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Tanzanian Teachers' Knowledge of Moral Character Inherent in the Teaching Profession

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which practicing teachers in Tanzania's educational institutions and in other capacities understand the inherent character of the teaching profession. One basic research question guided the study: What do teachers consider and understand as the moral values inherent in the teaching enterprise? The study used conversations and documentary research method to generate data in response to this question. The data generated was then analyzed thematically in accordance with the research question. Findings show that, although some practicing teachers can identify features that define the character of the teaching profession, the prevailing cases of teachers' misconduct confirm that some teachers were still ignorant of the ethical principles, which inform the teaching profession. Thus, unless teachers have a better understanding of the character inherent in the teaching enterprise, they will continue failing to live up to the highest moral standards that go with the teaching profession (and/or teacher professional identity).

1. Introduction

Teaching and/or education is widely appreciated as a professional enterprise alongside other traditional professions. The concept of traditional profession generally applies to medicine, law, the ministry and education. Thinkers in education, especially in the philosophy of education associate traditional professions with different salient criteria *inter alia* knowledge base, autonomy, code of conduct, concern with the provision of basic services, and organization and regulations (Carr, 1999; Downie, 1990; Anangisye, 2013).

Generally, all the scholars—be it in the North or South—involved in dialogue about professionalism, in principle, underscore the centrality of ethics in any respectable profession. In this regard, Anangisye (2010), Campbell (2003), Pring (2000), Carr (2000), Socket (1993) and Fenstermacher (1990) assert that the teaching profession is inherently ethical in character. Specifically, Socket (1993, p. xi) aptly puts it thusly: “All major professions have at [the] heart of their *raison d'être* a commitment to human betterment in a fundamental sense; for example, health, justice and education”. Nevertheless, other scholars, such as Carr (2000) add the dimension of the *spiritual salvation* as a basic need at the heart of the profession of the ministry in the sense of what priests undertake on a daily basis—*preaching the Gospel*.

The value of the teaching profession comes to the fore in the achievement of quality education as a basic need along other inalienable human basic needs. Campbell (2008) suggests that, “ethical knowledge is a defining characteristic of professionalism in teaching” (p.613). Moral character makes professional communities, including the teaching enterprise, unique. That said,

moral character is the solely condition for teacher professionalism. As one education thinker puts it, “[I]f we are at all correct in our arguments for teaching as a profoundly moral activity, then not just anyone can be a teacher, nor is teaching for anyone” (Sirotnik, 1990, p. 314). Indisputably, teaching (as activity, role, and practice) and ethics are inseparable. Arguably, individuals already serving as teachers and those longing to join the teaching enterprise for whatever reasons must therefore get to grips with the moral character inherent in the teaching profession. Indeed, teachers’ awareness of the moral character inherent in the teaching profession makes them behave and act morally in all their preoccupations. Many times, thinkers in education have reiterated that the teaching undertaking is not limited to a four-wall class or lecture room. As one teacher educator contends:

The village schoolteacher must remember that his work is not only confined in the four walls of the classroom. He is a teacher of both the children and the people around his school. Pupils and other people will copy what he does and so he must set a good example. He must bear in mind that he is their servant and not their master (Fovo, 1965, p. 16).

Here, the basic question has to do with whether teachers in schools or colleges of education are fully aware of and informed about the *character* inherent in the teaching enterprise as expected by the teaching professional community and other stakeholders around them. This primary concern is crucial because for years now, research reports and other scholarly works in the world have highlighted worrying cases of teachers’ misconduct in the world that continue unabated as though this profession is devoid of moral guidelines. Drawing on the American experience, Socket (1993) reports on cases of teachers implicated in corruption and narcotic drug dealing.

Like other places in the world, cases of teachers’ misconduct in Tanzania continue rearing their ugly head, hence tainting the image of the otherwise noble profession. In fact, this problem is so widely reported on the African continent and, Tanzania in particular (Leach, 2001; Leach, et al, 2003; Anangisye & Barret, 2005; Betweli, 2013; Anangisye, 2011). As such, reports of teachers’ unbecoming behaviors have been occurring for quite some time now. The most striking aspect in these reports of teachers’ misconduct cases has to do with their happening in a profession dominantly defined by moral character. In consequence, one wonders whether practicing and trainee, student or apprentice teachers are adequately aware, let alone possess ample knowledge on the inherent character that defines the teaching profession. Thus, this study raises concern over the extent to which practicing teachers in Tanzania’s educational institutions and in other capacities understand the inherent moral character of the teaching profession.

