

Role of Primary Educator in Restoring Academic Ethics and Integrity in Learners: A Move to Rebuilding Trust in the Educational System in Nigeria

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Abstract

Ethical and academic Integrity is very important in the pursuit of academic excellence in learning. In recent times, primary education system in Nigeria has been subjected to reported and unreported cases of ethical and integrity breaches, making the goal of achieving sound primary education a mirage. This could be as a result of degradation of dominant core values, which have been trampled upon in the educational sector and society and various perspectives of what constitutes academic ethics and integrity in the Nigerian educational context. Therefore this paper seeks to identify factors responsible for this development, which include education system, sociocultural environment, economic environment, infrastructure and institutional policies, and management systems. This paper also provides a synopsis of the different perspectives of academic ethics and integrity in Nigeria and how it impacts on the primary education in Nigeria. It concludes by presenting an overview of the major challenges associated with academic ethics and integrity and possible ways of instituting a culture of integrity in the Nigerian primary education system. It then recommended that; a total evaluation of ethical principles should be carried out at intervals in the schools system in order to instil some level of confidence in the primary educational system in Nigeria.

Keywords : ethics, integrity, education, primary education

Introduction

Ethics plays a very important role in Education. *Ethics* are interpreted as the discipline of dealing with good and bad with commitment and moral duty. Ethics are well-established levels that make the measures right and wrong. It is classified as unique values such as integrity and discipline, Honesty amid others and applies them in daily routines. Ethics impacts the behaviour and permit an individual to make the right options. To manage life and act responsibly is very hard without ethics (Guerrero-Dib, Portales & Heredia-Escorza (2020). According to Nwabueze, Oragwu and Diara (2018), ethics could be seen as moral principles and practices that govern a person's behaviour or the person's way of conducting an activity. It is the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles affecting how people make decisions and live their lives; what is good for individuals and society, which is equally

described as moral philosophy (Ukala & Nwabueze, 2016). The significance of ethics cannot be disregarded in any level of life. It's important that they are practiced in the area of Education.

Ethics in Education are important because they assist to run the system smoothly. The Ethics sets the standards of what's acceptable and what's not, therefore, protecting the Interest of both teachers and pupils. The Ethics in Education has been offered a lot of significance over the years and institutions are creating courses that assist students to understand these ethics. *Ethics in Education* are accessible on both the teachers and the pupils. In day as well as boarding school, it's the teacher's duty to make the pupils aware of the ethics. The school management frequently takes it upon them to acquaint the pupils with relevant ethical behaviours. Academic ethics could be seen as an idea that depends on the help of both school management and pupils who together, understand the needs to live decently and take action when necessary to uphold the academic integrity of their institutions. Thus, it is a moral code that guides the behaviour of academics in any given academic establishment.

Though the term integrity and ethics are often used interchangeably, they could be distinguished. According to Kayode and Adeyinka (2009), ethical issues are set of customary principles and practices embodying some sort of normative codes (behaviour or values) that need to be adhered to as a member of that society or body. Integrity remains one of the indices used for compliance level to a collection of rules and regulations, particularly in academic environments. Integrity is a behavior that conveys some level of fairness and responsibility. It could also mean the act of being honest and just sharing your academic successes and accomplishments for yourself and others. Some of the traits that are associated with lack of integrity on lack of integrity and academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation and obstruction. Integrity also means a strict adherence to set out rules and regulations, societal norms and expectations, principles and guidelines that regulate the activity of the organization with little or no monitoring (Boundless, 2016). Academic integrity is very essential in the Nigerian primary educational system because it is at this level of education that a child's could be formed or remoulded. There are diverse views of the importance of academic integrity in the Nigerian education system and what constitutes academic integrity. Academic ethics cover the integrity involved in academic behaviour from teaching, learning and evaluation to educational process management.

Principles of Ethics in Education:

Ethical principles refer to model for ethical guidelines related to education. They are also referred to as universal law of right and wrong establishing the kind of attitude an ethical person should and should not engage in. These principles help in making selection and also provide the principles by which various selections could be evaluated. In education, characters are evaluated based on trust and credibility according to the ethical principles (Hazarika, 2020) . Below describes some of the ethical principles applicable in educational institutions

Concept of Honesty

Honesty is a very important trait to have in Education. Honesty means being loyal, truthful, trustworthy, sincere, and fair. It is admirable in several cultures and religions. In-School, good student-teacher bond come from mutual trust and respect. In today's world, only academics is enough for students. To be successful, we must have the morality that complements our education knowledge. Amid all the attributed, Honesty is one of the vital assets that are essential for all the students. Honesty does not come naturally but it is an incarnated method of adopting it through a broad overview. "Honesty is considered the best policy." When we become an honest person, the people give the best compliment and its' a dream of every individual to get the good compliment. So, the education system should make sure to comprise some important practices and routine to put a student near to morality. Students must be guided correctly from the starting and their childhood to enactment honesty.

