



Ethics in The Teaching Profession: A Virtue Ethics Approach to Teaching Ethics

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the application of the normative ethical theory of virtue ethics to some ethical issues and dilemmas in the teaching profession in Nigeria. The paper is concerned with teaching as a profession, that is, professional ethics—teaching ethics. It argues that many unethical behaviours in the teaching profession, such as aiding and abetting examination malpractice by the students, exploitation of students, teacher absenteeism, and corrupt practise (such as having canal knowledge of a learner, bribery, and an indecent relationship with a learner, just to mention a few), among others, constitute ethical issues in the teaching profession. And these unethical behaviours have many negative implications and consequences for teachers, students, the teaching profession, the education system, and society as a whole. It concludes that ethics is a crucial element in the teaching profession and is essential to a teacher's professional life. Vicious acts and unethical misconduct by teachers are harmful to the teaching profession, student education, and the nation's educational system, but virtuous acts such as honesty, integrity, fairness, trustworthiness, practical wisdom, and empathy, among others.

Keywords: Teaching ethics; Virtue ethics; Teaching profession; Ethics; Professional ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Education is important to the social, economic, and political development of a nation. The role of the teacher is key in the process of educating the citizens of any nation. Teachers play a fundamental role as front-liners in every education system. Their role is not simply that of disseminating knowledge or imparting information but also moulding the character of the learners or students. There is no doubt that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Unarguably, the teacher is a major factor in the achievement of educational goals and objectives. Teaching is the process of transferring knowledge from the teacher to the learner or student for the sake of changing moral behaviour and skill acquisition. This underscores the need for a professional teacher to be both competent and ethically upright. So, the primary obligation of the teaching profession in Nigeria is to guide students or learners in the pursuit of knowledge and skill, to develop morally healthy attitudes that enable them to live in harmony with all other persons, and to help them become happy, useful, and responsible citizens.

Teachers are more and more expected by society to use their skills and expertise to serve humanity and be moral exemplars in and out of the classroom. Besides being moral exemplars, teachers are also expected to model ethical principles through their teaching. Teachers, as professionals, are faced with ethical issues, problems, or dilemmas practically every day of their career. To this end, they are expected to maintain a cordial relationship with other stakeholders in the education sector: students, parents, employers, colleagues, and the public as a whole. The ethical issues, problems, or dilemmas that teachers face daily raise some questions, such as: what are the ethical responsibilities of teachers? What moral role model can an unethical teacher be to his or her students or learners? What constitutes an ethical dilemma in the teaching profession? What are the ethical issues teachers are confronted with daily? This paper is an attempt to address these questions and also to assist teachers in better navigating through the many ethical challenges they face daily in the course of their profession by finding an effective, virtuous way to put the learner or student first within the framework of virtue ethics. Let us begin with a clarification of terms.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS: Teaching, Profession, Ethics and Teaching Ethics

Teaching, according to Ani and Umerah, "is the process or an art of imparting knowledge. It is a process by which an individual is guided by another to acquire new knowledge" (2014, p. 2). In the same vein, Akinduyo (2014) sees teaching as an "act of guiding and imparting knowledge in and outside the classroom, which can only be done professionally by qualified and trained teachers" (p. 1). These definitions suggest that teaching could be either formal or informal. Formal teaching takes place on school premises. For teaching to be said to take place, there must be a teacher and a student(s). A teacher is expected to inculcate or impart information, skills, and morals to the students. A teacher's job is to "lead the students to acquire new knowledge, have a positive change in attitude, and demonstrate good morals" (Ani and Umerah, 2014, p. 7). To achieve this meritoriously, the teacher must possess strong moral character because a good teacher is expected to be a character moulder and a role model.

A profession can be seen as an occupation that requires extensive and specialised training. Amaele and Amaele (2003) see a profession as a service occupation that applies a systematic body of knowledge to problems that are of great relevance to the needs and yearnings of society. It entails that a profession is an occupation that solves societal problems through services rendered to members of society. A profession, according to Cottell and Terry, is characterised by four important elements:

1. a specialized body of knowledge taught in a formal and certifiable manner;
2. a commitment to social purposes (good ones) that justify the profession's existence;
3. the capacity to regulate itself, often with the sanction of the law for those who violate acceptable norms of behaviour;
4. status and prestige of above-average ranking in society (1990, p. 18).

