

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Ethics education adherence by teacher trainees during teaching practice: A botswana perspective

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Received 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2012; Accepted 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2014

This paper presents the results of a survey conducted to find out the extent to which teacher trainees understand and observe professional ethics. It also sought the contribution of the Faculty of Education and secondary schools make in promoting teacher ethics among trainees on teaching practice. Data were gathered from randomly chosen 90 participants as follows: 70 teacher trainees on teaching practice at schools, 10 school teaching practice coordinators and 10 lecturers in the Faculty of Education at the University of Botswana. A predominantly qualitative based empirical approach to data gathering that used an open-ended questionnaire was used. The results show that teacher trainees have a fair understanding of what teacher ethics and teacher professionalism entail. However, this knowledge does not translate into practice. Still teacher trainees indulge in love affairs with their students, which the study reveals. Such teacher behaviour undermines the academic performance of students particularly the girls as they are the most affected by such relations. Male teachers have been reported to be the ones who make advances towards girls more than female teachers to the boys on sexuality matters. Such behaviour by teacher trainees, as the survey suggests, has likely been partly influenced by the absence of an enacted code of ethics that teachers can relate to in their practice which has partly contributed to some teachers to flout professional conduct with impunity. The paper ends by recommending that a code of ethics for teachers is very necessary in order to raise the image of teaching as a vocation and that ethics education should be mandatory to all students of education at the teacher training institutions in Botswana.

**Key words:** professionalism, ethics education, morality, teacher trainees, teaching practice, code of ethics.

## INTRODUCTION

The quality of education in many countries including developing countries is equated with how school perform academically. If students' achievement is low, this is translated into low quality of the education system (Moswela, 2004). Improving the quality of education often focuses on quantitative data such as learning time, class

size, teacher qualification, infrastructure and facilities. Equally important but often neglected are issues of punctuality to work, teacher conduct in relation to those whom he/she regularly interacts with including the community around him/her. Whereas the academic performance of the individual schools is the main criterion

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people judge schools as purported by Beare *et al.*, the way teachers at a particular school portray themselves (ideals and values) in the public eye is also important but often an overlooked measure. A teacher may be good in pedagogy; may have adequate and quality teaching resources at his/her disposal, his/her students may be performing well, but if he lacks professional ethics his good classroom teaching can be overshadowed by this. Jacques (2003) refers to lack of adherence to professional ethics as a violation of the ethical requirements of the teaching profession. A lack of such qualities may impact negatively on the students' learning. This being the case, teacher conduct has a direct link with students' academic achievement.

Competence and performance are ideal virtuous acts and elements every professional teacher must possess (Whitty, 2006). Based on many years of experience in teaching practice supervision, the researchers believe that these two aspects can be more enhanced by the conduct of the teacher. Previously, the assessment of students on teaching practice focused more on the teaching and learning methodology than on the student teacher's conduct. Focusing on these issues only does not adequately reveal a teacher's conduct outside classroom teaching. The tool used for assessment, the Lorf Form, was not able to assess such out of the lesson student teacher behaviour. Teacher ethics of the teacher trainees is an important aspect and a worthwhile topic to investigate. The findings can assist schools and teacher training institutions review their approaches towards teacher education generally and specifically help them assist new comers into the profession become all rounded in their profession including in ethics education. This is important because teacher ethics can affect the image of the individual teacher; the image of the school; the image of the teaching profession as a whole; and the image of the country.

In Botswana the admission system of students into a secondary school is such that students go to a school close to their home. Parents have little choice in this regard. If they had, all things being equal, they would, particularly those residing in towns where transport to school is less a problem than in rural areas, send their children to schools of their preference, looking at the performance of the school in public examinations, a criteria often used as an indicator of school effectiveness (Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, 1989). Regardless, there have been cases despite the initial posting of students to certain schools according to the catchment area where children have ended in schools preferred by their parents. High performing schools are characterized by teachers who are committed to service ideals and values (Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, 1989; Dunham, 1995). Commitment to ideals and values are key features of a code of ethics. Between two performing schools, parents would entrust their children to one whose teachers adhere to

professional ideals and values over one whose teachers are only good in content delivery but have a poor public image. Teachers from other countries with useful skills and knowledge for the country's economy may not want to work and have their children attending an education system where the ethical conduct of teachers is below standard.