2 Research Objective and Question

This study aimed at establishing the character of the teaching enterprise from the perspective of Tanzania’s practicing and trainee, student or apprentice teachers. Specifically, the following research question informed and guided data collection, analysis, and presentation and discussion of findings: What do teachers consider and understand as the moral values inherent in

the teaching enterprise?

3. Methodological Implications and Procedures

3.1 Data Generation Method and Procedures

Conversations: The method involved both *in situ* and telephone conversations between the researcher and the informants. The method aimed at giving informants freedom (Legard *et al.*, 2003) and confidence in expressing their ideas. Relevant research questions informed the conversations. Specifically, these conversations involved teachers (practising and retired teachers, teachers in other roles as Teacher Service Commission Officers [TSC] and education officers) and student teachers. The questions cut across all the categories of informants relating, for example, to personal informants' experience of the character of the teaching enterprise. These questions targeted practising teachers. Generally, all the conversations aimed to capture the views and the lived experiences of the teacher informants. As it was not possible to note down all the relevant ideas during conversations, the researcher also used a tape recorder.

In addition, to supplement one-on-one dialogue, focus group discussions (FGDs) helped to tap into relevant information about the problem from teacher informants' perspective. FGDs aided the generation of information on teachers' experiences and feelings about the moral character inherent in the teaching profession as such valuable data grows out teachers' exchanging views and feelings about the research problem, hence opening up room for the sharing and emergence of diverse views (Patton, 2002).

Specifically, Patton asserts that, "interactions among participants enhance data quality. Participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weeds out false or extreme views" (p. 386). During these information exchanges, several different instruments such as mobile phones, tape recorders, and laptop computer were helpful in the data generation process. At some stage, the researcher made several phone calls to interview and make follow-ups. Tape recorders recorded conversations held with all teacher informants. These recording were invaluable in transcribing the recorded conversations for analysis purposes. The transcribed data ended up in a laptop computer for easy data management.

Critical study of documents: Analysis of documents involved a critical examination of available written texts on the character of the teaching enterprise. Two questions informed the analysis of documents: What type of documents are they, and are where they found. Various sources yielded a range of relevant documentation: educational institutions and other offices. In the institutions—schools, colleges, and Universities, the focus was on books, journals, and grey literature relevant to the objective of the study. For bulky documents convenience sampling helped to select those analysed for the study. Informed by the hermeneutic approach, such analysis of documents created a clear picture on the teachers' understanding of the inherent character of the teaching enterprise. The hermeneutic approach rests on the meaning and interpretation of texts, hence enabling the researcher to interpret documents on the extent to which teachers understand the character of the teaching enterprise (Paterson & Higgs, 2005).

3.2 Data Treatment and Analysis

The resultant data sought was analysed thematically in accordance with the research question. The data analysis process began from the outset of fieldwork. It focused on transcribed conversations, field notes made during and after interviews, on observations, and documentary evidence. Data analysis involved three main stages as stipulated by Huberman and Miles (1994). The first stage was data reduction, which involved transcribing and summarising data from all sources on a daily basis. This data reduction enabled the researcher to assess the methods and strategies of data generation and accordingly effect necessary adjustments. The second stage entailed further organisation of the reduced data to generate major themes and sub-themes from the oral and written texts. Finally, the third stage was interpretation and drawing of conclusions from the data analysed. The primary units of analysis were informants and written texts. The data pertinent to the enquiry came from diverse local settings. Tanzania served as the geographical unit of analysis. As such, the conclusions in this study are generalised to the whole country.

3.3 Trustworthiness of Findings

The concept of trustworthiness has to do with validity (Robson, 2002). To achieve trustworthiness, the study adopted several different measures. First, during conversations the informants got assurances regarding confidentiality. Confidentiality cultivated in the informants a sense of trust and confidence in the researcher, and freed them to speak their minds out on the study. Second, informants had an opportunity to read the transcribed conversations afterwards.