In the same vein, Umerah (2014) citing Connelly and Clandinin, identifies thirteen characteristics of occupations that have achieved the status of professional as follows:

1. a high level of education and training based on a unique and specialized body of knowledge;
2. requires activities that are predominantly intellectual with members possessing specialized exoteric knowledge;
3. a strong ideal of public service with an enforced professional code of conduct and high levels of respect from the public at large;

4. registration and regulation by the professional body;
5. trusted to act in the client's best interest within a framework of accountability;
6. have ethical principles;
7. an autonomous Association;
8. members should show high priority to service as opposed to personal gain;
9. should demand continuous in-service growth and provide members opportunities for that;
10. a supportive working environment;
11. similar levels of compensation as to other professions;
12. it should be an occupation that affords its practitioners permanent membership in a life career;
13. the spirit of service to God and humanity (p. 42 – 43).

It is obvious from the above elements of profession and characteristics of a professional that teaching is a profession and teachers are professionals because the teaching profession requires training in either a college of education or a university.

Ethics is the study of the rules or standards that govern human conduct in society. It is concerned with the way human beings ought to behave, and the norms of conduct to which human actions ought to conform. Hence, ethics is regarded as a normative science that deals with the norms of right conduct. These norms are supposed to moderate and regulate human behaviour in any society.

Teaching ethics belongs to the family of professional ethics in applied ethics. Professional ethics is the study of the personal and corporate standards of behaviour expected from professionals. Teaching ethics is the study of the norms and standards of behaviour expected of teachers. Campbell (2003) makes a case for her conception of teaching ethics. For her, while ethical codes of practice and formalized precepts of behaviour and disposition uniquely relevant to the teacher should embody fundamental core principles of an ethical orientation essential to overall moral practice, they should not be defined solely by them. It should be conceived of broadly as elements of human virtue, in all its complexity, as expressed through the nuances of attitudes, intentions, words, and actions of the professional teacher. Simply, it is the realization of good and the struggle against bad as they apply to the everyday practice of teachers as individuals and as a collective professional group. Rather than the focus being on more general principles of ethics, such as honesty and fairness, as they apply to teachers' work, it should be on the identification of particular interpretations of ethics that emanate from the profession itself.

Campbell's conception of teaching ethics focuses more on the particular instances of how teachers behave. Campbell accounts for moral dilemmas because extenuating circumstances would come up during professional practice. Campbell does acknowledge the general instances as key to teaching ethics but at the same time she makes a case for the inclusion of the particular instances. To accommodate Campbell's suggestion, teaching ethics would have to be defined in terms of both general and particular instances. Hence, we define teaching ethics as the study of the principles that govern the conduct of educators as well as their ethical choices in the course of their practice. Put differently, teaching ethics refers to the norms and duties that ought to moderate professional teacher activities in such a way that the conduct of professional teachers is undertaken not for personal gains, but in the general interest of students, society and humanity as a whole. It also raises central questions that contain ethical issues, dilemmas and problems that arise in the teaching profession. Moreover, teaching ethics examines the moral issues, problems, dilemmas, and social responsibility of the professional teacher as well as the teaching profession itself in the light of moral principles and theories. It is also concerned with the relationship of the teacher with learners, parents,

colleagues and society as a whole. Let us at this juncture examine the code of conduct for teachers.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR TEACHERS

Every profession has its own clearly defined "dos" and don'ts," signifying the core expected values that the profession shares and holds tenaciously. The school is considered a miniature of society. The school is the formal platform that provides education to students. It has a major role in contributing to and bringing about development in any society. Teaching is an important element in schools. Without teaching, the educational process cannot function properly. Hence, teachers play a crucial and significant role in the educational process by imparting knowledge and bringing about desirable positive changes in the behaviour of the students. As someone with massive responsibility on his or her shoulders, the teacher should realise and understand his or her professional duties and responsibilities. The fulfilment of the aims and objectives of teaching is solely dependent upon the teacher's ability, teaching aptitude, content knowledge, pedagogy, and, most importantly, professional ethics. Moral messages abound in classrooms and schools where teachers' actions and attitudes towards others, most notably students, demonstrate varying levels of sensitivity to a range of moral and ethical principles (Campbell 2003). As such, there are certain codes of conduct that teachers are expected to abide by. In this section, we shall employ the teachers' code of conduct developed by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) as a guide to explain the teacher's expected behaviour and relationship with students, colleagues, school administration, parents, and the general public (*Teachers Code of Conduct 2013*).

