

# Unethical Practices in Teaching: Causes and Consequences in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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## **Abstract**

*Teaching is one of the oldest professions which has contributed a lot to the development of Nigeria and the survival of humanity, but over time, its standard of practice has depreciated leaving the country that depends on its products in a state of dilemma. This paper discussed unethical practices in teaching; its causes and consequences in Nigerian secondary schools. It explores the concept and characteristics of a profession and spells out the reasons why teaching is a profession. A series of unethical practices in teaching, it causes, consequences in Nigerian secondary schools. The paper concludes by recommending that the standard of the teaching profession can be improved upon by emphasizing the teaching of professional ethics as a compulsory course, as well as examining and supervising secondary school teachers. These would result in the management of differences in human activities which have made schools to contribute meaningfully to human development both in qualitative and quantitative terms.*

## **Introduction**

It is no gainsaying that professions are ethics-guided. Teaching is no exception. Its practice in Nigerian secondary schools is regulated by the professional agencies such as Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM), State Primary Education Board (SPEB) and Local Government Education Authority (LGEA). On the other hand, ethics provides explicit guidance to teachers about their responsibilities within the school and their profession. When professional ethics in teaching is adequately put to use by teachers, the integrity and dignity of the teaching profession can be assured, helping the learners to develop sound morals, intellect and character.

The teaching profession at commencement was endowed with dignity and integrity because of its ability to impact cherished moral education into learners and also enhance national development (Fafunwa, 1974). However, the profession is currently struggling with maintaining its standard and integrity

because of misconduct by its practitioners. These acts of misconduct are the unethical practices in the teaching profession. The teaching profession is empowered by principles that promote its modesty and the inadequate or no use of the principles that makes the profession loose its ethics; and this in turn influences the academic performance and attitude of students. Hence, teaching can be efficient and effective if the code or principles of the profession can be properly used and managed.

### **Concept of Teaching and unethical practices in the teaching profession**

A professional teacher is differentiated by the classroom practice in an institution of learning as an instructor with potential curiosity, discipline, foresight, keenness, firmness, initiative, parent's substitute, respect, etc. (Chalk et al. 1980; Majasan, 1995). Teachers, as vital human resource in the school, are certificated educational instructors; they are people who have gone through teachers' training and/ or grooming and have acquired the teaching skills in an accredited institution of learning. Hence, teachers as professionals are guided by ethics (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, 2005) and the contrary practice of this is called unethical practice of the profession.

According to Bain (2004), teaching is the learning of specific concepts, the nature of concepts, and the development of logical reasoning and critical thinking, which may be deductive or inductive. It can further be explained as an academic process by which students are motivated to learn in ways that make a sustained, substantial and positive influence on how they think, act and feel. Therefore, it is the imparting of knowledge, development of skills and attitudes and meeting of special needs in various ways ranging from structured to individualized activities, which aid and enrich the teaching-learning process.

Majasan (1995), explained teaching as a means that helps in the improvement and survival of humanity. The quality of the teaching products determines the nature or type of citizens raised in the country. The healthy condition of the profession is threatened severally. Some dimensions of this threats are outlined as follows:

- Harassment: It is an unpleasant persistence that threatens the comfort of teaching and learning, with the common one as sexual harassment.
- Discrimination and unfair evaluation: Refers to biased treatment by a teacher on the basis of age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, intellect, socio-economic status, etc.
- Practice of the profession by unqualified individuals: This is common at the primary and secondary level of education, where the school board or management employs untrained teachers or uncertified individuals. In other words, the employment of individuals into the classroom with no educational discipline or qualification.

- Stealing or misuse of school property: a practice common in some schools whereby the teacher misuses or takes school property home and does not return them.
- Covered up incidents: the deceptive method of covering up wrong actions within the school system. For instance, the covering up of financial mismanagement or embezzlement in the school, especially in government schools.
- Irregularity in lesson/ teaching periods: it is a situation when the teacher does not regularly attend to learners during his/her teaching periods.
- Inadequate utilization of curriculum: It is the failure of the teacher to maximally use the curriculum as a result of inavailability of current edition/ version, incompetence, ignorance, misinterpretation, etc. (Hunt, 2006 and Cannice, Heinz & Koontz,2007).

### **Teaching as a Profession**

Fafunwa (2004) and Ryan (2008) traced the advent of the term 'teaching' to the middle ages when the missionaries took the responsibility of teaching in designated learning centres. The term 'teaching' is synonymous with 'pedagogue' and was derived from a Greek word for 'slave'; that is, a slave who leads a child to school (Solomon, 1984). Teaching became a profession between 17th and 18th centuries when the Europeans' interest in education increased, leading to training in educational theories and methods (Fafunwa, 2004). Gradually, the practice of teaching shifted from clerics to individuals. As a result of this, teachers' institutes were established and saddled with the following responsibilities:

- a. to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of education (Fafunwa, 2004);
- b. to encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity (Majasan, 1995);
- c. to help teachers fit into the social life of the community and the society at large, and enhance their commitment to national objectives (TRCN, 2005);
- d. to provide teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and also adapt to the changing situation within and around the world (Fafunwa, 2004);
- e. to enhance teacher's commitment to the teaching profession.

Recently, there was a shift from the level of Grade II teacher training to Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE), Bachelor Degree in Education (B.Ed.) and so on, with an upgraded curriculum to meet the challenges of the technological age (TRCN, 2005).

