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Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct and its Application on Teaching Professionalism: A Case Study of Kigoma Ujiji, Tanzania

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teachers' professional code of conduct, teaching professionalism, ethical guidelines, sexual violence, academic performance, school dropout, Kigoma Ujiji.

Abstract: This study addresses the gap between teachers' awareness of professional codes of conduct and their actual application in the Kigoma Ujiji municipality, Tanzania, and examines the negative impact this has on teaching professionalism. Despite the existence of ethical guidelines, many teachers fail to adhere to them, leading to challenges such as sexual violence, low academic performance, and a disrupted educational environment. These issues not only compromise the quality of education but also affect the well-being of students. The study explores the role of teachers' professional codes of conduct in enhancing teaching professionalism in Kigoma Ujiji. A qualitative research approach with a descriptive analysis design was employed, involving the target population of 15 teachers from 5 schools, along with 1 District Education Officer (DEO), 5 Ward Education Officers (WEO), and 1 representative from the Teacher Services Commission (TSC). A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was used, with simple random sampling for teachers and non-probability sampling for education officers. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The results show that while many teachers are aware of professional codes of conduct, there is a significant gap in their application, leading to unethical behavior such as inappropriate relationships with students. This has contributed to school dropouts, low academic performance, early pregnancies, and community conflicts. The study emphasizes the need for better enforcement of ethical standards, more comprehensive teacher training, and the implementation of stricter policies to protect students from exploitation. Recommendations include strengthening monitoring mechanisms and providing ongoing professional development to

ensure teachers align their practices with established ethical guidelines, improving the overall educational environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The professional code of conduct is an essential part of any teaching profession, serving as a guide to educators' ethical and professional behavior. It is a framework that defines the key principles and standards to be followed by teachers in carrying out their duties. In Tanzania, the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct is part of a larger set of public service ethics that emphasize the need for teachers to act with integrity, fairness, and accountability in all aspects of their professional lives (URT, 2001). This code plays a critical role in establishing clear expectations for teachers' conduct, not only in their interactions with students but also with colleagues, parents, and the wider community (Lawrent, 2022). Teachers are expected to uphold the dignity and rights of their students, foster an environment of respect and trust, and work towards creating inclusive learning spaces that cater to the diverse needs of all learners (Mfaume, 2022). They are tasked with promoting high standards of academic achievement, maintaining professional relationships, and demonstrating responsibility in their day-to-day practices. As such, the ethical expectations embodied in the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct serve to guide teachers towards ensuring the well-being of their students, fostering high academic standards, and promoting a fair and just learning environment (Shapira-L., 2020).

In many educational systems around the world, teachers are viewed as public servants who are entrusted with the responsibility of educating and shaping the future of their communities. This responsibility is enshrined in various codes of ethics that guide their behavior and set clear expectations regarding their professional conduct (Car, 2000). For instance, in Australia, the public service code includes principles such as dedication to public service, attentiveness to government and public needs, and the pursuit of high-quality outcomes for students (Lim et al., 2022). Similar codes exist in other countries, including South Africa, where the South African Council for Educators (SACE) monitors the adherence to professional ethics in education (Dalu et al., 2020). These codes emphasize the need for teachers to act with integrity, fairness, and accountability in all their professional interactions, to manage resources responsibly, and to ensure that students' best interests are always at the forefront of their work.

However, in Tanzania, while the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct is well-established at the national level, its application and enforcement in specific regions, particularly in more rural or underserved areas like Kigoma Ujiji, remain a matter of concern (URT, 1990). Teachers in Tanzania are expected to adhere to a variety of ethical standards set by the government and the Ministry of Education, such as maintaining punctuality, upholding professional conduct, and respecting students' rights (Shapira-L., 2020). However, despite these expectations, there is limited research that examines how effectively the code is applied in practice, particularly in regions outside of major urban centers (Gustafsson et al., 2021). This gap in knowledge raises significant questions about the actual impact of the code on teaching professionalism and whether it leads to measurable improvements in educational quality and student outcomes.

In Kigoma Ujiji, teachers often face unique challenges, including limited access to resources, inadequate infrastructure, and lower levels of professional support, all of

which can hinder the effective implementation of the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct (Malle et al., 2022). These challenges, combined with a lack of consistent monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, can contribute to inconsistencies in the application of the code (Khusniddinova, 2021). Furthermore, the absence of structured professional development programs and orientation for teachers on the code upon their employment exacerbates the problem (Mfaume, 2022). Teachers in Kigoma Ujiji may therefore struggle to fully adhere to ethical standards, resulting in potential issues such as unprofessional behavior, absenteeism, and failure to create optimal learning environments for students (Howes, 2022).