Relationship with Learners

There are a lot of things involved in showing concern for the welfare of students. Teachers are expected to serve as good character models for the learners. The most model desirable character traits, such as perseverance, honesty, respect, integrity, patience, fairness, empathy and teamwork among others. As a teacher, one is obligated to have respect for the learner's rights and dignity without prejudice to gender, race, religion, tribe, colour, physical characteristics, place of origin, and age among others. Teachers must abide by all school and classroom safety procedures to ensure student safety. It is also a teacher's responsibility to report instances of bullying and harassment. If a teacher suspects cases of abuse or neglect, or a student confides in a teacher in cases of abuse or neglect, the teacher is required to report it to the proper authorities, even if the student requests otherwise. Teachers should show maximum consideration for the feelings and circumstances of the learners by treating every learner with kindness, equality and respect, without showing favouritism, prejudice or partiality to preserve the unity of the classroom.

A teacher's job is to provide a quality education to all students hence teachers should try to understand the learners' starting point, thoughts and opinions and pay special attention to learners who require care and protection. Teachers are not expected to aid and abet examination malpractice by any learner. They are expected to report all cases of examination malpractice to the appropriate authorities without delay. Teachers must also interact with students appropriately, not taking advantage of students in any way, bullying or putting them down. Contact with students outside of the classroom or school building must be kept to a minimum and must focus on school-related activities and events.

Maintaining the confidentiality of students is also paramount in safeguarding a student's welfare. Teachers are expected to considerately handle matters linked to the learner's personality and privacy. Unless a situation warrants involvement from parents, school administration or law enforcement, a teacher must keep the confidence of his students. Finally taking advantage of the learner in any way (sexually, financially, emotionally) is not permitted. These are some of the expected responsibilities of teachers as it relates to their relationship with learners.

Commitment to the Profession

Teachers have an obligation of commitment to the teaching profession. Teachers should have an enduring absolute commitment to the profession, complying with agreed national and school policies, procedures and guidelines which aim to promote pupil/student education and welfare, for instance, child protection, giving maximum attention and responsibility to the profession. They should have the aspiration to make a successful career within the system, and taking pride in the profession and represent themselves, their professional status, qualifications and experience honestly. They should seek to achieve the highest professional standards in all their work and uphold the honour and integrity of the profession. Moreover, they are expected to be dedicated and faithful in all professional undertakings: be punctual, thorough, conscientious and dependable.

The classroom should be a place of safety, security and acceptance, always avoiding any form of offensive conduct. Teachers must accurately describe their qualifications, credentials and licenses to school boards or principals who seek to hire them. Fulfilling contractual obligations and rendering their services only by the terms of the contract or the law is a sign of commitment to the job. It's their responsibility to design lesson plans to meet state standards and create a well-rounded education plan that appeals to a wide range of learners. Contracts that may call their commitment to their jobs to question or undermine the exercise of their full professional competencies, judgements and cordial relationship among colleagues without undue interference should be avoided. Teachers should commit to the standards and ethics of their work and manage their duties responsibly. Since teachers have to teach in a manner that reflects their personality, developing and caring for their individuality is their right and obligation.

Maintain a good relationship with Colleagues

Teaching is a very delicate profession. A teacher is responsible for imparting all sorts of knowledge whether consciously or unconsciously. It is important to exchange ideas with fellow professionals and improve oneself. In the light of this, teachers are expected to value their work and respect their colleagues. They should try to pool their resources and find a balance between their autonomy and the work community. Accepting the individuality of colleagues, understanding them, and supporting each other are key principles of the work community. In essence, teachers should cooperate to achieve professional goals. It should be a mutually beneficial relationship that is aimed at uplifting the profession to the highest level. This way it would not be difficult to seek assistance from colleagues in tasks beyond their management or professional ability when necessary and take delight in teamwork.

A good relationship between colleagues should be based on respect. Teachers should respect both their senior and junior colleagues in all dealings by rendering help and assisting them to attain the highest professional goals. Senior teachers should show self-respect, conduct themselves in an exemplary manner and strive to bring up junior colleagues professionally. The junior teachers are expected to have respect for their

seniors in both formal and informal contacts and show a willingness to learn from them. Respect also extends to not making derogatory remarks about one another or undermining the integrity of colleagues in any circumstance.

Relationship with Parents/ Guardians

Teachers have a responsibility to interact positively with parents and other stakeholders in a child's education. Contact with parents must be kept professional, free from arguments and physical contact. If a teacher has an issue with a parent, another teacher or administrator must be present during all meetings. Teachers also must avoid being unduly influenced by parents and other stakeholders when it comes to students' grades or other school-related matters. They should provide parents/guardians with all relevant information about activities, progress and problems concerning their children/wards as and when required.