Teaching practice, a component of the teacher education programme in the Faculty of Education, is a qualification requirement for teacher trainees to become teachers. Teacher trainees are posted to schools during their training to fulfil this requirement. To the group of students pursuing the post graduate diploma in education (PGDE), this would be their first experience to conduct a lesson in a classroom setup. The majority PGDE students who enrol in this programme possess a Bachelors degree from the Faculty of Humanities though students from other faculties who want to become teachers can also enrol. The PGDE group of students is the interest and focus of this paper. Students from other programmes in the Faculty of Education who mostly are on in-service training would have prior teaching experience before their Bachelor of Education degree enrolment. Before teaching practice school teachers (referred herein as school coordinators) who will be involved in the teaching practice exercise undergo orientation workshops. These workshops focus mainly on the portfolio, a collection of documents that together give evidence of the trainee's teaching philosophy statement; a lesson plan; its objectives and methods used; the syllabus; tests, assessment procedures; teacher reflections on the lesson and provides context of the evidence (<http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-portfolio/>) and so on. This is a case because school supervisors have little knowledge on the portfolio. Issues of trainees' conduct during teaching practice, if discussed at all, and done superficially. Schools on the other hand are expected to conduct orientation workshops for the teacher trainees upon arrival at the schools. This is discretion of the individual trainee receiving schools. The nature and extent of these orientations or whether they are held at all is not clear. The teaching practice office does not ascertain this. At the training institution, the Faculty of Education at University of Botswana, ethics education is not a core subject in the curriculum. In Educational Management and Counselling and Human Service it is taught as one-off topic within a core subject.

## THE PROBLEM

The fact that trainees are not taught ethics during their training and the fact that the orientation sessions conducted for both the school supervisors and trainees do not focus on ethics education *per se*, suggest that students go into teaching practice ill-equipped on issues

of teacher ethics. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of a code of ethics for teachers in the Botswana education system. Such conditions can make the teacher trainees vulnerable and make them easy prey to teachers who have little regards for ethical behaviour and they can become affected by such behaviour. These concerns came at a time when the standards of teacher behaviour and teachers' approach towards work, are issues of concern to schools leadership and society generally (Seretse, 2013).

### Focus of the paper

This paper seeks to find out the extent of ethics education knowledge among the PGDE' and how such knowledge affect their conduct during TP.

### Research question

Do teacher trainees have informed and knowledgeable practice in teacher ethics?

### Conceptualization and theoretical framework

The terms ethics and professionalism and to some extent morality dominate this paper because of their close similarity in usage. Ethics and professionalism, for example, cannot adequately be discussed independent of each other although they do not conjure the same meaning. Both morality and ethics are however, elements or embodiments of professionalism and in all the three terms the value aspect is the common denominator that binds their commonality. When we speak of the professionalism or morality or ethics of a person in a work place, essentially we are referring to how the person values his/her work; how he/she relates with those that he/she works closely with in the organization (Bottery, 1992). However, whereas professionalism and morality are also key words in this paper, ethics used in the context of education, is the key term upon which the study is anchored. The usage of the terms 'professionalism' and 'morality' is also made in the context of education or schools in this paper.

### Professionalism

The definition of professionalism as a concept is rather illusive. Its meaning can be understood in terms of its features or by making reference to some of its characteristics that illustrate its essence. Professionalism is associated with mainly:

1. Skills and specialized knowledge acquired over long

periods of training and certified by examination which renders the received professional authority and autonomy (Whitty, 2006; Botha, Mentz, Roos, van der Westhuizen, van Kerken, 2003).