This post-conversation process enabled the informants to reflect on their experiences and, where necessary, make additions to or subtractions from the transcripts. This post-conversation stage also allowed the researcher to ask for more clarification on emerging inconsistencies in the transcribed texts. However, when it was not easy to have the transcribed conversations delivered to teacher informants, they were contacted them via their mobile phones for explanations and clarification. Third, conversations conducted in Kiswahili, which universally accessible in the study area facilitated the participation of all teacher informants as they fully grasped the issues brought up during conversations. Without creating a language barrier, Kiswahili use increased the confidence and freedom of the informants. Fourth, triangulation engendered the trustworthiness of data. Triangulation is the use of a combination of strategies, theories, methods and different sources to ascertain the research findings (McNeill, 1985; Mills & Gay, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In particular, McNeill states: "...you get a better view of things by looking at them from more than one direction" (McNeill, 1985, p.115).

3.4 Ethical Statement and Consideration

Ethical imperatives are globally widely acknowledged as integral part of any research undertaking (Sarantakos, 2005; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Booth, Colomb & Williams, 2008). Like other research projects, principles of research ethics were deemed necessary for this study. First, all scholarly works used to inform the study were acknowledged accordingly. Second, in reporting the research findings names of informants and information were concealed and

treated confidentially respectively. As such, instead of actual names, pseudonyms were used. Third, prior to holding conversations with informants' consent was sought from them. Informants were clearly informed that the study was for educational purposes. In that regard, they participated in the study with full knowledge of the motives behind the study. This guaranteed informants freedom to enter into conversations, to withdraw or even to postpone conversations. Thus, their participation in the study was voluntary in nature. Last but not least, before the genesis of field work research clearance and permits were issued by the University of Dar es Salaam. Research clearance and permits were meant to enable the researcher gain access to and acceptance in the research sites (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

4. Research Findings

Teacher informants provided their views on what they considered and understood as the principal traits of teacher professionalism. Through conversations and documentary analysis, the teacher informants identified several salient virtues that characterize the teaching profession.

4.1 True Devotion and Commitment

It was evident that every teacher in his or her respective workplace or anywhere in the community was under normal circumstances expected to demonstrate true devotion to both professional and non-professional accomplishments. Professionally, the informants indicated different areas of teachers' concern and which manifested true devotion. Essentially, almost all the parents expected every teacher to deliver his or her quality expertise or academic competence in the lessons of higher specialty (or simply academic disciplines such as Literature, Mathematics, Geography, Physics, and so on). Sirotnik (1990) and Socket (1993) both highlight this expectation. For example, Sirotnik (1990) contends:

Teachers who lack competence in their disciplines and/or who teach outside their areas of competence, as well as those who conspire in such practices, disgrace the very concept of pedagogy and are engaged in clearly unethical activities (p. 311).

Of course, there are many other professional roles expected of teachers. These include weekly duties, class teaching, serving as heads of academic subject departments, and other tasks assigned to them by their respective school or college or ministry authorities. As discussed elsewhere, teachers' responsibilities extend to duties and functions outside the classroom. As one informant from the TSC office put it:

You know, when you become a teacher, apart from teaching in the classroom there are other matters such as leadership when one is a head of department or a school, or college project coordinator and so on. Usually, teachers have to shoulder multiple responsibilities other than teaching in the classroom. Unfortunately, many people simply see teachers as people of classroom concern only; but in principle as a teacher you work in both a classroom and an office (TSC officer).

In a non-professional role, on the other hand, the activities of teachers went beyond a four-walled classroom, school or college setting. Indeed, as Fovo (1965) once stressed the teaching as an enterprise is much more comprehensive in scope than the definition of classroom teaching portends. In this sense, teachers must show devotion in all preoccupations of their respective communities. More specifically, Socket provides a simple but insightful explanation:

Professionalism in teaching goes further. For outside the classroom a teacher has wider obligations and working relationships with colleagues and with parents in the exercise of his or her role as a teacher. Professionalism requires that we go beyond classroom performance or classroom activity as descriptors of teaching acts to the complete and complex role a teacher fulfils (Socket, 1993, p.8).

