

Strengthening the Professional Ethics of University Teachers for Quality Assurance in Nigerian Education

Prof. F.C. Emenalo

drflorenceemenalo@gmail.com, 08033903671,

Educational Management,
Faculty of Education,
Imo State University, Owerri

Abstract

This paper focuses on the strengthening of the professional ethics of university teachers to ensure quality assurance in Nigerian education. The importance and indispensability of quality education preceded by quality assurance in Nigeria universities are stressed. The responsibilities and roles of the universities and the teachers in the overall sustainable development of the students and nation as well as the inculcation of the right type of values to the students for proper social formation, for peaceful co-existence and democratic living were discussed. The prevailing unprofessional conducts of most university teachers were decried and what constitutes unprofessional ethics and ways of strengthening the professional ethics were x-rayed.

Key Words:

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|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) Professional Ethics | 2) University Teacher |
| 3) Quality Education | 4) Quality Assurance |

Introduction

Quality education is highly desirable at every level of educational system. Hence education stakeholders continuously clamour for it. Quality education is that education that provides all learners with capacities required of them to become economically productive, emotionally and morally sound, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual wellbeing. Worthy of note is the fact that quality education is usually preceded by Quality assurance which is a situation where there is quality in inputs, process and output. The teacher / lecturer, who occupy a central position in the education system, act as catalysts in this process because without the active commitment of the teachers/lecturers, every input into the system will be in a state of inertia resulting in a faulty, irrelevant and undesirable end product with attendant negative consequences.

However, the university which is the apex level of education in Nigeria, is charged to produce varied high level manpower in different fields of endeavor for national development, hence, different reputable professionals exist and operate to provide university education to students. Undoubtedly, university is a conglomeration of professionals of different

professions with their varying professional ethics and codes of conducts, and each of these professionals is involved in the process of imparting and facilitation of knowledge, skills, values, norms etc. In this exercise, there exists students/teachers interaction or relationship. It is therefore posited that every professional involved in the university Education delivery needs to be aware of, respect and comply with teachers' professional ethics if quality education is to be greatly assured in Nigeria.

This is unarguable because teachers/ lecturers' personal quality, professional conducts and general comportment greatly impact on, and influence students' total development. Moreover, Bandura (1986) cited in Agulana and Nwachukwu (2014) established that most individuals behaviour have been acquired through modelling and imitation of what significant others do. It then follows that any undesirable negative professional conduct of any university lecturers/ teachers send wrong signal to students, corrupts their minds and dislocates educational goals thereby derailing the very essence of quality education, the teacher is charged to actualize. It is not exaggerating the obvious that education is the major instrument for positive individual and societal transformation, attitudinal change, value and moral rectitude and rejuvenation as well as refinement of ideas, knowledge and skills. And government educational policies and programmes for individual and national development are implemented and actualized at the institutional level where the teacher/lecture is a key factor. It therefore becomes very disheartening to observe the prevalence of increasing moral decay and unprofessional conduct in the noble profession of teaching in Nigeria Universities which the students could quickly pick as a normal way of life. A case in point is the reported sex for grades Saga in universities which has gone viral and has attracted the attention of the National Assembly to introduce a Bill of 14 years imprisonment for any lecturer caught in sexual abuse of students. More serious concern is the general impression that university lecturers seem not to see themselves as teachers hence the tendency to overlook the ethics of the profession which manifests in series of university students constant complaints about their lecturers' unprofessional behaviour which contravene the professional ethics. In the light of this, where lies the hope of the university producing quality graduates in character and learning? This calls for serious attention on teacher professional ethics in Nigeria University so as to address many of these observed professional misconducts that run counter to the ethics of the teaching profession.

