

RE-ENGINEERING TEACHERS' CODE OF CONDUCT FOR QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The current problems of examination malpractice, blocking for grades, sexual harassment and shenanigans, plagiarism, indiscipline and cultism in teacher training institutions are traceable to the neglect of the strict adherence to the approved teachers' code of ethic or conduct. This paper, therefore upholds the truth that, teachers' code of conduct will contribute to the achievement of vision 2020 if teachers adhere to them strictly. To this end, the paper discusses inter alia the concept of teachers' code of conduct, code of ethics of the teaching profession in Nigeria and recommended that, the re-engineering should be focused on the teachers' code of ethics both in theory and practice.

One factor that has really militated against the recognition of teaching as a profession in Nigeria is that it has not evolved effective codes of conduct, entry, exit as well as effective measures of enforcing such codes (Ehiozuwa, 2005). Boyle in Peretemode (1992), quoted that the code of ethics for teachers has not been taken very seriously as it deserves. To many teachers lack knowledge of the code, it is not emphasized in preparation of programmes.

The problems of examination malpractice, blocking for grades, sexual shenanigans, plagiarism, cultism etc. in teachers training institutions are traceable to the neglect of the strict adherence to the approved teachers' code of ethics or conduct. Thus, professional status can not be conferred on the Nigerian teachers without viable teachers' code of conduct which all teachers must adhered to. This is because if teachers

are to be successful in their corner and earn recognition by the Nigerian nation, they need a reengineered teachers' code of conduct for relevant knowledge, skills and character required for qualitative and productive teacher performance in Nigeria.

It is in recognition of the fact that teachers' code of ethics will contribute to the development of our educational system if teachers adhere to them strictly, that this paper becomes necessary as it observed the importance of teachers' code of ethics in the development of teacher education in Nigeria. This is the crux of this paper.

What is Reengineering Teachers' Code of Ethics?

Re-engineering teachers' code of ethics in ordinary parlance simply means re-designing the teachers' code of conduct to meet the needs and purpose of teacher education in Nigeria. Thus, re-engineering teachers' code of ethics involves the provision of better quality and best practices in a changing environment so as to achieve the objectives of teacher education. The purpose of teacher education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) is:

- i. To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our education system.
- ii. To encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- iii. To help teachers to fit in the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives.
- iv. To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country, but in the wider world.
- v. To enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

All these call for urgent re-engineering of teachers' code of conduct in Nigeria so as to enable them embrace good practices and acceptable professional code of ethics which is the hallmark of effective, efficient and productive teaching-learning process. This implies that teachers' code of conduct would be re-engineered to equip the teachers with the relevant and necessary professional knowledge, skills and character, guidance based evaluation techniques, ethical based orientations and democratic values required for effective and productive performance of their pedagogical duties and responsibilities within and outside the school system.

Teachers' Code of Ethics

Since the crux of this paper is re-engineering teachers code of ethics, it is pertinent that we have a clear understanding of ethics is all about. Oyekan (2006), defined professional ethics as the basic habits made up of equitable principles or rules which are worthwhile standards and guides to good conduct of members of practitioners of a profession. He stated further that professional ethics also have sociological aspect of humanity as they are concerned with the issues of self control and self regulation in the discharge of members' professional duties.

According to Peretemode (1992), a professional code of ethics refers to the specific set of ideas, principles and standards of individual professional conduct as

related to his professional duties and responsibilities as approved and enforced by the membership of the professional group. That is, statements of rules and principles that have been accepted by a group of teachers to govern all aspects of their pedagogical responsibilities and duties. In support of this view, Burrup (1992) averred that a code of ethics as related to the professional educator is concerned with the teachers' relationship with the teachers' relationship with the children, parents, the general public, other teachers, administrators, supervisors and the educational profession. This concern is vividly expressed by Oyekan (2006) when he stated that a good code of conduct for the professional teachers demands exemplary life, seeking the welfare of the pupils, avoidance of derogatory remarks from and by the pupils, maintenance of the spirit of cooperation in all their relationships with colleagues, continuous assessment with efficient record keeping and punctuality in all teaching-learning activities. Thus, teachers' code of ethics refers to a compendium of morally acceptable virtues, values, skills, knowledge, principles and duties. Willingness of Nigerian teachers to put in to practice their code of ethics and enhance their pedagogical effectiveness, improve students' academic achievement and increase public confidence and trust in teachers.