2. A code of professional conduct (Barrell and Partington, 1985; Whitty, 2006).

3. Continuing research that increases the effectiveness of the educator or the education system (Botha *et al.* 2003).

4. Service orientation that requires the professional to put his/her clients' interest first before his/her. (Fombad and Quansah, 2006; Botha *et al.*, 2003)

### Morality

Morality is a descriptive term which is difficult to define on its own. We can speak of Christian morality, African morality, a certain group of people's morality. What is moral to one group of people may not be to the other. Certain groups may find the teaching of sex education to children as immoral while others may find it empowering to the child. Morality refers to any code of conduct a person or group understands and can govern their behaviour

(<http://businessdictionary.com/definition/morality.html>). It is about what is right and fitting, that is the goodness, righteousness, virtue, uprightness etc. (Harris, 2004). Morality is the principles of cultural or religious behaviour by which an individual belonging to that group determines what is considered to be right or wrong (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/morality>).

### Ethics

Ethics deals with standards set by a profession to regulate members' behaviour in the profession. The professional has a personal commitment to individual clients; to the general public; and to the profession and its stature (Kfir and Shamai, 2002). It refers to the moral value of human conduct and moral principles that control or influence a person's behaviour (Hornby, 2000). The principles that regulate or influence behaviour referred above also protect both the practitioner and his/her clients by ensuring against possible malpractice and exploitation, thus promoting fairness in the work place between the professional and his/her clients (Botha *et al.*, 2003). Ethics may refer to individuals or group of people tied together by a common purpose such as the medical, legal and teaching professions. That, which ties them together appears in the form of a written code of rules and principles that specify actions which have already been declared by them to be unprofessional, unethical or immoral. The code applies only to members of the association (Barrell and Partington, 1985).

Infringement to the code has consequences to the

infringing party which can amount to a suspension or termination from the profession (Anangisye, 2010). For example, it is against medical professional ethics for a doctor to disclose without his/hers patient's permission, the nature of disease the doctor is treating. A lawyer will be charged with unethical conduct by his/her law society if he/she made a dual and conflicting representation to two litigants (plaintiff and defendant) in a court case at the same time (Fombad and Quansah, 2006). Aloni (195) in Kfir and Shamai (2000:1) define ethics as dealing with "what is appropriate and what is proper". Similarly, ethics deal with principles of conduct that are considered correct in a given profession (Dictionary of the Contemporary English, 1987). Integrity, truth, fairness, impartiality, objectivity, respect and other virtues, underpin ethical norms among members of the teaching profession (Jacques, 2003; Poisson, 2009). The concepts of ethics offered by the different authors, particularly by Kfir and Shamai; Botha et al (no year). and Jacques are all concerned with the relationships which should exist between colleagues, including responsibilities towards those in a subordinate position. The two definitions of morality and ethics given above portray a similar meaning. Both emphasize conformance to a recognized code of certain values and ideals of a group, the infringement of which implies action taken against the offender.

### **Purpose of ethics**

Teachers have power to make or ruin society. They interact, particularly, with children, in a social relationship, and the fact that children do not enter the world with knowledge of how their conduct affects others they need to acquire knowledge and skills about relations through lived experiencing of their mentors, the teachers (Fenstermacher, 1990:132 in Anangisye, 2010). It is said that educators at the school are mirrors of good conduct to their clients - children in this respect. Ethics defines the powers, duties and responsibilities and conduct of members at the work place. Specifically, in the teaching profession, ethics gives teaching its cooperate personality and defines teachers' rights, responsibilities, remedies and those of the employer (ibid). It protects, in essence, both teachers and their employer against breach of employment agreement (Employment Act, 1984; Public Service Act, 2008). In short, a code of ethics is an empowerment document to the teachers with respect to their services to their clients and their employer. Whitty (2006) sees the purpose of teacher ethics as raising, maintaining and promoting the status of teaching to the highest standards of professional practice and affords teachers to exercise authority, justice and passion to those under their subordination.