Despite these challenges, there is little research that evaluates how teachers in this region apply the code of conduct in their daily practices. This lack of data makes it difficult to assess whether the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct has a tangible effect on teaching professionalism in Kigoma Ujiji and whether it influences teaching effectiveness and educational outcomes (Shapira-L., 2020). Understanding how teachers in this area implement the code is critical to identifying gaps in policy and practice, and in formulating strategies that could enhance the professionalism of teachers in this region.

This study aims to fill this gap by assessing how the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct is applied by teachers in Kigoma Ujiji, Tanzania. Specifically, the research will explore the challenges faced by educators in adhering to the code, examine how their professional conduct influences teaching outcomes, and investigate the relationship between adherence to ethical standards and overall teaching professionalism. By focusing on a specific region like Kigoma Ujiji, the study will provide a localized understanding of the challenges teachers face in applying the code and offer practical recommendations for improving the implementation of ethical standards in schools. The findings of this study could inform policy reforms, teacher training programs, and support systems aimed at enhancing the professionalism of teachers, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe teachers' perception of teachers' professional code of conduct and its application to the teaching professionalism in secondary schools in Ujiji
2. To assess the incidences of sexual violence in the teaching profession in secondary schools in Ujiji

Literature Review

The review of empirical studies shows that teaching professionalism is significantly influenced by unprofessional conduct exhibited by educators, which can negatively impact students' academic performance and overall school functioning. Aina and Bipath (2020) argue that such behaviors, including absenteeism, unpreparedness, and improper teaching methods, require timely intervention, with counseling being one of the most effective solutions. According to Car (2000), unprofessional behaviors in teaching often go unnoticed or unaddressed because of the reluctance of both teachers

and school administrators to confront these issues directly. Furthermore, Lawrent (2022) suggests that a lack of institutional support for counseling services exacerbates the problem, leaving educators and students vulnerable to the negative consequences of unchecked behavioral patterns. Thus, school systems must integrate counseling services into their framework to support teachers' professional growth and ensure a conducive learning environment for students (Malle et al., 2022; Cetorelli et al., 2020).

Behavioral therapy is increasingly recognized as an important tool in addressing unprofessional conduct among educators. Research by Mfaume (2022) highlights that techniques such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and behavior modification can lead to significant improvements in teachers' professional behaviors. These interventions help teachers recognize and change unprofessional thought and action patterns that hinder their effectiveness in the classroom (Gustafsson et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2022). In addition to CBT, behavior modification, grounded in operant conditioning principles, is frequently applied to reinforce positive teaching behaviors (Phillips & Turner, 2022). Studies by Sambo (2022) and Dalu et al. (2020) emphasize that such interventions not only promote professional growth but also contribute to a positive school environment by improving teacher-student relationships and enhancing overall academic achievement. Additionally, effective use of these therapies helps teachers reflect on their practices and align them with professional ethical standards (Carson & Jackson, 2019; Ba et al., 2020).

The importance of school connectedness in fostering a positive educational environment is well-documented. As Chapman et al. (2013) argue, connectedness, which refers to students' sense of acceptance, respect, and support within the school environment, is crucial for their academic success and emotional well-being. High levels of connectedness are associated with improved school attendance, better academic outcomes, and reduced risk-taking behaviors, such as substance abuse and delinquency (Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015; Howes, 2022). Conversely, students who lack a sense of belonging in school are more likely to engage in behaviors that hinder their academic and personal development (Schuitema et al., 2016). Teachers play a vital role in fostering school connectedness by modeling professional behavior, creating inclusive classrooms, and engaging in positive interactions with students (Gustafsson et al., 2021; Malle et al., 2022). Thus, teachers' adherence to a professional code of conduct not only enhances their own professionalism but also strengthens the overall school community, positively impacting students' development (Dalu et al., 2020).

Sexual violence within the school environment has serious implications for teaching professionalism and the overall educational atmosphere. Lawrent (2022) stresses the need for schools to create environments that address and prevent sexual violence, as it directly affects both students and educators. The failure to address this issue can lead to a culture of silence and fear, undermining the trust necessary for effective teaching and learning (Phillips & Turner, 2022). Furthermore, the ethical guidelines for teachers emphasize respect for all students and the importance of maintaining a safe and inclusive environment (Campbell, 2003; Car, 2000). The promotion of inclusive

education, particularly the integration of students with disabilities into regular classrooms, has been identified as a key strategy for creating a safe and supportive learning environment (Sambo, 2022; URT, 1990). This approach not only fosters equality but also promotes social justice and respects human dignity, aligning with global human rights standards (URT, 2001; Mfaume, 2022).