Although maintaining communication with parents/guardians is important, they are not to be taken advantage of. Even when offered, teachers should resist taking gifts, favours, and hospitality from parents and guardians, which are likely to influence them to show favours to their children/wards in the performance of their duty. This is because their services are already paid for by their employer.

VIRTUE ETHICS AS A NORMATIVE ETHICAL THEORY

Virtue ethics is an approach in normative ethics that underscores the virtues or moral character of the moral agent, in contrast to the approach that emphasizes the consequences of actions of the moral agent (consequentialism) or that calls attention to duties or moral rules (deontology). The emphasis of consequentialism and deontology is on the evaluation of actions, and the rules and principles which tell us which actions to perform. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, does offer a different understanding of what ethics is concerned with. It is thought to provide a much better understanding of humans' moral lives: what it is humans strive to be in pursuing the moral life and why the moral life is important to humans (Waluchow, 2003, p. 202). Virtue ethicists are less concerned with individual cases and choices than with what it is to be a good person, an individual who sustains a moral compass based on solid moral values (Udofia & Uduigwomen, 2022). They would say that judging any action in isolation will miss the point, as we ought to be looking at the person's whole life, all things considered. Hence, virtue ethics as a normative ethical theory emphasizes the moral agent's character and virtues rather than duties and rules, or the consequences of actions.

Several virtue ethicists have disapproved of the notion that actions are the basic subject matter of ethics. Ethics, they have argued, should look not only at the kinds of actions an individual ought to perform, but ought to pay attention to the kind of person an individual should be. A more appropriate approach to ethics, according to these virtue ethicists, would take the virtues such as honesty, courage, temperance, integrity, compassion, and self-control and the vices such as dishonesty, ruthlessness, greed, lack of integrity, cowardliness as the fundamental starting points for ethical reasoning (Velasquez, 2014). So, virtue ethics theories deal with such questions as: "How should I live?", "What is the good life?" and "What should I be?"

The Greek philosophers were the first in Western history to examine virtue ethics as a normative ethical theory. Although Socrates and Plato wrote on the topic, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is commonly viewed as the most influential work on virtue ethics. There are also scholarly works on virtue ethics in other cultures than Western cultures such as Asian and African. For instance, in Nigeria, we have the Ibibio virtue ethics and the Yoruba virtue ethics. Ibibio morality is summed up by the word *Edu* (character). *Edu*

“is the overriding trait of a person’s life. It is that which distinguishes a virtuous individual from a vicious one in the Ibibio society” (Okpo, 2020, p.20). Ibibio virtue ethics proposed some virtues to include: integrity, honesty, service to others, justice, courage, respect for others, established norms, values and laws (Okpo, 2019, pp. 35 -36). The Yoruba virtue ethics is similar to Ibibio virtue ethics. Oduwole (2006) citing Idowu opines that “Yoruba morality is summed up by the word *Iwa* (character). It is the dominant feature of a person’s life. It is that which distinguishes a man from a brute” (p. 14). Virtue ethics focuses on the good character of the moral agent, that is, it emphasizes the individual and his/her character traits.

What is virtue? Virtue, according to Beauchamp and Childress (1994), “is a trait of character that is socially valued, and a moral virtue is a trait that is morally valued” (p. 63). MacIntyre (1984) sees virtues as “dispositions not only to act in particular ways but also to feel in particular ways” (p. 149 – 150). For Mintz (1996), virtues are “acquired human qualities, the excellence of character, which enable a person to achieve the good life” (p. 827). These definitions imply that virtue has to do with conduct that shows high moral standards in a moral agent and refers to the characteristic of being morally good; something of social merit can lack moral worth and vice. Virtue is not simply an isolated action but a habit of acting well.

Virtues are good habits and are learned by practising. For an action to be virtuous an individual must do it deliberately, knowing what he/she is doing, and doing it because it is a noble action. While moral virtues position an individual to behave correctly, it is necessary also to have the right intellectual virtues (like practical wisdom) to reason properly about how to behave. Consequently, Aristotle maintains that there are two kinds of virtues, namely moral virtues and intellectual virtues. Moral virtues (including prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) and intellectual virtues (including theoretical wisdom, practical wisdom, and intuitive reason). Moral virtues lie between two extremes. Intellectual virtues, on the other hand, are the end product of teaching and for that reason require experience and time to be cultivated. Virtue, both moral and intellectual, is how we become fully human because it allows us to achieve our natural end, the *eudaimonic* good life. Hence, in speaking of a person’s moral character, we do not describe that person as wise or knowledgeable, but as gentle or self-disciplined. We praise a wise person for his/her character or dispositions, and praiseworthy character or dispositions are the virtues (Aristotle, 1996, p. 24).