This perception, however, raises the question: How aware are all practicing school or college teachers of their obligations outside the classroom? Arguably, the practice of teaching is not confined to the school setting and official hours only. Responsible teachers, for example, mark pupils' exercise books at home after official hours. Moreover, to provide pupils with feedback they spend late hours on such tasks.

4.2 Code of Professional Conduct

There were informants who reported that teacher professionalism was mainly characterized by the enforcement of a professional code of conduct. According to practicing teacher informants, a code of ethics in professions meant professional regulations aimed at regulating the conduct of teachers in addition to maintaining professional standards in professional communities. During interviews with teacher informants, one schoolteacher said:

[...] Code of professional conduct is very important to teachers... This is because teachers deal with students... the code guides them... Failure to adhere to this code of conduct will lead to professional crises in teaching or education.

Indeed, such a view is widespread in writings on codes of ethics by Campbell (Campbell, 2000; 2003) who maintains that such codes are essential in guiding teachers' behavior. In Tanzania, the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers in Tanzania is articulated in the teachers' regulations—the Unified Teaching Service (UTS) and TSC (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1962, pp. 51 & 52). This code of conduct requires every teacher to shoulder responsibility for the child, the community, the profession, the employer, and the state.

However, it was evident from their responses on the ethics code that there were practicing teachers with no idea about what it entails. Further probing revealed that some teachers had never seen the code of professional conduct in their professional life. This anomaly appears to be a common trend in several countries as Khandelwal and Biswal (2005) have pointed out:

Most teachers have little or no knowledge of the codes because they do not have easy access to copies of the 'Education code', and those who do have access to it do not know

how to use it effectively (p. 6).

Teachers' failure to access a code of ethics of their profession because of lacking a personal copy of this vital document contradicts the Public Service Act No. 8 of 2002, which states:

Where any person is first appointed to a public service post he shall be provided with a copy of the Code of ethics and Conducts for the Public Service (URT, 2004, p.109).

However, this professional code of conduct tends to have no effect for some teachers, especially new recruits in the teaching profession. In fact, the professional code of conduct usually drew the attention of many teachers when a misconduct case had already occurred. Then they scrambled to get hold of the copy to see what it spells out on that misdeed. In other words, the code is an effective document for identifying teachers' offences. Yet, its effective enforcement requires the teachers' awareness and professional acumen to abide by its requirements without exception.

4.3 Moral Development and Education

Some teacher informants reported the crucial role teachers have to play in the moral development and education of pupils, which is an important characteristic of teacher professionalism. During conversations held with teachers, they asserted that every professional teacher was responsible for the moral development and education of every school child regardless of where they worked. In this regard, URT (n.d., p. 1) states:

The origin of good discipline of the Nation is good upbringing of children in the community and the manner in which parents develop those children until they become adults and the extent to which teachers assist in that upbringing throughout the period of the children being in schools and colleges.

In fact, for many years in Tanzania teachers served as parents or second parents—to be precise—as the nature of their occupation demands that they contribute meaningfully to the moral development of their young charges (Alphonse, 2003; Chang, 1994; Barrett, 2005b). Indeed, a worldwide one, teachers with moral integrity have not shirked this vital responsibility in the communities they live. Writing on *Spiritual and Moral Development* from a British context, the National Curriculum Council (NCC, 1993, p. 4) addresses several dimensions of moral development:

- a) The will to behave morally as a point of principle;
- b) Knowledge of the codes and conventions of conduct agreed by society;
- c) Knowledge and understanding of the criteria put forward as a basis for making responsible judgements on moral issues; and
- d) The ability to make judgements on moral issues.

In their *locus parent* role, teachers are not only responsive to the parents who trust in them by putting their children under their care but also to the school and college, where students believe

their teachers would not betray their trust that comes with their job portfolio. Overall, school or college teachers are responsible and accountable for the development of students both academically and morally:

Teaching is a moral activity not simply because teachers exercise authority and control over those in their care. Perhaps more important, it is a moral activity because teachers have a specific responsibility for the proper and appropriate moral development of their students (Fenstermacher, 1990, p. 135).