Fafunwa (2004) emphasized that the professional training process of teachers has a well structured curriculum and certification, which clearly shows that teaching is a profession. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010), teaching cannot be practised without being licensed, that is, given a structured curricular, accredited/certified training. Goldblatt and Smith (2004) recommended teaching as a profession, stating that it has an established set of principles (ethics) made by the educational community in the interest of the public it serves and the profession; highlighting that teaching is a licensed profession, a profession that involves a specified or structured knowledge of study with induction done after adequate period of training through course work and field practice (teaching internship or practice) and has governing organizations. Darling-Hammond, Gendler and Wise (1990) stated that teaching is a profession because it provides the practice field for trainees (teaching internship or teaching practice) before being licensed to practice, and this practice serves as a means of instilling the ethics of teaching into upcoming teachers.

### **Ethics of the Teaching Profession**

Ethics was derived from the Greek word 'ethos' meaning character or custom (Solomon, 1984). Cannice, Koontz and Heinz (2007) defined ethics in teaching as truth and justice in moral duty and teaching – learning obligation. Ethics is composed of a range of acceptable (or unacceptable) social and personal behaviours, from rules of etiquette to more basic rules of the society.

Often times, morality and ethics are used interchangeably. However, morality is the subset of ethical rules of special importance. In other words, ethics in the teaching profession comprises the explicit guiding principles adopted from the societal norms into the teaching profession to promote and protect the integrity and dignity of the profession. Ethics in teaching was developed out of self-interest of the profession and a genuine commitment to protect the interest of the society in the profession (TRCN, 2005).

Hunt (2006) stated that teaching ethics requires mastery of content, pedagogy, student development, dual relationship with students, confidentiality, respect for colleagues, valid assessment of learners and respect for institutions. For such competence to be acquired, the teaching-training process must be adequately, efficiently, and effectively managed. Teaching practice and the actual practice of the teaching are the measures that can enhance teaching and learning. The practice of teaching with adequate supervision from competent teachers, educational agencies, school management, etc. will ensure that the ethics of teaching is maintained and fostered.

## **Causes and Consequences of Unethical Practices in the Teaching Profession in Nigerian Secondary Schools**

Unethical practices in the teaching profession are caused by:

- Inadequate supervision: Supervision as a collaborative and cooperative effort is directed towards the improvement or growth and development of both human and material resources within the school for the ultimate benefit of the learners and the society (Ijaiya, 2002).
- Inefficiency of the teaching associations, unions or agencies: There are various agencies responsible for education in Nigeria, ranging from the federal level to individuals. The inability of the teaching agencies to control the characteristics that qualify the occupation as a profession, let alone its ethics or principles, weakens the practice of teaching.
- Absence from work: This is the total or partial absence of the teacher from work without quitting the job. This usually occurs when the teacher's request for absenteeism is denied, the teacher with his colleague will collaboratively cover one another when such situations occur, while the teacher only shows up when needed at work often at the detriment of the learners.
- Leadership style: When the leadership style used in a school is weak, such as in the laissez-faire (non-challant) style, teachers take the law into their hands, misuse it and often abuse the profession (Majasan, 1995; Salami, 1999).

*The practice of unethical behaviour in teaching according to McNamara (1997), usually results in most times the following outcomes:*

- Poor academic performance of learners: when subject teachers absent themselves from school without permission, students suffer a lot academically if the lessons missed are not taken at a future time
- Moral decadence of learners:
- Reduction in the profession's standard or worth
- Intrusion of unwanted occurrences; truancy, buying and selling during school, sending students on errands during teaching, etc.
- Loss of teachers' dignity before the learners, parents and the society.
- Unqualified teachers/ practitioners.
- Indiscipline
- Examination malpractices

## **Conclusion**

A call for the need to uphold the ethics of teaching keeps resounding with response from few teachers who see that the unethical practices in the profession do no good to the practitioners, learners, and the society. Hence, teachers as the vital human resource in the school system should wake up and brace up to make the teaching profession what it used to be at inception; and build a truly just and egalitarian society, a free and democratic society, united, strong, and self-reliant nation, great and dynamic economy, and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens as enunciated in the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). In Conclusion, individual teachers should stand to say 'no' to unethical practices in the profession, to help concretize the standard of the job or profession, solidify its professionalism and improve the quality of their products as well as the dignity of teachers and/or profession.

## **Recommendations**

For the teaching profession to actualize the appropriate practice of the profession and rule out every form of abuse or assault on the profession thereby enhancing the performance of Nigerian secondary schools, the following must be considered or done:

- The institutions that train teachers should ensure qualitative training by all means, especially during the peer teaching, practicum and teaching practice exercises.
- Assignment is known to enhance learning; therefore, trainers of teachers should give adequate and meaningful assignments to teachers-in-training. For instance, allowing teachers-in-training to visit schools and identify problems and provide solutions to both curricular and co-curricular activities, and communicate their findings to the schools. If possible they should participate in the implementation of the solutions.
- Entry into the teacher-training institutions should be strictly monitored to ensure it is merit-based and not a dumping ground or alternative for individuals desperate for admission.
- Teachers must instill discipline in learners with themselves setting the pace (i.e they should be good role models).
- The decline in the ethics of teaching can be stopped by practitioners, and educational agencies through thorough supervision, enlightenment on the teaching ethics, measures of discipline for teachers behaving unethically and even superior officers in the school, as well as the management that employs untrained teachers.

Finally, the agencies and associations responsible for teachers such as Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM), State Primary Education Board (SPEB), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Universities Commission (NUC) should ensure that teachers are treated in the society as professionals through the conduct of the agencies and the associations.

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