Aristotle endorses that a person should strive for balance or moderation in life. He argues that each of the moral virtues is a golden mean, between two undesirable extremes: a vice of excess and a vice of defect. These extremes correspond with particular vices associated with the character. Central to Aristotle’s notion of virtue is that humans make a deliberate, rational choice to act in a manner that lies between these two extremes and is hence considered virtuous (Mintz 1996). It should be noted that one single act of virtuous act does not automatically make a person a virtuous person. Hence, virtues are developed over time and formed through the habitual practice of the virtues and consistent repetition of the right actions. Virtues, then, lead to character development in the sense that these good habits must be present for character formation to occur in a person.

The question that comes to mind at this point is: what are the main features that distinguish virtue ethics from other ethical theories? Some major features are identified by virtue ethicists to distinguish virtue ethics from other ethical theories (Koehn 1995; Meara *et al* 1996; Murphy 1999; Solomon 1992). The first attention of virtue ethics is on the individual and the character of the individual, not on a specific decision. The ethics of virtue relates to “being” while the ethics of duty or consequences concentrate on “doing” (Spohn 1992). To be ethical or virtuous, then, depends on the moral agent and

his/her character. So, virtue ethics pertains to persons' character development which provides the basis for their professional judgements and actions (Meara *et al* 1996). The second feature of virtue ethics is that virtues are products of good habits and are learned by practising. Virtues are acquired in no other way than by practising them continually and ceaselessly until it becomes a habit, second nature (Omogbe, 1993, p.165). Consequently, developing and cultivating a moral character is something that happens through practice and habitual action. The third feature of virtue ethics is for individuals to strive for balance or moderation in life. In teaching, teachers should be encouraged to balance their professional and personal lives. Another important feature of virtue ethics is that moral virtues are discovered by witnessing and imitating good behaviour. To become virtuous, an individual must see others practising good habits. This manifestation of this feature in many persons' lives is through parents, teachers and other role models who have a positive influence and impact on us in our childhood. The fifth feature speaks of the examination of character and virtue within the concept of community and society, not in isolation. An individual has to think of oneself as a member of the larger community and endeavour to excel, to bring out what was best in ourselves and our shared values and the public good. Lastly, objectives are key driving forces in virtue ethics. If the ambition of an individual is to live a virtuous life, then such an individual should constantly strive for personal improvement.

Virtues speak about the good character traits in an individual, providing grounds for morally appropriate actions when faced with an ethical dilemma. A good act is something that a virtuous person does and a virtuous person has a sure character: a set of virtues rather than vices (Okpo 2022). The virtues (integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, respect, empathy, truthfulness, and service to others among others) that will be appropriate in the teaching profession will be those which allow a professional teacher to contribute to the proper aims of the profession and in so doing lead to human flourishing. Let us now examine the application of virtue ethics to the teaching profession.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

The teaching profession deals with the moulding of the character of students and itself must rest on a set of virtues and a proven ethical framework that guarantees the very best learning environment and trust in the teaching-learning process. Ethics draws on human dispositions, attitudes and behaviours such as valuing, selecting and acting, and is concerned with desirable actions associated with human relationships and responsibility for other people (Norberg and Johansson, 2007). As discussed in the section of the code of conduct for teachers above, teachers are expected to maintain a cordial relationship with other stakeholders in the teaching profession: students, parents, colleagues, and employers among others in society. It is pertinent for teachers to know how to handle any ethical dilemma that may come their way as they relate with students, parents, colleagues, employers and other members of society. However, teachers are not regularly taught how to recognize what an ethical dilemma is. Correctly identifying an ethical dilemma is the first step in resolving it. What is an ethical dilemma?

An ethical dilemma is an inner conversation with the self-concerning two or more available propositions. It is a choice between two or more courses of action when obstacles on each side hinder the decision as to which course to pursue (Berlak & Berlak 1981). In other words, it is a situation in which a demanding moral choice has to be made between two courses of action, either of which suggests disobeying a moral principle or moral virtue. Campbell (2003) recognizes the importance of the individual ethical choices of teachers to teaching ethics. During the course of teaching practice, dilemmas are bound to arise that the teachers may have to solve on their own without referring to the ethical codes of conduct of professional regulatory bodies, like TRCN's code of

conduct for teachers. Consequently, when teachers' sense of proper action is constrained by complex factors in educational practice and decisions are made and carried out contrary to the "right course", critical incidents which involve ethical dilemmas and moral distress result (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2010). Teachers deal with many ethical problems in their professional life and they may have to make choices based on their moral dispositions or moral character. Navigating such moral dilemmas is also important in teaching ethics. We will take a look at some of these moral dilemmas confronted in practice by teachers.