Such a role goes beyond the lower levels of education. University teachers, especially in units (faculties, departments, schools, or colleges of teacher education) which specialize in teacher education and training programmes, are also responsible for the moral growth and education of student teachers (Brandenberger, 2005).

4.4 Exemplary Modelling

Findings revealed that exemplary modelling constitutes an important feature of teacher professionalism, as the practicing teacher informants reported in the research sites. In fact, the teaching profession—by its nature—obligates teacher to serve as moral model to all and sundry around him or her (Mbunda, 1996). Research findings indicate that some teachers do provide exemplary modelling for school and college teachers. Sharing his experience, one retired teacher, who had served in different capacities as a retired schoolteacher, school inspector and education officer, explained the people's expectations of a teacher thusly:

When I say that a teacher is supposed to be ethical, I mean a teacher who respects himself or herself. The first thing that must enter into his or her mind is that the whole community looks up to him or her as the teacher. Teachers get censure and blame for doing bad things or for lacking proper behavior. He or she, thus, faces a challenge of serving as an exemplar through proper dressing, speaking, and respecting students or other people in society because every person emulates teachers.

Similarly, some informants argued that the teaching profession was like a mirror to the society (Barrett, 2005). Many people in the society see a teacher as a standard-bearer for others. In this regard, one student teacher in a college of teacher education said:

[...] It depends...because the work of teaching is a mirror of the community. The community reflects itself to a teacher on daily basis. It looks at the teacher; even when people disagree over certain matters you will find people saying, go and ask the teacher. Therefore, he or she becomes like a model to the community.

This characteristic corresponds with a view from an Ethiopian context that prompted Junge and Gidey (1998, p.166) to argue:

Other than parents, the classroom teacher may be the most important model in the

child's environment. Children may closely model their teacher's behavior [sic]. The teacher's likes and dislikes regarding subject matter may become obvious to the students and result in imitative attitudes. If the teacher hates math, these feelings may be transmitted to the class and the children will have negative attitudes toward math. If the teacher is physically or verbally abusive to students, beats them or shouts at them, the child may show the same behavior towards classmates. Teachers can be negative as well as positive role models.

Teachers' behavior and actions have implications for children and other people around them, hence Junge and Gidey's assertion that teachers' actions have the power to build or ruin pupils around them.

4.5 Teacher as Help to Pupils

Being helpful to pupils emerged as a feature that could also help describe teacher professionalism. As every school child has a right to be assisted by his or her respective teachers regardless of his or her gender or socio-economic background, the 'help aspect' is an integral part of teacher professionalism (Fry, 2002; Pring, 2001; Socket, 1993). Similarly, field findings from a study carried out in a neighboring country of Malawi entitled "Primary Teacher Education in Malawi: Insights into Practice and Policy" identifies the help rendered to learners as crucial among professional teachers and is at the core of their personal characteristics:

Many others refer in some way to relationships with children: good teachers are loving, friendly and interested in learners; they should be ready to help them, to listen and to encourage, and to be concerned with their well-being (Kunje et al., 2003, pp. 79 & 80).

Thus, the onus is on those entering the teaching to help children or students at all levels. Although this orientation should be the norm among teachers, research findings account for numerous cases of teachers abusing this role. Indeed, there were schoolteachers who deliberately discouraged and set away students who needed academic help from them.

4.6 The Virtue of Tolerance

Research findings affirm the value of tolerance among teacher professionals. Tolerance, according to Ignacimuthu (1994), is a function of different qualities. His description underlying the concept reads as follows:

Tolerance is the capacity for allowing or respecting the beliefs or behaviour of others when these differ from our own. It helps us to endure hardships or pain, enables us to adjust our relationships with each other and work together for a common purpose. It prompts us to cultivate the spirit of accommodation, dialogue and interaction. It smoothens interpersonal relationships. Tolerance is an essential prerequisite to all the areas of community life, namely religious, social and cultural (pp. 92 & 93).