As ethics details what teachers can do and cannot, in a way, a code of ethics provides self-directing, self-

regulating and self-disciplining (Barrel and Partington, 1985; Jacques, 2003). The teachers through the code of ethics can in turn empower their students and enable them to practice new and effective ways of learning, thus improving the standards of their performance (Bottery, 1992). This sense is supported by Jacques's (2003) who belief that a code of ethics increases the professionalization of teachers in aspect of moral conduct and commitment to work and is the cornerstone of quality teaching that leads towards students' excellent performance. According to Barrell and Partington (1985:106), "The code reminds teachers that they must handle carefully any confidential information they may receive; bearing in mind the requirements of the law and the best interest of children", and that the head teacher and senior officers should be consulted before confidential information is disclosed (ibid). Further, they caution that professionals are not entitled to infringe on the rights of their clients to treat information that they possess by virtue of their position with discretion. To do the contrary would be a violation of the code (Kfir and Shamai, 2002). The challenge to this in Botswana is that teachers have not received training in education law pertaining particularly in this context, to human rights in general and the rights of children in particular (Moswela, 2008).

### **What documents guide the teaching profession in Botswana?**

Many countries have codes of ethics for teachers. These codes are supplemented by other statutes (Jacques, 2003). In some countries like Botswana, a code of ethics or conduct for teachers is still yet to be introduced. But what guides the teacher's practice in the profession? Professional guidance to teachers in Botswana is provided through statutes, such as the Education Act (1967); the Teaching Service Act (1967); subordinate legislation such as the Unified Teaching Service Code of Regulations (1976); (not an Act) and of late, the Public Service Act, 2008). The impact of these statutes on the teacher's conduct is questionable given that teachers have limited access to them. Teachers have never seen the need to buy one as a personal document. They feel the documents should be provided freely to them by the employer. Only few copies, one kept in the staff room (which easily disappears) are one of two copies kept by the school management. Trainees on teaching practice would therefore not have easy access to these statutes.

### **Who are the framers of a code of conduct/ethics?**

A code of ethics for teachers as its description suggests, is meant for teachers. In most countries it is a product of the teachers through their unions or associations and is

shared by significant others in the education enterprise. As in the legal and medical professions, the professionals in the area assisted by knowledgeable others, frame their own code. This makes sense with regard to ownership, compliance, and commitment to the code's ideals and values (Botha et al., 2003). Participating in the development of their own code of conduct would make teachers view the document as not an administrative instrument to be enforced by the employer but as a code for teachers enforced by the teachers themselves. The maintenance of the register of qualified member teachers is the duty of the council. In Australia (Victoria State), the Code of Conduct has been developed for and by Victorian teaching profession. "The code identifies a set of principles, which describe the professional conduct, personal conduct, and professional competence expected of a teacher by colleagues and the community. It is based on the values set out in . . . the Code namely: Integrity, Respect and Responsibility". However, the definition of a code of conduct by Poisson (2009:16) as ". . . a written document produced by public authorities . . ." suggests that in some countries the code is framed by other people other than the professionals themselves. In South Africa, for example, Council for Educators developed a professional code of conduct for teachers as provided by Act 145 section 1 of 1993" (Botha et al., 2003). The function of a Council of Teachers is to maintain a register of qualified teachers, recommend to the Permanent Secretary standards of entry to the profession, control probation and discipline registered teachers (ibid). In Botswana there is not yet a purposely developed formal code of conduct for teachers and a Council of Educators the way it exists in South Africa.