The Caring Climate Versus the Formal Climate

This dilemma was identified by Victor and Cullen (1988), this dilemma revolves around the school climate. The caring climate promotes attention to individual and social needs, while the formal climate emphasises adherence to organisational rules. As a result of the tension between two ethical dimensions of the school climate, a dilemma arises between caring for others (pupils, teachers) and maintaining formality (school rules, educational standards). This dilemma reflects itself when a teacher has difficulty in deciding how to best care for a pupil or how to respond when a colleague breaks the rules. Interactions with pupils frequently move beyond the classroom, and teachers must somehow strike "solidarity and authority" as a balance between being "allies" with pupils while simultaneously "retaining the kind of authority that will allow pupils to respect them" (Johnson, 2002, p. 103).

Teachers end up torn between the two; while they have to show the students that they are on their side, they are, however, in a position of authority and must act accordingly. While being friendly and maintaining a good relationship is good for the social development and self-esteem of the student, at the same time they could end up being conceited and deem it unnecessary to show the required respect to the teacher. In the same vein, being overly strict may hurt the development of the student.

Distributive Justice and School Standards

Distributive justice refers to the fairness of outcomes when teachers use principles such as equity to evaluate the justness or unjustness of outcomes. School standards on the other hand are the criteria that schools apply for reaching decisions (Greenberg 1995). This dilemma reflects itself when the teachers perceive the school standards as biased and unfair. For example, school standards encourage preferential treatment based on ethnicity, religion, wealth and so on. The teacher is obligated to be fair and equitable in his/her dealing with students but at the same time is obligated to his employers, thereby obligated to follow the school's set standards.

In conflicts regarding fairness, teachers must decide which principle of fairness is relevant in each situation the principle of equal allocation and treatment or the principle of differential allocation and treatment (Eyo et al., 2008; Udofia, 2017). This is when teachers must decide whether to focus on one needy pupil or all pupils equally (Colnerud 1997). Some students have a harder time learning than others, these kinds of students require extra attention. Hence the problem of deciding what exactly is fair in the classroom; paying equal attention to all students or paying extra attention to the needy ones. While paying extra attention to needy students may help them, it comes to the detriment of others. On the other hand, paying attention to all students equally, the needy students are unable to keep up with the others.

Confidentiality Versus School Rules

The teacher must keep the confidentiality of the student. A dilemma arises when teachers must choose between maintaining the trust of a confiding pupil and abiding by school rules which obligate them to report the confided information to the administration and parents. Sometimes students are more comfortable confiding in teachers than parents. In these situations, teachers are privy to information even though parents have no access. Some of these things the student might tell the teacher are extremely private or delicate family matters. This might put the teacher in a tight spot.

The welfare of the student is important. At the same time, teachers should ask themselves whether their role as a teacher includes handling these types of situations. At the same time, the teacher has to think of the implication of breaking the student's trust even if it is in the student's best interest. It might be clear to the teacher that what the student needs might be professional help, but he/she is conflicted because of the request of the student to keep the shared information confidential.

Difference between the Educational agenda of the Pupil's Family and the School's Educational Standards

Parents view teachers as the school's standard bearers. Teachers face a dilemma when their perception of the child's best interest differs from that of the parents (Campbell 2000). According to Klaassen (2002), sometimes teachers are quite critical of how parents raise their children and point out the need for parents to impose more rules and be more consistent in the training of their children. Parents in turn criticise teachers for the lack of a clear teaching policy and for the lack of communication with parents regarding the values they teach. Klaassen (2002) further observes that some teachers tend to see parents as customers of the educational system. In keeping with the adage that the customer is always right, even when teachers are convinced that they are right and can justify their position as being in the best interest of pupils, they tend to adopt a reserved attitude.

The point is whenever there is a conflict between the educational standard of the school and the expectation of parents/guardians, a teacher finds himself/herself in a dilemma. The teacher by his/her position as an employee of the school is under an obligation to comply with the educational standards set by the school. On the other hand, by being in charge, of the education of their child/ward, the teacher also must listen to the input of the parent/guardian towards the education of their child/ward. The teacher is then conflicted between two choices of action.

