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A review of the code of conduct on teachers' professional relationship with learners: implications for improved teacher education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper reviews the code of conduct on teachers' professional relationship with learners. The review was based on the provisions of the teachers' code of conduct, a document of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria. The chapter five, numbers 33 through 45 of the document highlights the relationship of teachers with learners. Relevant sections of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria bothering on fundamental rights of citizens and national policy on education were cited to add credence to the teachers' code of conduct. The paper highlighted some implications of the code of conduct on the improvement of the professional standard of teacher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Code of conduct, teachers, learners, teacher education

Introduction

Three major elements of the educational system are the teacher, the learner and the learning experience. The learning experience, which justifies the efforts of both the teacher and learner, does not happen at random, certain conditions surrounding the processes of teaching and learning must be appropriately harnessed. One of these conditions is a sustainable harmonious relationship and understanding between the teacher and the learner. Failure to achieve a desirable state of harmony in their relationship will always hamper the objectives of the school. Teachers' professional efficiency is judged based on four basic points. His knowledge and structuring of the subject matter, the adequacy of his relationship with students, the adequacy of his classroom planning and management and his degree of enthusiasm in working with children (Snowman & Biehler, 2003). Failure of the teacher to deliver on these roles spells doom for the school system.

Because education depends largely on what teachers do, the section five, part B, number 101 of the national policy on education (2013, p. 45) stipulates what the authorities will continue to do to ensure the improvement of quality education at all levels of education. The points include:

- a. Appointment and retention of academically and professionally qualified persons as teachers and heads of educational institutions;
- b. Putting in place a coherent national framework for teacher development and professional teaching standards that set out what teachers should know and be able to do at all levels of education and at the various stages of their professional development (i.e. on graduation from initial training; on completion of an induction period and for professional accomplishment);
- c. Improvement and regulation of career-long professional development of teachers through the provision of a wide range of programmes and multiple pathways to provide serving teachers with regular opportunities for updating their knowledge and skills;
- d. Provision of improved conditions of service and incentives to motivate teachers and make the teaching profession more attractive;
- e. Setting professional standards for teacher educators who train new teachers; and
- f. Revamping teacher education curricula and training.

Towards the achievement of the above goals, the policy in the same section five number 100, bestowed the responsibility of registering teachers and regulating teaching profession and

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practice on the Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). The TRCN thus in 2004 published the first edition of its teachers' code of conduct. The original edition was however subjected to professional scrutiny and was revised in 2005.

The teaching work is regarded as a professional practice; hence the TRCN is seriously poised on achieving the high professional standard in the educational processes. The body has thus highlighted guiding rules in different aspects of the teaching work in the teachers' code of conduct. The agency strongly believes that when teachers understand their work and diligently delivers creditably, the honour and dignity of the teaching profession would be secured. What would guarantee the desired professional standard are commitment and efficiency of teachers. One of the major high lights of the role of teachers towards efficient professional practice is the maintenance of a harmonious relationship with learners.

The importance of good teacher-student relationship cannot be emphasized. An improved teacher-students relationship guarantees effective learning and psychosocial development of learners. Studies have shown that students that enjoyed a positive relationship with their teachers in terms of unconditional positive regards, having a sense of humour, showing respect for learner's opinion, showing empathy and understanding over learners' challenges, experience better academic result than their counterparts whose teacher did not relate positively with.

The Positive Teacher-Students relationship theory of Rim-Kaufman espouses harmonious interpersonal relationship in the classroom between the teacher and his learners. Teaching and learning process involves the exchange of information and the transmission of ideas and experiences. Targeted goals can only be achieved if the parties involved feel safe in the relationship.

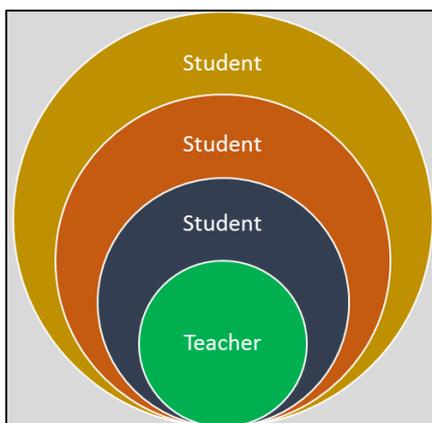


Fig 1: Chart indicating harmonious teacher-learners relationship.

