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Application of Ethical Standards and Professionalism for Effective Teaching in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This paper is a critical examination of the application of ethical standards and professionalism for effective teaching in Nigerian secondary schools. It discussed the concept of ethics with reference to some definitions. The issue of professionalism and its approaches were also discussed. Several efforts at professionalizing teaching and various challenges hindering it in Nigeria were also brought to the fore in the paper. The paper therefore recommended that a period of internship for teachers after training, as it is being done in most other professions, to increase the level of confidence among the teachers be included in the teacher education programme. Also, teachers' remunerations should be improved as a way of dealing with the display of low self-esteem and inferiority complex among teachers.

Introduction

Teaching, being one of the foremost professions, epitomizes integrity, knowledge, leadership, moral rectitude, and selfless services, and as such, spearheads development of communities and societies. Similarly, the establishment of an agreed set of ethical principles by both the teachers and the public provides a collective understanding and vision for the judgment and action of the profession. Thus, both the educational communities and the public are expected to be involved in the construction of ethical standards that guide the individual and collective professional practices of teachers.

All over the world, there are standards set out to guide the teaching profession just as there are in all other professions. For instance, the Ontario College of Teachers described the followings as the ethical standards of teaching profession:

- (a) *Care*: This includes compassion, interest and insight for developing students' potentials and teachers express their commitment to students' wellbeing and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice.
- (b) *Respect*: Teachers are expected to honour human dignity, emotional wellness, and cognitive development. In their professional practice, teachers model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy, and the environment.
- (c) *Trust*: The ethical standard of trust embodies fairness, openness, and honesty. Teachers' professional relationships with students, colleagues, parents, guardians and the public are based on trust.
- (d) *Integrity*: Honesty, reliability, and moral actions are embodied in the ethical standard of integrity. Continual reflection assists teachers in exercising integrity in their professional commitments and responsibilities.

The ethical principles that guide teachers' behavioural patterns are reflected in standards of ethics described in the documents such as the "Statement on Professional Ethics" and "Codes of Conduct" (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN, 2005). In addition, Teachers' Handbooks often include a section that addresses ethical standards or expectations regarding teachers' behavioural patterns. Thus, the most important resource available to teachers is a high standard of professional ethics which help to guide their behaviour and interaction at the work place.

The Concept of Ethics

Ethics is the general term for attempts to state or determine what is good, both for individuals and the society as a whole. The Oxford Dictionary defined ethics as a general idea or belief that influences people behavior

and attitude or the moral rules or principles of behavior for deciding what is right or wrong. Cardeiro (2003) submitted that ethics is a value system by which individuals evaluate and judge the behaviours of themselves and others against some previously established set of standards. According to him, this evaluation may be on the basis of traditional convictions, of ideals sought, of goals desired, or moral laws to be obeyed, of an improved quality of relations among humans and with the environment. Ethics is largely concerned with perspective: putting every activity and goal in its place, knowing what is worth doing and what is not worth doing, knowing what is worth having and what is not worth having. It is also keeping in mind what is ultimately important and essential and what is not, what serves our overall career goals and what does not, what is part of business and what is forbidden to business, even with an increased profit.

Ethics, just as Medicine and Military techniques or Strategy, explores how human beings should act in all earthly situations, not only for the achievement of stated objectives but for the entire wellbeing of the organisation. The aims being pursued should bring about flourishing and successful life. A guiding principle in ethical practice is to be fair and seek to uphold the common good of the community to which one belongs, in the spirit of duty of care to one's environment. Ethics is the reflective consideration and evaluation of our moral beliefs and practices. It is considered a normative science, because it is concerned with norms of human conduct, as distinguished from the formal sciences, such as Mathematics and Logic, and the empirical Sciences, such as Chemistry and Physics. Ethics considers the justification and motivation of practices such as why should the laws of a certain profession be observed? What motivates individuals to work? It is concerned with norms and standards of conduct with the primary focus on what ought to be the case rather than what exists.