Concept of Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the other ethics that is essential in Education. The Confidentiality refers to your commitment not to disclose or transmit information to the unauthorized people. It extends to information about either peoples or organizations. When facing any number of stresses, challenges or crises students seek out students affairs professionals. Students frequently share personal information in-depth with the expectation that Confidentiality will be maintained. This entails that student grades, attendance records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials and are released only with student consent, or for legitimate academic purposes, or if there are reasonable grounds for believing that releasing such information will be beneficial to the student or will prevent harm to others.

Conflict of Interest

Conflict of Interest *ethic in Education* is a condition in which your main responsibility to a student is negotiated by engaging priorities. Conflicts of Interest can display in a variety of contexts and for several various reasons. The conflict of Interest emerges when the best Interest of one person is not in the best interest of another individual or organization to which that person incurs loyalty. Conflicts of Interest can extent from mistakenly permitting another priority to affect one's judgment, to deliberately infracting a school policy for personal benefit. Therefore in order to avoid conflict of interest, a teacher does not enter into dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favouritism on the part of teacher.

Concept of Responsibility

Along with all the ethics, responsibility is also one of the vital *ethics in Education*. The student's responsibility takes place when students take an energetic part in their studying by acknowledging they are responsible for their academic success. The student's responsibility is

to communicate respectfully, and careful manner with the teachers, and other classmates of the School. Student responsibility is exhibit when students make an option and take steps which guide them to their educational objectives. Attend and participate in classes, seminars, and labs, along with this effectively complete all the assigned work by a teacher in a given time.

The Ethics in Education is very crucial for all the students because they help to develop the personality off, students. *Ethics in Education* assist to manage the education system and make sure that these habits positively take part in human well-being. Between moral and ethical principles the ethical knowledge is an intrinsic feature of awareness. *Ethics in Education* needs a student to respect and obey the teacher and follow all the rules establish by them. Students should obtain academic responsibility and integrity and practice self-discipline.

Dishonesty and academic Fraud

Stephens (2016) argues that the problem of cheating is endemic and is at the root of human nature, thus it should not be surprising that it occurs. It is a strategy, conscious or not, used by humans to solve a problem. However, recognizing that cheating has always existed should not foster a passive and pessimistic attitude since human beings have a conscience that enables them to discern ethical behaviours from those that are not.

Understanding the phenomenon of dishonesty is important since the strategies used to try to counteract it will depend on this. For example, if dishonesty is considered a genetic disorder that some people suffer, the way to deal with it would be to identify those who suffer from it, supervise them, segregate them and/or try to “treat” them. If it is a common deficiency that everyone experiences to a greater or smaller degree, other kinds of tactics should be used to counteract it (Ariely 2013).

In general terms, there are different types of academic dishonesty that may be grouped into four major categories:

- a. Copying. Copying or attempting to copy from a classmate during an examination or assessment.
- b. Plagiarism. Copying, paraphrasing or using another author’s ideas without citing or giving the corresponding credit to them.
- c. Collusion. Collaboration with someone else’s dishonesty, and includes not reporting dishonest actions which have been witnessed. The most representative actions of this type of misconduct are: submitting assignments on behalf of classmates, allowing others to copy from you during an exam and including the names of people who did not participate in teamwork assignments or projects.
- d. Cheating. Among the most common actions in this category we find: using notes, technology or other forbidden materials during an exam; including non-consulted references; inventing or making up data in assignments or lab reports; contract cheating; distributing or commercializing exams or assignments; submitting apocryphal documents; impersonating another student’s identity; stealing exams; altering grades; bribing individuals to improve grades.

The list is not exhaustive since it does not include every possible type of dishonesty. Every situation creates unique circumstances and different nuances so it should not be surprising that the emergence of “new” ways to threaten academic integrity arise (Bertram-Gallant 2016). Students’ creativity and the continual development of technology will cause different manifestations of academic fraud (Gino and Ariely 2012), a fact that has been documented in university contexts in the past.

Academic dishonesty and its relationship with the lack of ethical professional behaviour

Establishing a relationship between the level of corruption in a country and the level of academic dishonesty in its educational institutions is a difficult task to carry out since fraud and corruption have many different forms and causes, particularly in complex contexts such as the social dynamics of a country (International Transparency 2017). However, it can be established that academic dishonesty is a manifestation of a culture in which it is easy and common to break rules and where integrity is not as valued as it should be. Under this logic, it is possible to establish a certain relationship between a poor civic culture and academic dishonesty (García-Villegas et al. 2016).

This poor civic culture tends to be reflected in the daily activities of the citizens, particularly within organizations, where a relationship between students who cheat and unethical behaviour in the workplace has been identified (Winrow 2015). From this point of view, integrity and ethical behaviour, expressed in different terms such as decision making, conflict resolution or accountability, is one of the competencies most requested by employers (Kavanagh and Drennan 2008) and one of the critical factors needed to efficiently develop inter-organizational relationships of trust (Connelly et al. 2018). This is the reason behind the study, the understanding of this relationship.