The above chart shows that teacher and students are pursuing the same goal and are not disjointed in their interaction. Every learner is linked to the teacher at the base, and the teacher is both the facilitator and the rallying point. Rim-Kaufman (2012) identified the contributions of positive teacher-student relationship as follows:

- It encourages a high level of closeness and support
- It builds a high level of self-dependence
- It helps students to gain school adjustment
- It contributes to their interpersonal development
- It builds self-confidence and self-efficacy
- It builds a cooperative life
- It builds interest and zeal for school attendance

The code of conduct on teacher's relationship with learners

The chapter five of the teachers' code of conduct document highlights a number of teachers' conditions and rules of practice with regards to their relationship with their students. They are as follows:

1. **Learner's right and dignity.** The code of conduct instructs teachers to respect learners' right and dignity regardless of gender, race, religion, tribe, physical attributes and place of origin. Children are entitled to all human rights as enshrined in the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. The chapter 4 number 34(1) of the 1999 constitution as amended stipulates that "Every individual (school Child inclusive) is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly, (a) no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment; (b) no person shall be held in slavery or servitude; and (c) no person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour". Teachers are prohibited by law to display any form of violence against children. Research has revealed that school children are physically and psychologically violated against. Some of the recorded cases include intentional vendetta, assault, verbal and psychological abuse (UNICEF, 2007)^[1].
2. **Responsibility for educational programmes.** Teachers are obligated by the code of conduct to carry out certain professional responsibilities that would enable the children to benefit maximally from every school programme. They are to initiate, organize and implement and evaluate educational programmes.
3. **Empathy.** One of the duties a teacher owes every child according to the code of conduct is to show maximum consideration for the feelings and circumstances of the learners. According to Onyekuru (2010)^[6] empathizing means to consider oneself in the place of another person to understand how he feels over his situation. The duty of empathizing extends from counsellors to teachers. Teachers should provide the love, safety and attention that learners need to gain full emotional adjustment. When teachers attend to the feelings and expressions of learners and accept their feelings, they will develop a sense of belonging.
4. **Confidentiality.** The strategic position of a teacher in the life of learners avails him some private information about learners. Ethically, teachers are thus not expected to divulge such private information to the public without due consideration of the interest and safety of the student. Conditions under which student's private information can be revealed are stipulated in the code of conduct to include when the revelation is for legal reasons or for the interest of the learner, his parents or the public. Teachers must endeavour to earn the trust of learners and their parents so that they could feel free and safe to release relevant information about the learner to the teacher (Kottler, 2004)^[4].
5. **Fair remuneration:** The code of conduct states that teachers are not supposed to make charges on students having been paid by their employers. However, many corrupt teachers have continued in the unethical conduct of material exploitation. Making illegal financial or material demands from learners is an act of gross misconduct.

6. **Sexual misconduct and related abuse of office.** The code of conduct bars teachers from taking undue advantage of their learners by means of harassing, humiliating, threatening and intimidating them for selfish aggrandisement. Such misconducts like engaging in sexual interaction, drug addiction, cultism and human trafficking are spelt out in the code of conduct as things a teacher must never indulge with students. According to the Federal Ministry of Education and UNICEF (2007) ^[1], there exist different forms of violence in schools in Nigeria. Among them are physical violence, psychological violence, gender-based violence, sexual violence and health-related violence. It is reported that these acts of violence may be carried out by teachers.
7. **Examination malpractice.** It is also enshrined in the code of conduct orders teachers to always handle examination records with decorum and absolute secrecy. The document deters teachers from aiding and abating examination malpractice by learners. It also mandates them to promptly report cases of examination malpractice that come to their knowledge to appropriate authorities. Examination malpractice has become a major bane of the Nigerian educational system and attracted much research work among other ills of the school system.
8. **Patronage of illegal learner groups.** Teachers are prohibited from indulging in antisocial activities such as secret cult, gay relationship and related acts. They are also ordered to be part of the efforts to eradicate such illicit groups in schools where they exist.
9. **Role model.** Teachers are the immediate role model to learners. The code encourages teachers to position themselves appropriately as role models to the learners. Their exemplary status should show in speech, mannerism, discipline, dressing and overall performance. With an emphasis on dressing style, the code of conduct instructs teachers to show a sense of professionalism in dressing. A teacher cannot be a good role model to learners if he or she does not maintain an impeccable character. According to Oladele (1989) ^[5], one of the reasons why teachers fail in maintaining discipline among pupils is if he or she has poor personality.
10. **Corrupt practice.** Teachers are prohibited by the code of conduct from corrupt practices such as bribery, asking for gratification, sexual relationship and indulging in an unwholesome relationship with learners.
11. **Corporal punishment.** Corporal punishment is strictly prohibited by the code of conduct. It states that teacher should not under any circumstance administer any corporal punishment on learners, except when the school authority gives permission. This has been a controversial matter in schools, as many teachers lack the capacity to instil discipline without applying corporal punishment. Reported there is a high prevalence of corporal punishment in Nigerian school, especially the government schools. Corporal punishment exerts a negative socio-psychological impact on school children (Federal Ministry of Education and UNICEF, 2007) ^[1].
12. **Discipline.** The disciplining of learners by the teacher is approved by the code of conduct. Teachers are instructed to always ensure that learners show a sense