### **Should teacher ethics be taught at teacher training institutions?**

Professional ethics need to be part of the colleges and universities' curricular and be part of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education just like in the nursing field (Jacques, 2003). Tanzania has made some strides in this area as already, teacher trainees are taught professional ethics in a formal way for the preparation of licensed secondary school teachers although the practice is undermined by poor implementation (Anangisye, 2010). The benefits that accrue to the trainees are among other things; the enhancement of positive attitudes and dispositions in a classroom setup; trainees begin to appreciate and display qualities of a good teacher while still at training; because of consequences for violating college rules, trainees comply with the regulations. Consequences include suspension or dismissal from the college (ibid). As pointed out previously in this paper, ethics at training institutions in Botswana is not a stand-alone but is an integrated topic within a core-course. The

current Dean of Education is a proponent a teacher who is a product of a diverse disposition that includes his/her social interaction with students, colleagues and the community. To this extent, in 2009, he marshalled and introduced a new teaching practice assessment tool, the portfolio that would produce a teacher who is broad-minded, rounded, and diverse. Trainees on teaching practice are assessed on how they relate with community, their involvement in extra-curricular activities and of course including classroom teaching activities (Tabulawa, 2009) and different from the earlier assessment instrument.

At the junior secondary schools in Botswana Moral Education is an examinable subject. At some senior secondary schools especially church schools, Religious Education is compulsory to all students, essentially aimed at promoting virtuous acts. The teaching is from a Christian perspective, emphasizing conformance to religious values and beliefs. In his study of effective schools entitled "Sharing Wisdom", Moswela (2008) revealed that at one senior secondary school, the teachers, school managers and the students, attribute the sustainable good academic record over the years to the compulsory study of Religious Education. Also, there used to be a general belief, supported by public examination results to a great extent, that some church secondary schools (such as Materspei, Maun and St. Josephs) perform better than government secondary schools and that this is partly because Moral and Religious education is offered to all their students (ibid). If ethics education promote positive attitudes and dispositions in classrooms; and if students can perform better because they are taught subjects that enhance morality, then teachers training institutions should teach 'ethics education' as a core course in the curriculum.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design and approach**

The paper sets to investigate the extent of ethics education knowledge among the PGDE' and how such knowledge affect their conduct during TP. The design of this paper asks the question 'what is happening' and the method used to gather data asked 'what' 'how', 'where' and 'from whom' questions. These are open-ended that describe and explain phenomena (Carlson and Ducharme, 1987; Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Erickson (cited in Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:32) refers to this approach as seeking a "participant perspective". The questions seek the views and experiences of respondents on the subject to be investigated. These questions lead to responses expressed in words and text which are characteristics of qualitative approaches to research investigations (Ary, et al., 2010). This approach according to Corbin and Strauss (1998), allows the researcher to explore substantive areas about which little is known or about which much is known to gain deeper understanding. In many respects the qualitative approach is a multi-method in focus involving among others an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin

and Lincoln, 1994). To this extent schools are natural settings to all the groups that participated in the investigation.

### Data collection

As indicated, open-ended questions were means that collected the data. These questions to the three groups of respondents, that is. The teacher trainees, the school coordinators and the Faculty lecturers were in semi-structured form.

### Population and Sampling

The population of this study was all the Post Graduate Diploma in Education students in the Faculty of Education who were on teaching practice during the 2012/13 academic year. A sample of the population was restricted to the PGDE group because the researchers preferred students who had not participated in teaching practice before. In this regard the sampling was purposive as it was done with a specific purpose and needs of the investigators in mind (Martella, Nelson and Martella, 1999; Creswell, et al., 2007). A sample of seventy (70) students was randomly chosen from the target group. Before the investigation, this group of student were left only with the practical component (teaching practice) of their programme to graduate with a PGDE qualification. Teaching practice spreads students throughout the country based on where the trainees can find their own accommodation. The researchers took advantage of their involvement in the teaching practice supervision and assessment to collect data from the teaching practice students' participants on a random basis. Cooperation and involvement in the investigation was solicited from ten (10) teaching practice school coordinators on a random basis. All lecturers in the Faculty of Education supervise teaching practice to the Bachelor of Education and PGDE students. Ten (10) lecturers were involved in the data collecting exercise and were chosen also on a random basis. Altogether, there were 90 respondents from three groups namely; the trainees, school coordinators and the Faculty lecturers.