Despite the extensive body of literature on the importance of teaching professionalism and ethical conduct, there remains a gap in understanding how these values are applied within specific cultural and institutional contexts, such as Tanzania. While numerous studies have explored the general principles of professional ethics in education (Cetorelli et al., 2020; Howes, 2022), few have focused on the practical application of these principles within Tanzanian schools. This study, "Assessing Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct and its Application on Teaching Professionalism: A Case Study of Kigoma Ujiji, Tanzania," aims to fill this gap by investigating the challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of professional ethical standards in Tanzanian schools. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the local practices surrounding teacher professionalism and will offer recommendations for enhancing the application of professional codes of conduct to improve teaching quality and student outcomes in Tanzania..

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive analysis design to investigate the role of teachers' codes of conduct in enhancing teaching professionalism within the Kigoma Ujiji municipality. The choice of this approach was guided by the need to explore the participants' mental processes and the underlying causes of teaching professionalism (Mason, 2002). The target population included 15 teachers from 5 schools, as well as 1 District Education Officer (DEO), 5 Ward Education Officers (WEO), and 1 Teacher Services Commission (TSC) representative. To select the sample, both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used, with simple random sampling applied to teachers and non-probability sampling for educational officers (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Data collection was primarily conducted through semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth exploration of the participants' views and experiences. This method, which is flexible and can capture both verbal and non-verbal responses, was crucial for addressing the research objectives (Cohen, 2011; Stake, 2010). The study aimed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings by cross-checking data through multiple sources (Kothari, 2004).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the study employed triangulation, using multiple data sources such as the DEO, WEO, and TSC. Furthermore, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the research were carefully considered. For example, the researcher conducted a pilot study to refine the data collection instruments, ensuring their relevance and clarity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data analysis followed a thematic approach, systematically organizing, accounting for,

and interpreting the data according to the research questions (Terry et al., 2017). Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study, with permission obtained from relevant authorities, confidentiality assured for participants, and voluntary participation emphasized. To avoid researcher bias and enhance objectivity, the researcher maintained confidentiality by using codes instead of participants' names during data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' perception of teachers' professional code of conduct

The study on teachers' perceptions of the professional code of conduct and its application to teaching professionalism in Kigoma Ujiji, Tanzania, highlighted significant findings about teachers' awareness of these codes. According to the data collected from 75 respondents, 60% reported knowing about the professional code of conduct, including key principles like accountability, integrity, confidentiality, honesty, trust, and fidelity. However, 40% were unaware of any such codes and cited a lack of training and professional development regarding these ethics. This discrepancy suggests that, although teachers may recognize the existence of ethical guidelines, there remains a gap between awareness and application. Previous studies have also pointed out that awareness alone does not necessarily translate into ethical behavior, as factors like inadequate training and lack of reinforcement mechanisms often hinder the application of professional codes (Car, 2000; Macfarlane, 2004). This finding emphasizes the importance of not just educating teachers about professional ethics but also providing ongoing support to help them adhere to these standards in practice.

The findings from the District Education Officer (DEO) and the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) further corroborate this observation. Both the DEO and TSC noted a rise in unethical practices despite teachers' awareness of the codes of conduct. The DEO mentioned issues such as sexual misconduct, absenteeism, and breaches of confidentiality, while the TSC identified poor dressing, irresponsibility, and lack of efficiency as common problems among teachers. These violations have detrimental effects on both teacher-student relationships and the overall educational environment, leading to a decline in student performance and academic achievements. Such findings are consistent with the research by Aina and Bipath (2020), who also emphasized that despite awareness of codes of conduct, violations continue to persist in educational systems, primarily due to insufficient monitoring and enforcement. The presence of these ethical issues suggests that the professional code of conduct is not being adequately enforced or internalized by many teachers, highlighting a gap in the institutional structures meant to support and uphold ethical teaching practices.