Quality Education

Quality connotes appropriateness, effectiveness and adequacy (Abraham 2019). Quality as defined by Ekwuru (2019), is a desirable attribute of product or service that distinguishes it for the person seeking it. Quality Education is conceived as that education that provides all the learners with capacities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well being. ASCD & EL (2016) stated that quality education focuses on the whole

child, the social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status or geographical location

Six dimensions of quality education outlined by ASCD & EL are Equity, Relevance, child friendly, sustainability, balanced approach and learning outcome skill. Similarly, UNICEF (2019), posits that for quality education, learning environment, should be safe, healthy and stimulating and that five elements of 1) Learner outside experiences (2) Learning environment 3) Content of Education 4) Learning process 5) Learning outcomes that make up quality education must be adequately attended to.

Quality Education manifests clearly in the products of Education performing well in the world of works in real life situation (Ekwuru, 2019). It is a condition for sustainable development because it has to meet the needs of daily life, be relevant to the country's needs and preparation for the future.

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance is a mechanism put in place to maintain the degree of excellence on Educational products and services. It is an index that a product has passed through necessary processes of test or fitters to ensure that such products or services have attained quality threshold (RIN in Emenalo 2015). Also Oku and Obi (2011) view quality Assurance to be the consistent provision and utilization of good and high standard resources to foster effective teaching and learning in every stage and aspect of educational system. Quality is assured when all the processes and measures that guarantee good quality have been applied in the venture that is being taken. (Okonkwo and Udenze, 2012).

Quality Assurance therefore connotes all the measures taken to ensure that the educational system and its products are better and able to meet the needs of each society. Noting that quality suggests appropriateness, effectiveness, and adequacy, Abraham (2019) stated that quality assurance helps to achieve zero defects, wastage reduction and excellent output. It also brings about continuous improvement, organizational renewal to ensure that the finished products fit and meet the expected standard.

However, considering the input-process-output Synergy in Quality Assurance, any unprofessional acts by the university teacher/lecturer in processing the inputs or raw materials to get the finished products/outputs, (graduates), will definitely derail the course of quality assurance. This suggests that conducts and practices that run contrary to the professional ethics of teaching profession such as non-coverage of course contents, sexual harassment, indecent dressing, financial extortion, smoking and drinking Alcohol before students will be inimical to the realization of educational goals of causing positive change in behavior of the recipient who ought to be worthy in character and learning to make contribution to national development.

University Teachers

University is the apex level of educational system in Nigeria which offers diversified curricular to undergraduates after their secondary school education. It is a community of scholars who believe in the freedom of mind over matters and who insist that things or materials should be subordinated to the intellect. University consists of the largest concentration of certified expert, teachers in different fields of study/profession required for the advancement and development of the society (Emenalo 2013). The responsibility of the production of high-level manpower for the socio-political and economic development of a nation charged the universities; mandate them to ensure the production of high level relevant manpower through training and development as well as inculcating proper values for the survival of the individual and the society. It is therefore the agent for not only shaping the destiny of man but also the nation.

University Teachers Operate and teach not only in Faculty of Education but in all the Faculties. Though many seem not to regard themselves as teachers, but as lecturers who should not be checkmated by the teachers' code of conduct. It is important to note that the concept of University Teacher comprises professionally certificated teachers, lawyers, Medical doctors, Engineers, Architects, Nurses, Geographers, and Surveyors etc. All these University Teachers of different fields get Involved in the process of teaching and learning that brings about a change in the students behaviour, skill and knowledge. The education delivery services they are into have to do with teacher-students interaction, relationship and interface which calls for professional carefulness and caution. This is true because teaching is a noble and indispensable profession which transfers what is worthwhile to the learners to bring about positive change in behaviour and skill. It then follows that the University Teachers who are role models and facilitators in this process of knowledge, skills and values acquisition have to exhibit high level of professionalism and integrity in relating with students. Appreciating the important roles of University teachers, Osuagwu in Emenalo (2013) stated that the two major institutions that can serve the society well are the University and the church. This suggests high societal confidence on the universities' teachers as agents for societal transformation, moral rejuvenation and sanitization as well as the advancement of the nation

However one does not lose sight of the fact that not all that teach are professional teachers. A professional teacher according FRN (2013), is a person who had undergone approved professional training in education at appropriate levels capable of imparting knowledge, attitudes and skills to the learner's. This implies that a teacher is a person who by virtue of his training, expertise and induction is equipped to inspire, motivate and facilitate the learner to acquire new knowledge, skills, values, competencies to function effectively, and positively contribute to the sustainable development of himself and the nation, It is not an all comers affair profession (Emenalo, Alabeke, Ike 2018). In consideration of the fact that other lecturers in the university outside the Faculty of Education are also professionals in

their different fields, but also engage in teaching/ learning process calls for the repositioning and strengthening of Teachers professional ethics in the universities. This will enable them discharge their charged responsibilities which include the development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of the individual and the society, which is very crucial and expedient in Nigeria today.