In other words, tolerance is an important moral dimension: Teachers have a duty and moral obligation to exercise tolerance in both their social and professional duties. More specifically, tolerance from a moral perspective is concerned with teachers' acceptance and respecting of their pupils, fellow teachers, and other people in society. Tolerance is important in situations where there is social, political, economic, and cultural diversity as it forestalls unnecessary misunderstandings due to the differences that might arise. As such, teachers should accept and accommodate these differences on professional grounds. After all, they are not supposed to discriminate anyone regardless of their religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, social and political affiliation. Indeed, teachers are responsible for students who may come from different socio-economic backgrounds—the poor, those with special needs, and slow learners—who all need the teachers' attention and protection. In short, tolerance is a factor that can foster teachers' professional effectiveness and success in dealing with multitudes from different socio-economic backgrounds.

5. Discussion of Findings

This inquiry investigated Tanzanian teachers' views on the moral character inherent in the teaching profession (and/or teacher professional identity). Field findings-based evidence suggests that although teachers involved in the inquiry indicated some virtues inherent in the teaching profession some practicing teachers are still not as well informed about the character of the teaching enterprise as one would expect. To a certain extent, the failure to have a better grasp of the inherent character of teaching as a traditional profession translates into a serious failure on the part of teachers to practice and live up to the highest moral standards of the teaching profession and general society. This failure arguably rests both on the authorities responsible for recruiting candidates for colleges of teacher education and applicants for teacher-training courses.

Both the recruiting education authorities and the applicants lack adequate understanding of the meaning of teaching and its implications for both the classroom and in the wider society. Consequently, *unsuitable* people (including those with questionable 'credentials' in terms of the moral dimension) enter colleges of teacher education whose training demand high levels of commitment and sacrifice. For reasons not established, the colleges or teacher education programmes fail to prepare teachers that tick all the right boxes of teacher professionalism that requires lofty stands of moral character.

As a result, these unsuitable individuals graduate from colleges or teacher education programmes and tarnish the image of the teaching profession. Eventually, *teachers* who do not know what it means to be a teacher have flooded the teaching profession in Tanzania and have brought it to disrepute (Anangisye & Barrett, 2005; Anangisye, 2011; Komba, Anangisye & Katabaro, 2013). Thus, unless teachers have a better understanding of the character inherent in the teaching profession, they will continue failing to live up to the highest moral standards that go with the teaching profession (and/or teacher professional identity).

6. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Limitations of the Study

6.1 Conclusion and Recommendation

This study investigated Tanzanian teachers' views on the moral character inherent in the teaching profession (and/or teacher professional identity). Specifically, it exclusively aimed at establishing the character of the teaching profession from the perspective of Tanzania's practicing and trainee, student or apprentice teachers. Based on the findings, the following conclusions are made. Teachers' failure to live up to the moral standards is arguably an indicator of some teachers' ignorance of the moral nature and character inherent in the teaching profession. This observation finds strength from Socrates who attributes the doing of any evil to ignorance. Specifically, referring to Socrates, the ancient moral philosopher, Rowse (1936, p. 401) puts:

He believed that if men really knew what they were doing they would always choose the good, for that alone can make them happy. If they deliberately choose to be evil it is because they think it is a short cut to happiness. But they will that the short cut is a cul-de-sac. It is their ignorance that makes them put their trust in evil doing.

As indicated elsewhere, some teachers worth the name are still not informed of the moral mission of education. Thus, responsible education authorities and stakeholders have the obligation to strengthening initial and in-service teacher education in ethical and/or moral education. For initial teacher education, for example, there is a dire need for a curriculum review at all levels to take on board teacher ethics. For in-service programmes, on the other hand, it is high time teacher education authorities thought of considerable teachers' orientation in moral values inherent in the teaching profession (and/or teacher professional identity).

6.2 Limitation of the Study

Although the study achieved its objective, there were inevitable limitations. First, accessing official records relevant to the study was not as smooth as initially anticipated by the researcher. Education officers and teacher informants were reluctant to allow access to the required and relevant documents. Second, some education offices and libraries of colleges of education did not have relevant documents, due to poor recording keeping. This limitation prevented access to relevant and quality data for the study. Third, financial support for fieldwork was inadequate, causing logistical problems for the fieldwork programme. The financial constraint delayed the process of data generation. This limitation impacted on the fieldwork programme. Last but not least, because of time constraint, this study drew on a small population size of informants. In this regard, the findings cannot be confidently generalized to other African countries in the region.

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