A study carried out with 1051 students from six North American universities concluded that students who considered academic dishonesty as acceptable tended to engage in such activities and the same individuals tended to show unethical behaviour later during their professional lives (Nonis and Swift 2001). In another study with Engineering students, it was found that those who self-reported having engaged in dishonest actions, also carried it out in the professional field, which suggests that unethical behaviour shown at the college level continued into professional life (Harding et al. 2004). Findings of another study carried out at a nursing school demonstrated that students who showed academic dishonesty had a greater incidence of dishonest behaviour once they worked as health professionals (Laduke 2013).

In a study carried out with 284 psychology students who reported having engaged in some kind of academic dishonesty, specifically having copied during exams and lying in order to meet their obligations during their college education, also reported participating in actions considered illegal or unethical within the context of the research, specifically those related to substance abuse - alcohol and drugs, risky driving, lying and other sort of illegal behaviours. This data suggests that, besides the contextual factors, there are also individual causes such as

attitudes, perceptions and personality traits that can influence the individual's behaviour in different aspects of their lives (Blankenship and Whitley 2000).

In one of the most recent studies, where data from 40 countries was collected, a strong relationship was identified between the self-reporting "copying in exams" of the student population and the level of corruption of the country, expressed in the corruption perception index published by Transparency International (Orosz et al. 2018).

Despite the increase in the number of studies related to academic integrity and ethical behaviour in the companies in different parts of the world since the 1990s, it has not been possible to identify any research in Mexico that explores the relationship between the ethical behaviour of an individual in his/her different life stages, as a college student and as a professional; or to put it differently, between academic integrity and ethical performance in the workplace.

Academic Ethic and Integrity

Ethics education can be divided into four stages:

1 Ethics education in Family

In family, ethics education should focus on descriptive facts. Children observe their parents' (role models) ethical behaviours and they learn social facts about ethical behaviour.

2 Ethics Education in School

In school, children learn what is right and what is wrong. This is a value education or character education. In educational systems, generally ethics is associated with religion. Therefore, instead of ethics course students take religious course. However, students should learn values clarification, and making ethical decision. In addition, school fosters on pupils the need to become trustful, responsible, and just person.

3 Ethics Education in University

In university, ethics should be professional ethics. Only some students can take ethics course related to their professions in universities, because in universities ethics does not give as a course in all departments. This kind of ethical education provides students to realize what is right, make good decisions about ethical issues in their professions. In addition, students learn evaluate different moral standpoints.

4 Ethics education in business

In business, people learn some ethical codes about their occupations. This kind of ethics tells how people should act in business life.

Role of Primary School in Teaching Ethics

In school ethics is associated with social norm and religion practices. Therefore, in educational systems instead of ethics pupils were taught social studies and religious studies as a subject which can be used to replace Ethical studies and in returns make them to performance. Until university students do not take an ethics course in their schools. In universities, not all

departments have an ethics course only a few departments have an ethics course like philosophy, psychology, psychological guidance, business faculties etc. In primary, secondary and high schools' students take only religious culture and moral course. Moral and ethics are always mixed together, but they refer to different subjects. Before, as we said, ethics is derived from Greek term "Ethos" which means custom and character. On the other hand, morality is a set of beliefs and practices about how to live a good life. Morality comes from the Latin term "Mores" which means custom and manner. The terms ethics and morality are often used interchangeably. They have same roots. Their meanings are the same; custom. However, there is a distinction between them in philosophy. This distinction can be stated as morality is first-order set of beliefs and practices about how to live a good life, ethics is a second-order, conscious reflection on the adequacy of our moral beliefs. In other words, Morality is used to refer to what we would call moral conduct while ethics is used to refer to the formal study of moral conduct.

It could be claimed that morality is related to praxis, but ethics is related to theory. Fitzmaurice, (2010) present three arguments about why ethics should be taught in schools. These arguments are socialization argument, the quality of life argument and the tool argument. According to socialization argument school should help students to become good citizens. To do this ethics is necessary in schools. The second argument, the quality of life argument claims that school helps to students to live a good life. "school has an obligation to foster the students to become persons who act in a morally correct way" This is possible by ethics in school (Fitzmaurice, 2010).

Conclusion; The study examined the concept of academic ethics and integrity as values expected of respective stakeholders in fostering trust in the educational system. The study concluded that, the involvement of lecturers in bribery, improper or biased grading of students' work and grade, fraud, deliberate negligence towards cheating or assistance in cheating, plagiarism, data falsification, sexual harassment of students among others are what academic ethics and integrity frowns at vehemently. Also, there is need to enforce ethical standards as enshrined in the code of conduct and conscious efforts must be made to enable stakeholders be aware of the code.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions were put forward.

1. Parents should be enlightened on the need to discourage their wards from engaging in any form of gratification(s) both in their pursuit for higher education or society as it would only lead to academic backwardness in the long-run.
2. Total evaluation of ethical principles should be carried out at intervals on the educational system in order to forestall confidence.
3. Finally, erring staff should be punished as it would help restrict other academic staff from engaging in indiscriminate behaviours.

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