of civility. The concept discipline refers to a state of order and sanity in the school, resulting from total adherence to set rules and regulations. Discipline is an essential element of the school system that necessitates the achievement of school goals and objectives. School discipline entails the operation of rules and regulation through the systems of rewards, punishments and other behaviour management strategies towards the maintenance of orderliness and decorum in the school. An effective school discipline is the state of a high degree of obedience and compliance to set of rules and regulation by students. Due to changes in international, national and local legislation and legal frameworks, there has been the need for schools to adapt to changes that have been established. Schools are drifting from an old punitive form of punishments to corrective and progressive discipline approaches. Experts are beginning to develop alternative methods to discipline practices.

13. **Ideological influence.** The code of conduct prohibits teachers from enforcing their belief systems such as their religion and political inclinations on learners. The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria gives strong backing to this code. Chapter 5 number 38 (2) of the 1999 constitution as amended states that ‘No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or religion not approved by his parent or guardian’.

Implications for improved educational standard

It is imperative that teachers at different levels of education come in terms with the provisions of the code of conduct and other relevant laws guiding their professional practice. This would ensure that the set goals and objectives of the nation’s education are realised. The observance of the codes of conduct by teachers has the following implications.

1. In line with the provision of the National policy on education, all teachers in educational institutions should be professionally trained so that their delivery would reflect on the academic and general development of learners.
2. After engaging teachers in service, there should be periodic in-service training that would refresh their knowledge and reinvigorate them. Part of the training should be to expose them to the guiding rules and law of their professional practice.
3. Learners are human beings that deserve respect and regards. The human dignity and honour of students must not be relegated to be background by teachers. Laws of the land protect every body’s dignity and must not be violated by any teachers. Thus, teachers are obligated to show unconditional positive regards to each learner irrespective of gender, culture and physical conditions.
4. Students are brought under the guidance of a teacher to cater for the period they are in school. This guidance role can only be effective if teachers love and care for the well-being of all learners. Teachers should ensure that they respond to students’ questions and complaints. Responding to their needs reassures them that they are

- cherished. They would propel their interest and motivation for academic and other school activities.
5. Learners have individual differences and peculiar challenges. Untrained teachers would not know how they can handle their individual needs. The realization and appreciation of human dynamics in education would help teachers to take every child or learner the way is formed.
 6. Every relationship calls for emotional control and emotional intelligence. Teachers should not have a reason for being irritant towards their students. Students who know that their teacher understands them and responds positively to them will have a higher level of interest in going to school.

Conclusion

The emphasis of this paper is on the efficacy of positive professional teacher-student relationship. Teachers at all levels must know how best to relate with their students so that they do not contravene the code of conduct. The contravention of the various provisions of the code of conduct and other relevant laws usually attracts punishments already stipulated. Higher academic performance, social skills development, emotional adjustment and positive attitude towards school and learning among others, remain the enormous benefits of the positive teacher-student relationship. Thus, teachers must do their best to abide by the code of conduct.

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