Teachers Professional Ethics

Professional ethics are those norms, values and principles that govern a professional conduct (Okonkwo and Udeze 2012). Ethics have to do with morality and values, people's belief of right and wrong, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Ethical considerations distinguish human beings from animals (Oku, Emenalo and Okeke 2013), (Heinz and Koantz 2005), Ethical issues go beyond legalities but requires individual judgments to determine what is wrong or right (Ijeoma 2001).

Understanding the unique characteristics and background of professional members in every organization, various professions like teaching establish and codify appropriate ethics that checkmate and moderate the conducts of its members to ensure sanity, quality and high productivity. This means that code of ethics is a written and codified rules and regulations backed up by law and contravention of any part of the law attracts sanctions from the relevant authority. Professional code of ethics outlines teachers' main responsibilities to their students and defines their roles in students' lives. Teachers are required to demonstrate integrity, impartiality and ethical behaviour in the classroom and in their conduct with parents and co-workers. Professional ethics is a guide which facilitates the teachers to deliver quality education and inculcate good values among the learners. It also enlightens the teachers on their major roles in bringing about desirable change in the behaviour of the students, who they ought to treat with love, care, commitment etc. (Karma, 2018).

Apart from having good academic and professional qualifications, a teacher should possess the knowledge of professional ethics. This stems from the reasoning that the maintenance of discipline, moral values and standards requires the existence of good conduct amongst the groups that are to maintain and inculcate the discipline (Ukotte & Ihisota 2019). Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria TRCN (2012), which is teachers regulatory body, set to sieve the weeds from the tars, enjoined all teachers to be guided and bound by those rules contained in the teachers' code of conduct, teachers shall be guilty of professional misconduct if they contravene any of the rules. It also urges teachers to abide by the 2004 TRCN provision and also familiarize themselves with other relevant laws in the performance of their duties regardless of the level of their operation. Such other relevant laws teachers need to be aware of and respect in pursuance of their professional obligations include UN declaration of Human Rights (1947), Corrupt practices and other related offence Act (2000) and Child right law (2003), The position here is that, teachers no matter at what level of operation, once they get involved in teaching exercise have agreed to follow the code of

ethics. They can't push their personal beliefs on students because they are a "captive audience". They need to be fair to students and not to take advantage of them (<https://ww.education.uiowaeduc2>). This explains why Durosaro (2014) stressed that teachers being the facilitators to students learning and total development, must not send wrong signals to the students/learners, bearing in mind that educational products are not only determined by the quality of the material inputs but also by the quality of those who implement and supervise those inputs. Still stressing on the importance and compliance to teachers professional ethics, Prakasha & Jayama (2012) opined that if the teachers bear good professional ethics in relation to their profession, the ethics are automatically transferred to the upcoming generation, and that the effective use of professional ethics has the power to stop violence and terrorism in the world.

Furthermore, Durosaro (2014) who views professional ethics as the moral principles that guide the activities of teachers in the discharge of their duties, are social norms that must be transferred from one generation to another, categorized ethics in teaching into two, namely moral and work ethics.

1. **Moral Ethics.-** This has to do with honesty, discipline, loyalty, not smoking, drinking in public or before the students, dressing neatly and decently to school, sexual comportment, punctuality etc.
2. **Work Ethics:** These include continuous learning; regular preparation of lesson plans, playing the role of in-Locho Parentis, regular and objective assessment of Learners, being cooperative with other teachers at work and obedience to authority. Going by this, any act of sex or money for grades goes contrary to teachers expected sexual comportment and objective assessment of students.