Utilizing John Stuart Mill's utilitarian ethical theory provides a useful framework to understand the implications of these findings. According to Mill, actions should be evaluated based on their consequences, with the aim of promoting happiness and well-being for the greatest number of people (Bentham, 1789). In the context of this study, the failure of teachers to adhere to the professional code of conduct negatively affects not only the teachers and students involved but also the broader educational system. Unethical

behavior such as teacher absenteeism or inappropriate relationships with students disrupts the learning environment, erodes trust between educators and students, and ultimately diminishes the quality of education. This is contrary to the utilitarian principle, which would argue that teachers' actions should contribute positively to the well-being of both the students and the wider community (Lawrent, 2022). Thus, the lack of adherence to the professional code of conduct results in harm, not just to individual students, but to the educational system as a whole.

Moreover, the findings resonate with the ethical concerns raised by Car (2000) and Lawrent (2022), who both highlighted the importance of teacher professionalism in fostering a conducive learning environment. Teachers are expected to act as role models, embodying ethical behavior that students can emulate. When teachers fail to uphold these ethical standards, they undermine their role as moral guides and negatively influence students' academic and social development. This is particularly concerning because the failure of teachers to adhere to ethical guidelines also weakens the overall education system, affecting not just individual schools but the community at large (Mfaume, 2022). Mill's utilitarianism underscores that such failures compromise the well-being of the entire educational community, calling for a more robust approach to ethics in education that ensures teachers consistently act in the best interest of their students and the broader society.

The study indicates that while teachers in Kigoma Ujiji are generally aware of the professional code of conduct, there are significant gaps in both the application and enforcement of these codes. The ethical theory of utilitarianism provides a valuable lens through which to understand the broader consequences of teachers' actions and emphasizes the need for professional ethics to contribute to the well-being of all stakeholders in the educational system. Based on the findings of this study and previous research, it is evident that efforts to improve the ethical conduct of teachers must go beyond mere awareness and include stronger enforcement, regular professional development, and accountability mechanisms. Teachers must be supported in not only understanding the codes but also in integrating them into their daily practice to ensure the academic and moral development of their students and the overall success of the educational system.

The incidences of sexual violence in the teaching profession

The objective of examining the incidences and effects of sexual violence on girl students in Kigoma Ujiji revealed alarming consequences for both the affected students and the broader educational system. According to the data collected from 75 respondents, a significant number of teachers and school authorities acknowledged the detrimental impact of sexual violence on teaching professionalism. Many teachers, especially in the context of their relationships with female students, had failed to adhere to the ethical standards set out in the professional code of conduct, leading to violations that greatly affected students' educational experiences. As highlighted by the respondents, such

unethical relationships with teachers contributed to a variety of issues, including school dropout rates, low academic performance, and even conflicts within the community. These findings echo concerns expressed in previous studies about the persistent challenges of teacher professionalism, particularly regarding the sexual exploitation of students (Campbell, 2003; Macfarlane, 2004).

Dropout and Psychological Effects

The research showed a direct link between sexual violence and school dropout rates. Specifically, many girl students dropped out due to the consequences of romantic relationships with their teachers. In some cases, these relationships were driven by economic pressures, with parents tacitly condoning such interactions as a way to secure financial support for their families. As one head teacher mentioned, these students were often ashamed of their relationships with teachers and faced stigma from their peers, which further contributed to their decision to leave school. This issue is exacerbated by the lack of strict enforcement of professional ethics, leading to a culture where sexual violence is not adequately addressed. According to the DEO, such incidents of sexual violence have led to community conflicts, where disagreements between teachers and their colleagues escalated into violent threats. This further reflects the damaging impact of unethical teaching practices on the school environment, leading to a breakdown of trust and cooperation (Lawrent, 2022; Macfarlane, 2004).

Low Performance

In addition to the emotional and psychological toll, sexual violence also negatively impacts the academic performance of girl students. As reported by 20% of the respondents, students involved in relationships with teachers experienced a significant decline in their academic achievements. These relationships often led to distraction, as students became more focused on their interactions with teachers than on their studies. One respondent noted that these students believed their success was dependent on the romantic relationship with their teacher, which undermined their academic motivation. The lack of parental involvement and monitoring was another contributing factor, as it allowed students to engage in relationships without any oversight, further exacerbating the academic decline. This finding aligns with the work of Dalu et al. (2020), who observed that the performance of students who faced such exploitation suffered not only academically but also in their personal development.

Conflict and Community Disruptions

The effects of sexual violence among teachers also led to significant community conflicts. Respondents reported that relationships between teachers and students often resulted in major disputes among teachers and, in some cases, violent threats. One interviewee recounted a situation where a teacher's romantic relationship with a student, who was the child of a fellow teacher, led to so much animosity that it resulted in a teacher being transferred to another school. This situation illustrates the deepening divisions

caused by unethical teacher behavior, where trust and respect among educators were compromised, leading to tensions within the school community. As noted by Phillips and Turner (2022), such conflicts not only disrupt the educational process but also damage the social fabric of the school, making it more difficult for teachers to work collaboratively and effectively.