### Data analysis

The data produced by the approach used (qualitative) will emerge or unfold since the method used to collect data does not allow the prediction of responses to be produced (Yvonna *et al.*, 1985). The qualitative approach to data gathering did not establish frequencies, means and other parameters but sought opinions on a particular subject and therefore it adopted a descriptive approach to analysing the data (Jansen, 2010). The data collected were analysed basing on the emerging themes which predominantly were aligned to the sub-headings in the questionnaires. Data, to some extent, were therefore analysed simultaneously together with the responses, an analysis approach which is possible according to Bogdan and Biklen (2003).

## RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

There were three groups of respondents to this study namely; the teacher trainees on teaching practice; the schools teaching practice coordinators and the Faculty of Education lecturers. As indicated in the methodology, the questionnaire for each group of respondents asked questions which predominantly required respondents to

answer at some greater length. The results are discussed according to these three groups under salient themes that emerged from the responses.

### Responses from teacher trainees

#### ***Understanding the concepts of ethics and professionalism***

Altogether, sixty seven (67) teacher trainees responded to the questionnaire. Trainees were asked their understanding of what a professional teacher is and what an ethical teacher is. The questions were separate but they are discussed simultaneously. It was clear from the responses that student teachers cannot differentiate between the two terms. What they described as a professional teacher was more or less the same as what they described as an ethical teacher. The attributes of the two terms, in a number of cases overlapped. Some trainees used the same description of one term to describe or explain the other. To them the usage of the two terms is synonymous. They understood and described a professional teacher as one who:

“Has passion and commitment”; “maintains confidentiality”; “Adheres to the code of ethics that guide behaviour”; “dresses properly, disciplined and relates well with both colleagues and the students” and many other positive dispositions that can reasonably be accepted by society generally.

An ethical teacher was viewed as one who:

“Respects the culture of students”; “has good morals and good conduct”; “is sympathetic and empathetic”; “portrays a good image of the teaching profession”; can differentiate between right and wrong or good and bad”; “follows the code of conduct and doing what is right”.

Indeed the attributes of a professional teacher can overlap with those of an ethical teacher and are similar if not the same in a number of examples. That is why there are words like professional ethics. The characteristics of professionalism and ethics as provided by the trainees corroborate the researchers' argument that there is little difference between the two terms in usage. But if one were to hazard a distinction between the two as provided in the literature, it can be said ethics deals more with behaviour towards one-self and towards other people. For example, “professional commitment towards clients . . .”(Kfir and Shamai, 2002); “integrity, respect, truth, impartiality towards others . . .” (Dictionary of Contemporary English). Professionalism on the other hand emphasizes more on behaviour or attitude towards service or work. For example, Whitty (2006) and Botha et al. (2003) emphasize in professionalism “skill and

specialized knowledge”; Fombad and Quansah (2006) emphasize: service orientation . . .”; while Botha et. al. (2003) define professionalism as to do with “continuing research . . .”.

What is important to the future teacher’s practice, however, is not so much the difference between professionalism and ethics, but an understanding of what it takes to be a teacher with professional ethics. A combination of the attributes of a professional teacher and those of an ethical teacher as understood and provided by the trainees is sufficient to the trainees in understanding what constitutes a quality teacher. A positive disposition and good relations with clients and colleagues in the teaching environment is what is asked of a teacher. Students on teaching practice are not exonerated from an adherence to the statutes that guard against teacher conduct and this is an important fact trainees must be aware of. The general public knows a teacher and not a teacher on teaching practice. So the latter’s conduct . . . can affect the public image of the school.

### **Should ethics be a curriculum topic?**

The majority of respondents (55%) were of the single view that the inclusion of ethics in the curriculum would be a good thing to the teaching profession. They suggested that it should be a stand-alone course and not taught as an infusion into core subjects. Thirty percent (30%) suggested that it should be integrated with Education Law which also should be introduced as a core subject. A small minority (3%) held a different view. They were of the view that only an integration of ethics into existing topics will be enough.