Loyalty to Colleagues Versus Loyalty to Students

Teachers sometimes witness a colleague mistreating a pupil or are informed of such mistreatment that is not in line with school norms, and find it difficult to confront the colleague (Campbell 2000). The teacher must protect students but out of a sense of camaraderie with someone in the same profession is conflicted as to how he should act in such a situation; whether to report the misconduct of his/her fellow teacher and protect the student or to show loyalty to the colleague and let him continue in his misconduct. He could rationalize it by saying how teaching is difficult and students even more so. A sense of loyalty to colleagues is usually welcome by fellow professionals. There is also the consideration of how other colleagues will react to the reporting of the misconduct; they may consider it a betrayal or disloyalty and begin to ostracize him/her as they feel he/she cannot be counted on. Conversely, if a colleague's misconduct comes to light and it is found out that one knew about it but chose to remain silent, one could be considered an unethical teacher and lose his/her job. Such is the dilemma of having to choose between loyalty to colleagues and loyalty to students. There are a lot of factors that come into play that make it a difficult decision to make.

From our discussion on ethical dilemmas in the teaching profession, professional teachers with strong moral character and virtues of integrity, honesty, fairness, empathy, friendliness, respect, truthfulness, and trustworthiness will resist pressure to compromise their moral conviction on any of the ethical dilemma, no matter where the pressure is coming from: students, parents, employers, colleagues or anywhere. A virtuous professional teacher will always act when confronted with any ethical dilemma by the rule of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the moral insight of a virtuous person by which the morally right course of action in any given situation can be known; only a virtuous teacher can be a person of practical wisdom, and this is acquired through experience.

VIRTUE ETHICS APPROACH TO ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

The aftereffects of unethical practises and misconduct in the teaching profession have serious repercussions on the profession and the moral upbringing of students in schools, as teachers are expected to be role models. Teachers do not only educate but also assist learners in becoming responsible citizens. Hence, teachers must always remember that their role involves not only impacting knowledge (professional competencies) but also moral character and ethical conduct models. Teachers with moral character serve as role models by respecting others, telling the truth, being honest, and living a virtuous life. But what moral role model can an unethical teacher be to his or her students or learners?

In Nigeria, the professional regulatory agency for the teaching profession is the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). TRCN was established to rapidly transform the teaching profession through the quality of teacher education programmes, registration and licencing, mandatory continuing professional development, professional conduct, and the overall social status of teachers at all levels of the education system (TRCN 2013). Apart from the ethical dilemmas discussed in the preceding section, teachers are confronted with a lot of ethical and professional issues and problems. It is quite disappointing to know that despite the code of conduct for teachers by TRCN, there are still many unethical practises and misconducts that are prevalent in the teaching profession.

Teachers are to teach professionally and ethically so that students, parents, and the general public have confidence in the educational system. Undoubtedly, high ethical and moral standards are required for teachers to earn the trust and confidence of their students, parents, employers, colleagues, and the entire public due to the role and function teachers play in the education of citizens. The history of education in the country reveals that teachers occupied the position of great honour and influence in their communities; they exemplified integrity, knowledge, leadership, moral rectitude and selfless service (Ubogu 2015). The story is different today; over the years, things appeared to have changed for the worse. In light of these demands and expectations, the TRCN formulates a code of conduct for teachers to guide them on what the teaching profession and society expect from them.

Despite the code of conduct for teachers, unethical behaviours such as aiding and abetting examination malpractice by the students, exploitation of students, teacher absenteeism, and corrupt practises (such as having canal knowledge of a learner, bribery, and an indecent relationship with a learner, just to mention a few) are on the increase by the day in our schools. The question that is begging for an answer is: why are many professional teachers not adhering to the demands of the code of conduct of the teaching profession? The simple truth is that many professional teachers lack strong moral character and virtues. Moreover, the prevalent moral character failure experienced in

every sector of Nigerian society is also responsible for unethical misconduct in the teaching profession. But the general public expects professional teachers to hold certain morals and virtues that will guide them to act suitably in line with the ethics of the teaching profession. But teachers are expected to live above board in line with their professional calling; they are expected not to forget that their role entails not only professional competencies but also ethical behaviour models. The code of conduct for teachers has not been able to stop teachers from engaging in unethical practises in the teaching profession. What, then, are ethical issues?

Learning to recognise ethical issues in a profession is the most important step in understanding professional ethics. Ethical issues arise most fundamentally when the choices individuals face affect the well-being of others by either augmenting or diminishing it, causing either harm or benefit. It should be noted that ethical issues arise in cases where only the moral agent's well-being is affected. So, if anyone's well-being will be affected by a moral agent's behaviour, whether the moral agent's own or anyone else's, it creates an ethical issue. Many unethical behaviours in the teaching profession, such as aiding and abetting examination malpractice by the students, exploitation of students, teacher absenteeism, and corrupt practise (such as having canal knowledge of a learner, bribery, and an indecent relationship with a learner, just to mention a few), among others, constitute ethical issues in the teaching profession. However, conceptualised unethical practises and misconduct in the teaching profession exist whenever teachers, individually or collectively, use their position in a way that compromises public confidence and trust because of a conflict of loyalties or values or as a result of attempts to achieve some form of private gain at the expense of public welfare or the common good (Obunadike 2016).