According to Phaneuf (2009), ethics proceeds in a dialectic manner, that is, it uses rigorous analysis to reveal the flaws of logic and the contradictions of the reasoning and seeks to go beyond them. It also deals with what we should do or should not do, but it does so by applying reasoning for or against, in order to decide on the conduct to be taken when faced with a moral problem.

Other definitions emphasize the context within which business is conducted when defining ethics. For instance Christensen, L. J., Peirce, E., Hartman, L. P., Hoffman, W. M. & Carrier, J. (2007) define ethics as 'a form of applied ethics that examines ethical rules and principles within a commercial context; the various moral or ethical problems that can arise in a business setting and any special duties or obligations that apply to persons who are engaged in commerce. The common foundation among these definitions is the acceptance of standards and morality which should be clearly drawn, clarified, documented and agreed upon by all in a corporation and all of that should be acceptable to society at large.

According to Shirley and Khandelwal (2006), ethics, referring to a science of morals and the principle of morality, provides the basis for establishing and maintaining high standards of value in any society and the violation of ethics or the principle of morality is generally perceived as corruption.

Professionalism

Ukpo (2005) noted that the meaning of profession can be traced to the practice of religion. According to him profession, to the religious practitioners simply means the act of professing and a declaration of loyalty. According to Halliday (1999), attempts have been made to solve the problem of definition using different approaches such as functionalist approach, interactionist approach, foucauldian approach, and division of labour approach.

(i) The Functionalists Approach

The functionalist approach, (developed by Marshall in 1963 and expanded by Goode in 1969) is premised on the professional knowledge base. The focus of this approach according to Eraut (1994) is the social control of expertise with emphasis on collectivity orientation and altruism. The functionalists view a profession in terms of its central social function, its length of training, a body of knowledge, high level of skills, a code of ethical conduct, client centeredness, autonomy, independent decision making, adaptability, and self-governance.

People who define a profession from a functionalist approach stated that the approach spells out the privileges and position in terms of a rational solution to the society's needs. Eraut (1994) observed that providing a list of professional traits and assuming their integrative function has not removed or solved the problem of definition. This is because most of these criteria in the functionalist approach to the definition are culture bound with greater significance in some countries, (especially the developed countries) than others. For instance, the approach assumes that there is a well-defined set of needs within the society without asking questions about the nature of the society. This means that, the approach provides an understanding of the nature of the profession in terms of current practices arising from the needs of societies without considering the variations existing within the societies.

(ii) The Interactionists Approach

The interactionist approach is concerned with everyday actions and interactions of professionals and how they make their social world construct their career as participants. This approach views professionalization as a social and political project or mission designed to enhance the interest of an occupational group (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). This is why interactionist approach is also called social constructivist approach. To the interactionist, profession is a relative

concept which can be subjected to different constructions according to the discursive disposition of its advocates and critics. In this approach, the driving force of professionalization is concerned with striving for upward mobility while the main strategy is social closure which enables the groups with common interest to act in a collective manner to protect their interest and membership. The emphasis in this approach is on employment rewards for those who achieve professional status.

Ukpo (2005) maintained that the materially and symbolically privilege position of professional workers is achieved by virtue of the protection and patronage of some elite segment of the society. The problem in this approach to the definition of profession is that the group may willingly or unwillingly erect barriers that could in turn promote inequality in an attempt to close access to its occupation.

(iii) The Foucauldian Approach

Foucauldian approach which was made popular by Abbot in 1988, establishes relationship between knowledge and power. It is observed that knowledge is a key component in the competition for power. To foucauldians, knowledge and power are two sides of the same question. Who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided. The power and legitimacy of professions is acquired, in part, from their status as organization defined by their control over knowledge. McDonald (1995) observed that this approach rejects any idea that the state is a purposeful actor, instead the state is considered as a collection of institutions; procedures, knowledge which together form the particular direction that the state has chosen. Foucauldian approach is of the opinion that both the state and the professions are, in part, the emergent effects of the interplay between changing government policies and occupational strategies.

(iv) The Division of Labour Approach

The concern of division of labour approach is the inter-professional

competition between professions. Its focus is on the content of professional work among professions and dispute over their work areas, which is referred to as the jurisdictional dispute (McDonald, 1995).