Excerpts of their justification are that:

“Teaching is full of challenges, including legal challenges”. “Teaching ethics at teacher training institutions can reduce the number of embarrassing cases we hear about teachers’ professional misconduct”. “It would help teachers make informed judgment in the interaction with students”. Trainees will enter the profession more informed and more prepared about the profession, “it is necessary particularly on the aspect of teacher/student relationships”. “The image of the teacher and that of the profession will be protected and respected”.

The views of the trainees get support from Anangisye’s (2010) argues that “teachers need to acquire knowledge and skills about relationships” . . . and also from Whitty (2006) who sees ethics education as “raising and promoting the status of teaching to the highest standard . . .”. Young people in Botswana no longer find teaching exciting. If they had the options, the Faculty of Humanities at the University would have very few students. Teaching has not been portrayed as an exclusive profession partly

because people without a teacher’s certificate are engaged as temporary teachers whereas this is not the case with professions like medicine and law. When government jobs were graded in the early 1990s for salary differentiations, teachers were not included in the professionals category where architects, engineers, lawyers were categorized (Government Paper, 1994). This, together with the fact that teachers do not have a code of ethics, might have undermined and lowered the status of teaching to the public eye. The regard for teaching may be a lost tradition this way but certainly it is not a lost art. However, making ethics education and Education Law core subjects at training institutions can redeem the lost image of the teaching profession. The introduction of Education Law partly arises from the ethics related comment on teaching, that it has many challenges including legal challenges. Parents nowadays would be quick to take legal action against teachers who infringe on the rights of their children.

Trainees listed a number of courses taught at the university, some of which have dedicated topics on ethics education namely; ethical and legal studies, professional studies, school organization, moral education and a few that integrated ethics in certain topics. A good number of these courses are, however, not provided as core to all students of education. The statements; “in order to curb the present teacher unprofessional conduct’ and “to reduce the number of cases we hear about teacher professional misbehaviour” are justifications for the need to introduce as a subject/course ethics education to future teachers.

### **Orientation of trainees at the University and at schools on teacher ethics before teaching practice**

Fifty eight per cent (58%) of the trainees said they received orientation at the schools they did their teaching practice and have expressed satisfaction in the quality of the orientation. Forty per cent (40%) said that professionalism and ethics dominated the orientations. This should have been deliberate by the school considering that in the previous year there was general concern about some student teachers’ unprofessional conduct during teaching practice. The teaching practice office conducts workshops for school coordinators in advance of teaching practice and coordinators use this chance to raise concerns. The revelation by the teacher trainees that 60% of them did not receive orientation prior to their departure to schools can be accounted for by orientation sessions which are conducted by lecturers on a group of subject basis without any formal checking whether students have been oriented or not. Apart from oral orientations at the schools, trainees did not have access to statutes that guide teachers’ conduct such as the Education Act nor did they see one in the staff room.

### Responses from university staff and school coordinators/mentors

Ten (10) school coordinators and ten (10) lecturers from the Faculty of Education participated in the investigation. Asked whether orientation sessions were conducted for the teacher trainees upon arrival at the schools for teaching practice, six school coordinators (60%) said such sessions were conducted. Four (40%) school coordinators said they did not. Four lecturers (40%) said they conducted orientation sessions for the teacher trainees while six said they did not. This observation corroborates findings from the trainees. Lecturers who did not conduct orientation sessions pointed out that the responsibility to do so was not clear. Three thought it was the teaching practice office's responsibility while one thought that it was the responsibility of those lecturers who taught the methodology courses. School coordinators who did not conduct orientation sessions said they could not orientate trainees because they did not attend training workshops conducted for school coordinators by the teaching practice office at the University.