Code of Ethics of the Teaching Profession in Nigeria

It is an empirical variety that, the purpose of education is to develop the citizenry in terms of knowledge, skills and values that are required for national development. If Nigerian teachers at all levels would remain in the crusade for the achievement of the objectives and goals of UBE, MEGs and EFA programmes in Nigeria, the basic rules of conduct and regulations highlighted herein shall be strictly adhered to by all practicing teachers in Nigeria.

First Principle: Commitment to the pupils, students and learners:

The primary obligation of the teaching profession in Nigeria is to guide children, youths and adults in the pursuit of knowledge and skill, to develop healthy attitudes that enable them live in harmony with all other Nigerian and to help them become happy, useful and responsible citizens. The ultimate strength of the nation lies in social responsibility, economic competence and moral strength of the individual. In fulfilling our obligation to the student every teacher shall:

1. deal justly and impartially with pupils and students regardless of their physical, mental, emotional, economic, social, racial or religious characteristics;
2. recognize and respect the differences among pupils and students and seek to meet their individual educational needs;
3. help students to develop an understanding and appreciation not only of the privileges and benefits which they can enjoy but also of their corresponding responsibility to the nation which makes these privileges and benefits possible;
4. not enter into any indecent relationship with the students and pupils in his school;
5. withhold confidential information about a student on his home except that its release is to authorized agencies or is required by law;
6. make discreet use of all available information about the students;

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7. avoid all damaging or derogatory comments about a student especially his home.

Second Principle: Commitment to the Parents.

Members of the teaching profession share with parents the task of shaping each student's behaviour towards socially acceptable ends. Teachers share with all other citizens the responsibility for the development of sound public policy. Teachers are particularly accountable for participating in the development of sound educational programmes and policies and of great interest to them. But teachers believe that the effectiveness of teaching is dependent upon the healthy relationship with the home and the community. In fulfilling our obligation to the parents, all teachers shall:

1. share the responsibility of improving the educational opportunity for all;
2. respect the basic desire of parents in Nigeria for the education of their children;
3. seek to establish friendly and co-operative relationship with the home of the student;
4. help to increase the student's confidence in his home and endeavour to avoid disparaging remarks which undermine that confidence;
5. provide parents with information that will serve the interests of their children and make careful and wise use of information received from parents;
6. keep parents informed about the progress of their children and wards.

Third Principle: Commitment of the Community

Teaching profession in Nigeria occupies a position of public trust involving not only the individual teacher's personal conduct but also the interaction of the school and community. Education is most effective when these many relationships operate in a friendly cooperative and constructive manner. In fulfilling obligation to the community, every teacher in Nigeria shall:

1. adhere to reasonable pattern of behaviour approved by the community for professional persons;
2. assure full political and citizenship responsibilities but avoid exploiting the instructional privileges of the teaching profession in Nigeria to promote political activities.
3. discuss controversial issues with an objectivity that will keep his students from partisan opinion;
4. recognize that the school belongs to the community and encourage lay participation in shaping the purposes of the school and strive to keep the public informed of the educational programme which is being provided;
5. respect the community in which he is employed and be loyal to the school system, community, state and nation.
6. work to raise educational standards and to strengthen the community's moral, spiritual and intellectual life.

Fourth Principle: Commitment to the Employer

The members of the teaching profession in Nigeria are inescapably involved in employer – employee relationship. For the purpose of fulfilling obligation to students, the state and our nation, employer – employee relationship should be so regulated that there shall be mutual respect, understanding and good faith. In fulfilling this fourth principle, the teacher in Nigeria shall:

1. conduct his professional duties through the proper channels and accept no remuneration for teaching except in accordance with approved policy.
2. refrain from discussing confidential and official information with unauthorized persons;
3. apply for specific position only when it is known to be vacant and refrain from underbidding or maligning other applicants to prejudice the employer;
4. adhere to the conditions of a contract or to the terms of appointment until either it has been terminated formally by mutual consent or legally;
5. give sufficient notice of any change of status, position or services;
6. refuse to take an appointment from which in the opinion of the N.U.T Executive, a member of the Union has been unjustly dismissed.
7. engage in no gainful employment outside of his contract where such employment affects adversely his professional status or impairs his standing with students, associates and the community;
8. not seek promotion or obtain the position of another teacher by unfair methods;
9. apply for a position only on the basis of professional and legal qualifications;

Fifth Principle: Commitment to the Profession

The teaching profession is a unique occupation and teachers believe that the quality of the services of the teaching profession in Nigeria directly influences the future of the nation and its citizens. The members of the teaching profession in Nigeria must strive to give their best to the nation by making the teaching profession attractive so as to encourage persons worthy of the trust to take up teaching as a career. Aware of the value of united effort, teachers contribute greatly to the development of their profession. In fulfilling our obligation to the profession, every teacher in Nigeria should:

1. deal justly with other members of the profession in the same manner as he himself wishes to be treated;
2. show a spirit of willingness to help an unemployed member to obtain work.
3. stand by other teachers who have acted rightly on his behalf and at his request;
4. avoid making defamatory statement or comments in the presence of pupils or parents about a fellow teacher;
5. maintain active compulsory membership in professional organization and through participation, strive to attain the objectives that justify such organized professional body;
6. speak constructively of the teaching profession and make the teaching profession so attractive in ideals and practices that sincere and young people will want to enter it;

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7. not make any statement in newspaper, magazine or any other information media, that is detrimental to the interest of the Union;
8. be fair in all recommendations that are given concerning the work of other teachers and his subordinates;
9. not seek to compel another teacher to perform outside the ordinary school hours, any tasks which is not essentially connected with the ordinary work and organization of the school;
10. not impose upon another teacher, out of the ordinary school hours, an excessive and unreasonable amount of work of any kind;
11. not disregard any lawful instruction of the Union,
12. not made an adverse report upon another teacher to the manager, proprietor, school board, Education Officer, Education Department or in the log book without first acquainting the teacher with the report;
13. not conduct himself in a manner detrimental ie injurious to the interests and/or honour of the profession or the union; and
14. not solicit to his school, pupils already connected with another school. (Source: Oyekan, 2006).

Implication for Re-Engineering Teachers' Code of Conduct or Ethics:

Code of conduct will yield the following outcomes:

- Teachers at all levels shall be committed to the needs of the children, parents, society, employer, their profession and the nation.
- As quality assurance mechanism, the adaptation and practice of teachers' code of conduct will help to eradicate some aspects of gross indiscipline, corruption, underachievement and frustration that jointly make schooling unbearable for some children. Oyekan (2006).
- The adoption of a professional code of ethics underscores the rationality and responsibility of the teachers to enshrine honesty, diligence, sagacity, equity, fairness, transparency, accountability, tolerance, productivity, self control, loyalty, respectability, dignity, decency, meritocracy, selflessness, self confidence, confidentiality to mention but just a few.

Conclusion

Willingness of Nigerian teachers to obey, embrace, adhere and practice the ethics of teaching in carrying out their pedagogical responsibilities could enhance their teaching effectiveness and students' academic achievements. If the present endemic corruption in Nigeria schools must be eradicated, teachers' code of conduct must be reengineered in order to achieve the lofty objectives of teacher education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The concept of re-engineering connotes change of attitudes or attitudinal change. Therefore, it is often regarded as a challenge to *status quo*. In order to have a successful and qualitative re-engineering of teachers' code of ethics, the following recommendations become imperative.

- The re-engineering should be focused on the teachers' code of ethics (Theory and practice).
- Curricula of Colleges of Education and Universities should be reviewed so as to expose the trainee teachers to the teachers' code of ethics.
- Teachers at all levels should be well rewarded and motivated to perform their pedagogical responsibilities with pride, integrity, humility, dignity and honour so as to give their calling a unique status.
- Teachers that violate the teaching code of ethics and conduct should be sanctioned by the appropriate authority.
- Teachers should exhibit high sense of exemplary leadership at all times.

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