The different approaches have provided useful understanding of the profession and their professional activities which have brought out agreement on the criteria and characteristics of a profession. There is a widespread agreement, according to Hoyle and John (1995), in terms of the criteria of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. The approaches have provided benchmark with which the status and conduct of a profession or its erosion can be measured, and draws attention to the changing nature of professional status, definition, work and behaviour.

Profession and Professionals

According to Halliday (1999), a profession is an occupation with a set of competency based on knowledge acquired through many years of academic training, the goal of its members being a commitment to service guided by a code of ethics. The profession is granted autonomy and public recognition to provide a service considered essential by the society through a regulatory body, responsible for establishing and maintaining standards through mechanisms such as credentialing, standard of practice and competences. Professions which possess most or all of these characteristics enumerated in the definition offer their members good life, prospects or benefits. Benefits of such include job opportunity, job security, high rewards, societal recognition, high self-esteem, high status and dignity, professional excellence, and job satisfaction.

Professionalism performs a crucial social function and as such requires a considerable degree of skill as well as a body of systematic knowledge grounded in theory. The acquisition of this body of knowledge and the development of specific skill entails a lengthy period of training involving the process of socialization and acquisition of various

professional values which tend to center on the pre-eminence of essentials for the professional to have the freedom or autonomy to make his/her own judgments with regards to appropriate practice.(Day,1991). A Professional on the other hand, is one who has a specialized knowledge base and commitment to meeting client needs, strong collective identity-professional commitment, collegial as against bureaucratic control over practice and professional standards (Darling, 1991) A professional teacher is a person who instructs, follows rules and standards, and possesses professional knowledge and professional conduct. He recognizes that the classroom is a complex environment, and is capable of making decisions and solving problems in that environment.

Hoyle and John (1995), writing on professional practices, outlined the characteristics of the professionals. According to them, the professionals:

- i) possess specialized skills enabling them to offer specialized services;
- ii) undergo intellectual and practical training in a well-defined area of study;
- iii) maintain detachment and integrity in exercising personal judgment on behalf of a client;
- iv) establish direct, personal relations with clients based on confidence, faith and trust;
- v) collectively have a sense of responsibility for maintaining the competence and integrity of the professional as a whole;
- vi) tend to avoid certain manners of attracting business, and
- vii) are organized in bodies which, with or without state intervention, are concerned to provide the machinery for testing competence and regulating standards of conduct.

It is generally believed that the act of teaching the young children and adolescents cannot qualify as a profession, but rather as a craft in which any untrained person can engage. However, unfolding events in the

teaching profession prove that teaching as a profession in the modern day goes beyond "talk and chalk". It involves molding young lives, guiding youths, motivating students and general character training. Similarly, classroom teaching does not succeed alone by itself without discipline and adequate guidance which then move it convincingly into the professional realm.

Professionalizing the Teaching Profession in Nigeria

Teaching profession in Nigeria has been recognized by all stakeholders. The government, through the National Policy on Education has clearly stated that teacher education will continue to be given major emphasis in all our educational planning because no education system can rise above the quality of its teacher. In addition, the government has recognized teaching as a profession by stating that teaching like other professions in Nigeria, will be legally and publicly recognized as a profession (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

To achieve this, government has set up the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria among whose functions are registration, accreditations, certification, discipline and regulation of professional practices. The government has given a period of time within which, those untrained teachers and those teachers without the requisite qualification, should strive to qualify for membership or leave teaching profession. The government has also asserted the desirability and intention to professionalize teaching. Furthermore, the federal government states clearly in the Nigeria Teachers' Manual that professionalization of teaching should be given adequate attention in order to enhance the role of teachers in the formulation and implementation of educational policies in the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1990).

Ciwar (2000) identified a number of factors as criteria that enhance professionalization of teaching namely: the theoretical and practical

knowledge mastered exclusively by the practitioners, fairly long time of training in the field, continuous practice in the field, ethical codes of conduct for practitioners, regulatory body that licenses and disciplines, as well as promotes professional growth of practitioners, continuous in-service development, rendering of essential and qualitative services to society by the practitioners, exalting service above self, and membership of practitioners in the professional or regulatory body. Abimbola (2005) opined that teachers' professional development consist of activities a teacher can engage in to keep abreast of new development, evaluate and improve his classroom performance. Such activities according to him include participating in in- service courses, and workshops, continuing graduate study, participating in, attending professional meetings, and reading professional journals.

