast doubt on their position as models and custodians of morals in the society. Apart from being looked upon as moral exemplars, they are expected to uphold and demonstrate ethical principles as they discharge their professional responsibilities. Ethical lessons are implicitly imparted by the culture of caring, honesty, fairness, justice and respect that the teacher brings and enforces into the classroom. It is only when these are transparently manifested in the schools that quality education can be sustained.

Teaching is said to be an extension of parenting. In other words, it is a profession based on morals that possesses seemingly distinct guidelines for what should be done in a given situation. Consequently, teachers, like

Professional ethics are indispensable in every profession. They serve as rudders that direct the activities of the profession. Teaching profession is not an

parents are expected and at the same time expect themselves to follow their own personal morality and life experiences as they guide students to adulthood with future expectations.

For sustainable education to occur, there is absolute need to integrate ethics in teacher education because teachers' behaviours are largely influenced and dictated by the pattern of their thought process and ethics influence thought process. Again, values, beliefs and manner of thinking guide practice. It is against this background that Burant, Chubbuck and [10] had argued for the need and urgent refocusing on morals through teachers training programmes. They posited that:

We are convinced that our attention in teacher education must shift considerably to the formation not only of knowledge and skills but also of the moral sensibility that underlines them. The moral nature of teaching cannot be conflated with the knowledge and skills important for teaching neither can it be neatly separated from them. As we have known throughout the ages yet also frequently ignore, the moral is always in play in classrooms, in teachers' actions whether intentionally or not... (p.3).

The above summarizes the importance of ethics and the need to integrate it in the course of study in teacher education programme in Nigeria. Adequate and appropriate knowledge of professional ethics is very important in teaching profession. This is because teachers' roles and actions provide a multidimensional scope for students' moral development. In this respect, teachers are expected to be equipped and guided by ethical values. These ethical values cannot be acquired in the air. They must be taught for purposes of sustainable education.

CONCLUSION

exception. The profession is guided by ethics and values. However, it appears that these ethics and values are not integrated in the teacher education

programme. The integration of these principles is of paramount importance if sustainable quality education is to be maintained. Teachers need adequate and appropriate knowledge of ethics and

values to be able to impart to students such values. Teachers will have little or nothing to impart or to manifest as ethics and values if they are not taught.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, the following recommendations are made.

- Ethics and values should form part of course of study in teacher education programme.

- Teachers should manifest high level of ethical behaviour both in the classrooms and outside the classrooms.

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