Other teachers' ethics fashioned after UNESCO/ILO recommendations include academic freedom in what to teach, materials to use and the appropriate method, mutual cooperation between teachers and parents, allegiance to the professional body, participation in social and public life of the community in the interest of teachers personal development and to be socially relevant, freedom to exercise their civic rights and be eligible for public offices, active participation in co-curricular activities for the benefit of the learner, showing no form of discrimination in their operation, not engaging in any form of defamation of the characters of colleagues, not dubiously taking away learners from colleagues.

Also included in the ethics are respecting the rights and dignity of the learner without prejudice to sex, race, colour, creed or religion, ensuring the confidentiality of learners' personal information, nonsexual harassment of learners, non involvement in any form of examination malpractices, cultism, bribery and corruption, not giving corporal punishment without authorization, not influencing learners ideology etc. (TRCN, 2007)

Observance of Teachers' Professional Ethics in the Universities

The observance of teachers' professional ethics in Nigerian universities has been a great source of worry to all and sundry. The prevailing unprofessional conducts of university teachers/lecturers have been decried by Igbinedion (2014) when he states that cases of indecent dressing, high scores in exchange for sex or money and other forms of gratification which are aberration to the maintenance of high standards in education abound in our schools. Similarly, Onyeson and Iwegbu (2011), found out that moral, financial ineptitude, examination malpractice, indecent dressing etc addressed in the code of ethics are still prevalent in our educational system. Again the most recent sex for grades Saga in one of the Nigeria universities which went virile and caused the National Assembly to propose a 14year jail term Bill for any lecturer found in sexual abuse of his students, agitated the minds of many to ask, if university lecturers have thrown to the winds the professional ethics of the teaching profession which among other things require them to demonstrate high level of integrity, non-sexual harassment to the learner as well as playing the role of "in-loco-parentis" (in place of parents). Where then lays the hope of Nigerian Universities producing quality graduates in character and learning if the lecturers who ought to inculcate the right values and virtues engage in such unethical and unprofessional acts that could derail the course of quality assurance and attainment of quality products. This is of great concern considering the earlier reported findings of Fowowe (1999), Ojibere (1988) and Akuezuilo (1987), of a strong and positive relationship between what teachers do, how they do them, and their students learning outcomes.

It is in cognizance of this that scholars like Caetano and Silva (2019) and Williams and Armstaed (2014), posit for proper awareness creation of teachers' professional ethics. They believe that people who are guided by a code must be aware of such ethics hence ethical training and seminars need to be given to university teachers.

In addition to the adequate awareness creation of teachers professional ethics in Nigerian universities, Emenalo, (2015) x-rayed the under listed as ways of strengthening the professional ethics of university lecturers:-

- a. Improvement and prompt attention to teachers' condition of service.
- b. Ethics criteria in performance appraisal
- c. Ethics committee to promptly look into ethical issues.
- d. Regular training/seminars for university teachers.
- e. Publication of sanctions for unethical behaviour.
- f. Encouragement of students to report any unprofessional conduct of lecturers.
- g. Publication of lectures unethical behaviour etc.

If these strategies are adopted, it will go a long way in check mating the unprofessional and unethical conduct of most lecturers prevalent in Nigerian universities today thereby strengthening teacher's professional ethics. The resultant effect would be efficient and effective processing of university inputs by the lecturers to produce quality, standard, relevant and morally sound graduates in the world of works for peaceful, democratic and sustainable development of a nation of our choice.

In conclusion, quality assurance and quality education are 'a must have' in Nigerian universities for them to be able to carry out their charged responsibilities for sustainable development, peaceful co-existence and sanitized and a rebranded system in Nigeria. For quality education to be assured, it is dependent on the inputs and process synergy to get the desired quality products. In strengthening the process dimension of quality education where the university teacher is a key player, efforts and strong political will must be given to the inputs dimension such as funds, facilities, buildings, ICT, Admission, Appointment of Vice Chancellors etc to complete the quality assurance cycle for quality education to be attained.

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