The offering of 'ethics education' as a subject in the curriculum of teacher training institutions received a lot of support from both lecturers and school coordinators. They justified its continued teaching or introduction thus: "in order to respect the profession", "it instils discipline among teachers", "for the promotion of the image of the teaching profession", "for teachers to appreciate to work in unity or respect each others' points of view" "since teachers are in the forefront in reflecting the culture and norms of society, so they must be exemplary in their deeds and actions". While both school coordinators and lecturers were in common agreement on the teaching of 'ethics education', they differed in the method in which it should be offered. Most lecturers (80%) suggested that an exposure through the integration of 'ethics' as a sub-topic taught within existing topics would suffice. School coordinators were for the teaching of 'ethics education' as a stand-alone topic. Practicing teachers have more practical experience of how teachers behave in the field than lecturers who deal with ethics on a theoretical approach. This could account for the differences between teachers and lecturers views on how ethics education should be exposed to teacher trainees.

Two school coordinators and one lecturer opined that the teaching of ethics would be more meaningful if after acquiring knowledge, there was a teacher council that monitored the conduct of teachers and take adverse consequences against members who infringe. This contractual requirement in the form of a code of conduct would augment the only existing statutory which guards against professional negligence and teacher inaptitude. Another school respondent proposed the unionization of teaching, arguing that "as long as the present setup continues unabated where unions are fighting for

teachers' rights only and not fighting to become professionals in the strict sense of the word, we will always have in our education system teachers who are not professionals". This, he argued, has implications for quality education delivery. For many years the teachers' unions have been advocating for the improvement of the conditions of service for teachers. The battle still continues. And for many years there has been talk about the development of a code of conduct for teachers which until to-date has not come to any fruition. Instead, there are at least three teacher unions all pursuing the same objective of fighting for teachers' rights and improved working conditions but from different camps.

### CONCLUSION

The teacher trainees to some extent understand what teacher professionalism and teacher ethics entail although they do not make a clear distinction between the two terms. Despite lack of a clear distinction, nevertheless the important thing is that they understand what it takes and means to be a professional teacher. Attributing to their fair understanding of the two terms is the efforts made by the training institution and the schools, through one-off orientation sessions and the integration of ethics as a topic into some courses at the training institutions. Be that as it may, a large percentage (65%) of teacher trainees on teaching practice revealed that unprofessional relationships between teachers on teaching practice and their student are very prevalent, what Barrell and Partington (1995) called an abuse of the teachers' professional relationships. To this end this study suggests that teaching can only truly become professional provided that there is a code of conduct that has consequences for teachers who infringe it.

Almost all teacher trainees (66 out of 70), school teachers and University lecturers support that ethics should be a curriculum subject at teacher training institutions. This, they believe, can promote good conduct on teacher trainees at an early stage and could help them enter the profession more prepared and informed about professional expectations from them. Issues of discrimination and confidentiality were not singled out but rather, were implied in the trainees' conceptualization of teacher professional ethics. These are sensitive and crucial matters trainee teachers must have a clear comprehension on as they equally determine the integrity and moral values of a professional teacher. Trainees as teachers, on a daily basis deal with students from different social backgrounds and with different abilities (physical, emotional, and intellectual) and it is a legal requirement that the teacher treats all of them equally without favour. Also, issues of health and social problems emanating from home confided to the teacher need strict observance of confidentiality because if not carefully handled the affected students may withdraw their respect for the

teacher. Teacher trainees look up at the regular teacher as a role model.

## RECOMMENDATION

In view of the findings on the importance of ethics education, three main recommendations are made:

1. A code of ethics is indispensable to the teaching profession. Collaboration between the teachers and the employer on professionalizing teaching, if done in good faith should result in the development of a professional code for teachers that teachers on teaching practice can refer to. The Ministry of Education and Skills Development should expedite the facilitation of a Teacher's Council to this effect.
2. Orientation programmes conducted by both the Faculty of Education and schools are important to the student who is about to go for teaching practice and therefore should be made compulsory to the Faculty, schools and to the trainees.
3. A course on teacher ethics education should be offered by teacher training institutions as a core course to all teacher trainees.

## Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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