Early Pregnancy and its Consequences

Another significant outcome of sexual violence in schools was the increasing rate of early pregnancies among girl students. As reported by 20% of the respondents, several girls, particularly those in the 12 to 14 age range, became pregnant as a result of relationships with their teachers. These pregnancies severely disrupted the students' education and long-term goals. Many students who became pregnant dropped out of school, unable to continue their education due to the stigma, emotional distress, and financial constraints that followed. The head teacher of one school noted that such incidents often went unreported, as parents failed to cooperate with authorities, largely due to the socio-economic pressures faced by families in the region. These findings resonate with the work of Lawrent (2022) and Mfaume (2022), who both highlighted the detrimental effects of early pregnancies on female students' academic achievements and personal development. Early pregnancies, particularly those resulting from teacher-student relationships, are a direct violation of ethical teaching practices and have long-lasting consequences for the affected students' future opportunities.

Additionally, the data revealed that sexual violence significantly undermines the professionalism of teaching in Kigoma Ujiji. Respondents reported that many girl students were subjected to sexual advances or relationships with teachers, leading to severe consequences for both the students and the educational environment. One notable impact was the dropout rate, with students leaving school due to the psychological distress caused by these encounters. According to a respondent from school A, students were often ridiculed by their peers for engaging in romantic relationships with teachers, which led to embarrassment and emotional trauma that hindered their academic pursuits. This finding is consistent with earlier studies, which emphasize how such misconduct among teachers not only damages students' emotional well-being but also negatively affects their academic development (Car, 2000; Dalu et al., 2020). Furthermore, the involvement of parents in encouraging these relationships, often due to economic hardship, underscores the systemic nature of the problem. This situation highlights the failure of both teachers and families to adequately protect students' best interests.

The study underscores the serious impact of sexual violence on the teaching profession and the educational outcomes of girl students in Kigoma Ujiji. The violation of ethical standards by teachers, particularly in the form of romantic relationships with students, leads to school dropouts, poor academic performance, community conflicts, and early pregnancies. These issues are exacerbated by the lack of effective enforcement of professional ethics and insufficient support for both students and teachers. Therefore, it

is imperative to provide education and training for teachers on the ethical implications of their behavior, particularly in relation to sexual violence, and to implement stricter policies to protect students from such exploitation. Addressing these ethical concerns will be critical in improving both teaching professionalism and the academic success of all students in the region.

CONCLUSION

Addressing the ethical and professional gaps within the teaching profession in Kigoma Ujiji requires a multifaceted approach. Teachers' awareness of the professional code of conduct, while significant, often does not translate into consistent ethical behavior, especially regarding sexual violence and other misconduct. To ensure that ethical principles are applied in practice, it is essential to provide continuous professional development programs for teachers. These programs should not only raise awareness but also equip educators with practical strategies for upholding ethical standards in their interactions with students.

Enforcement mechanisms must be strengthened to hold teachers accountable for violations of ethical standards. Without clear and consistent consequences, unethical behaviors such as sexual violence and absenteeism will continue to undermine the professionalism of teaching. Alongside stronger enforcement, teachers need ongoing support to help them apply these standards effectively, reinforcing the connection between professional ethics and positive educational outcomes.

Addressing the issue of sexual violence requires a holistic approach that involves not just teachers, but also parents and the broader community. Socio-economic pressures often contribute to the exploitation of students, with some parents inadvertently enabling such relationships. Increasing community awareness and engaging parents are critical steps in preventing exploitation. Schools should also provide counseling services to support students affected by sexual violence, helping them cope with the emotional toll and preventing them from dropping out due to psychological distress.

Moreover, policy interventions that address the socio-economic factors contributing to sexual violence can further mitigate the risk of exploitation. Financial assistance programs for students and their families would help ease the economic pressures that contribute to these unethical relationships, allowing students to focus on their education. Finally, educational authorities such as the District Education Officer (DEO) and Teacher Service Commission (TSC) must take a more active role in monitoring and addressing breaches of ethical standards. Strengthening oversight and ensuring compliance with professional codes of conduct will contribute to a culture of accountability within schools. By fostering collaboration between educational authorities, school leadership, and the local community, it is possible to create an environment where both students and educators thrive.

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