The emphasis in the observation raised is on the institutional and the professional needs of the individual teacher. Thus the need for a career-long professional development programme for teachers, which can be realized through a combination of various approaches involving initial training, regular inductions and in-service training programmes designed to cater for the needs of prospective as well serving teachers. As observed by Leach (1996), professionalizing teaching is a continuum, a creative journey from the earliest stages of initial teacher education through to the latest stages of being an educational professional.

At the realization of the foregoing, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), in the National Policy on Education outlines the objectives of teacher education as to:

- 1) produce highly motivated, conscientious, and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system;
- 2) encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- 3) help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals;

4) provide teachers with the intellectual and professional (a liberal education policy) background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situation, and

5) enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) prepare the benchmark to ensure that the Colleges of Education and the Faculties of Education in the Universities follow the curriculum. With the aim of providing students with both discipline and pedagogical knowledge to enable them perform their duties effectively upon graduation. In addition, students participate in teaching practices to acquire classroom skills that should enable them perform effectively. Thus, teachers receive academically, an equivalent level of training, as do most other professionals.

Challenges of Professionalization of Teaching in Nigeria

The teaching career in Nigeria lacks professionalization, certificate of registration and license, mandatory continuing education, exalting service above self, and a membership Register. This could probably explain why a professional teacher has been defined in the Nigerian Teachers' Manual as just "a person who has the registered professional qualifications which enable him or her to be appointed to teach at any appropriate level of recognized education in Nigeria and who is of sound mind and is mentally alert". Secondly, teachers in Nigeria appear to be exhibiting lack of confidence and display some level inferiority complex unlike their counterparts in other professions. According to Ciwar (2000), other professions such as Pharmacy, Medicine, Engineering, Law, Architecture, and others have been able to organize themselves in such a way that they have now become the epitome and symbol of genuine professionalism. They proudly wear their identities and even when they find themselves other jobs, they still prefer to be identified by

their respective professions. Another challenge is that teachers usually consider themselves finished products upon graduation.

In order to overcome these challenges, the construct of teachers' professional development must be active. This construct is used to describe teachers' in-service training, workshop, seminar or on-the-job training. Jekayinfa (2005) described teachers' development construct as all forms of education and training whether formal or informal, whether teacher initiated or system initiated and whether accredited or otherwise. This propels teachers to continually update their knowledge within their discipline especially in this era of scientific and technological advancement. It also helps them to be informed regarding new methods and materials that will make their teaching more effective.

Conclusion

The growth and development of every economy revolves round the education sector. It therefore follows that the education sector is most be highly placed. The practitioners must be people that are well respected and are given maximum support to achieve effectiveness in their role performance. Professionalization of the teaching profession will definitely inculcate high self-esteem in teachers and a sense of belongingness and in turn serve as a source of inspiration for student teachers. Ethical standards that have been set, if adhered to, will enhance efficiency and effectiveness in Nigerian secondary schools. The act of teaching involves preparing and grooming of the future generations and as such requires a high level of skill acquisition to attain optimum and effective job performance. Consequently, the curriculum of teacher education places emphasis on subject mastery and pedagogy, the programme includes courses in different areas, with each student trained to specialize in one or two subject areas while the courses on methodology are to prepare them for competent classroom work. Thus,

teachers, by the virtue of their training, should compete favorably with other professionals through strict adherence to the ethical standards of the profession.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1. In addition to teaching practice during the teacher education, there should be a period of internship for teachers after training, as it is being done in most other professions, to increase the level of confidence among them.
2. Teachers' remunerations should be improved as a way of dealing with the display of low self-esteem and inferiority complex among teachers.

Secondary school teachers should be made to adhere to the ethics of the teaching profession through membership of one or more professional associations or bodies and at the same time avail themselves of the opportunities for professional growth through in-service training, attendance of conferences.

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