Teachers are not expected in any manner whatsoever to aid and abet examination malpractice by students in their school, either in internal or external examinations. In some instances, teachers' and schools' reputations depend on the success of students' performances in public examinations, where school positions in external examinations are published in local and national dailies. Moreover, there is also the challenge of awards and prizes given to outstanding schools or individual subject teachers, which trigger examination malpractice from both school authorities and teachers. To this end, teachers go against their professional ethics to promote their own self-interest. Unarguably, examination malpractice has many negative implications and consequences for the teacher, students, the teaching profession, the education system, and society as a whole.

Another devastating example of unethical behaviour in the teaching profession is teacher absenteeism. Many teachers in public schools are mostly absent from classes, thereby negatively impacting the moral and academic training of their students. The high rate of teacher absenteeism is negatively affecting the standard of education in the country's public schools. This unethical behaviour by teachers has immensely reduced the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the school system in many ways, including diminishing students' interest in academic pursuit, students' performance in external examinations, increasing moral decadence in our schools, harming the school's reputation, and encouraging student absenteeism.

Undoubtedly, teachers' conduct has a great impact when it is credible, ethical, and focused on the well-being of students or learners. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in our schools today. The cost of unethical behaviour can be devastating to the educational system as a whole. Teachers involved in unethical practises and behaviour lack the strong moral character and virtues demanded by the teaching profession. The unethical behaviours of teachers have had a great negative impact on the profession and the moral upbringing of students in schools. It is hardly possible for a vicious teacher to impart moral virtues to his or her students or learners. One cannot give what he or she

does not have. Consequently, the prevalent cases of depravity among students, such as lack of respect, dishonesty, cultism, alcoholism, gangsterism, and other delinquent behaviour in schools, are traceable to the moral character failure of teachers.

Teachers with strong moral character and virtues will resist pressure to compromise their ethical values, principles, and moral convictions, no matter where the pressure is coming from: students, parents, colleagues, or employers. These virtuous teachers will take action to avoid unethical practises and conduct. Moreover, a virtuous teacher with strong moral character will be able to identify ethical dilemmas, problems, and issues and find the best way to resolve them in a way that benefits every stakeholder in the education system. This will be possible due to the role of practical wisdom in virtue ethics. Practical wisdom, as discussed earlier, is one of the intellectual virtues that play an important role in our actions, and the objective of humans' actions is not only that they should be right but that they should also cultivate a good and virtuous character (Cooke and Carr, 2014, pp. 96–100). This is vital because teachers, as role models, influence others. Carr reminds us that learners or students will be able to follow rules and accept values when taught by teachers who apply them in their everyday teaching and their private lives. If teachers teach learners or students self-control, honesty, and integrity, then the learners or students will cherish these values too. Teachers and their behaviour consequently play a role in the instrumental moral formation of students (Carr, 2006; Udofia, 2021). For teachers to restore, maintain, and sustain public trust and confidence in the teaching profession in Nigeria, they must imbibe and cultivate the moral character and virtues of honesty, integrity, empathy, fairness, trustworthiness, and truthfulness, among others.

CONCLUSION

Ethics is a crucial element in the teaching profession and is essential to a teacher's professional life. A teacher's ethical stance will govern how he/she instructs, relates, and assesses learners or students. Ethics will also play a significant role in how a teacher interacts with learners or students, with colleagues, with employers, with parents, and with the public at large. Without a strong moral character and virtues, it is difficult to see how teachers can address the complexity of moral judgments they must make with competence, develop moral understanding and teach learners or students to reflect on moral issues. As it has been discussed there are situations where general codes of conduct do not help hence individual moral convictions take the front role. How they handle such situations shows how good of a guide they can be to their students or learners. The difference between a good and an exceptional teacher lies in the way they negotiate through everyday situations and guide their students or learners. Teachers cannot earn the trust and confidence of the public in the teaching profession without moral character and virtues. Vicious acts and unethical misconduct by teachers are harmful to the teaching profession, student education, and the nation's educational system, but virtuous acts such as honesty, integrity, fairness, trustworthiness, respect, and empathy among others.

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