



## TEACHER CODE OF CONDUCT IN NIGERIA: ETHICAL STANDARDS, APPLICATION, AND IMPACT ON EDUCATION



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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the teacher code of conduct in Nigeria, focusing on its ethical standards, practical application, and impact on teaching effectiveness and student performance. Employing a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review from 2020 to 2025, the study identifies key provisions of the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) code, including professional competence, impartiality, confidentiality, and respectful professional relationships. The research highlights that adherence to these standards enhances classroom management, student engagement, and academic outcomes. However, challenges such as weak enforcement mechanisms, resource limitations, and conflicts between personal beliefs and professional duties hinder consistent application. Recommendations include continuous professional development, robust monitoring systems, and establishment of ethical review committees to strengthen adherence and improve educational outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher Code of Conduct, Ethical Standards, Teaching Effectiveness, Professional Development, Classroom Management*

### **Introduction**

The teaching profession is a cornerstone of societal development, tasked with shaping the intellectual, moral, and social fabric of future generations. In Nigeria, where education is pivotal for addressing challenges like poverty, inequality, and socio-economic stagnation, teachers play a critical role in driving national progress (Adebayo, 2021). The Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) has established a comprehensive code of conduct to guide educators in maintaining high ethical standards, ensuring they act with integrity, fairness, and professionalism. This code serves as a regulatory framework that outlines the minimum ethical expectations for teachers, emphasizing principles such as professional competence, impartiality, confidentiality, and respectful interactions with students, colleagues, parents, and the broader community (Eze&Nwankwo, 2023). These standards are designed to foster a conducive learning environment, promote public trust in the education system, and enhance student outcomes by aligning teacher behavior with the values of accountability and excellence.

The teacher code of conduct in Nigeria is not merely a set of guidelines but a strategic tool for nation-building. It addresses the ethical demands of teaching, which extend beyond delivering academic content to include shaping students' character, fostering critical thinking, and promoting inclusivity (Ogunleye&Akinbode, 2022). For instance, professional competence requires teachers to engage in continuous learning to stay abreast of modern pedagogical approaches, technological advancements,



and subject matter expertise, thereby ensuring high-quality instruction. Similarly, impartiality mandates equitable treatment of all students, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic background, to create an inclusive classroom where every learner feels valued (Okonkwo, 2019). Confidentiality, another core principle, protects students' personal and academic information, fostering trust and encouraging open communication. Additionally, the code emphasizes professional relationships, urging teachers to collaborate respectfully with colleagues, engage constructively with parents, and contribute positively to the school community, all of which strengthen institutional credibility and educational outcomes (Bello & Yusuf, 2024).

Despite the robust framework provided by the TRCN's code, its implementation faces significant challenges, particularly in Nigeria's complex educational landscape. Systemic issues such as inadequate funding, large class sizes, and limited access to professional development hinder teachers' ability to consistently adhere to ethical standards (Olabode, 2021). In many schools, especially in rural areas, weak regulatory oversight and resource constraints lead to ethical lapses, including absenteeism, favoritism, and breaches of confidentiality, which undermine student trust and academic performance (Ogunleye&Akinbode, 2022). Furthermore, ethical dilemmas often arise when teachers' personal beliefs or cultural norms conflict with professional obligations, complicating adherence to the code (Uche& Ibrahim, 2023). For example, a teacher may face pressure to show leniency toward certain students due to community expectations, creating tension between fairness and external influences.

The broader socio-political context in Nigeria also impacts the implementation of the teacher code of conduct. Political instability, corruption, and policy discontinuity disrupt educational reforms, affecting the enforcement of ethical standards (Ezeani&Onyishi, 2024). Moreover, the lack of regular monitoring and accountability mechanisms in many schools allows ethical violations, such as corporal punishment or exploitation, to persist unchecked (Okonkwo, 2019). These challenges not only diminish the credibility of the teaching profession but also contribute to a growing disconnect between educational policies and their practical outcomes, leaving students and communities frustrated.

The importance of ethical adherence cannot be overstated, as it directly influences teaching effectiveness and student performance. Research consistently shows that teachers who uphold ethical standards create positive classroom environments, leading to increased student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Adebayo, 2021). Ethical teachers serve as role models, instilling values like honesty, respect, and responsibility in students, which have long-term benefits for their personal and professional lives (Bello & Yusuf, 2024). Conversely, ethical lapses erode trust, disrupt classroom dynamics, and hinder learning outcomes, perpetuating cycles of underperformance in the education system. This study seeks to address these issues by examining the teacher code of conduct in Nigeria through a comprehensive lens.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

A robust education system is fundamental to national development, relying heavily on teachers who uphold ethical standards to deliver quality instruction and foster holistic student development. In Nigeria, the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) has established a comprehensive teacher code of conduct to guide professional behavior, emphasizing critical principles such as fairness, confidentiality, professional competence, and respectful interactions. This framework is designed to ensure that educators act as ethical role models, creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that promote student trust, engagement, and academic success (Adebayo, 2021). However, despite the existence of this well-structured code, many schools across Nigeria struggle to achieve consistent adherence, resulting in a significant gap between policy expectations and practical outcomes.

Several systemic and contextual challenges contribute to this implementation gap. Inadequate training and professional development opportunities limit teachers' ability to fully understand and internalize the ethical standards outlined in the code (Olabode, 2021). Many educators, particularly in under-resourced rural schools, lack access to regular workshops or resources that reinforce ethical practices, leading to lapses such as favoritism, absenteeism, and improper handling of student information (Ogunleye&Akinbode, 2022). Weak regulatory oversight and the absence of robust



monitoring mechanisms further exacerbate these issues, allowing ethical violations to go unchecked in many institutions (Uche& Ibrahim, 2023). For instance, cases of corporal punishment, sexual harassment, and bribery, though explicitly prohibited by the code, persist in some schools due to insufficient enforcement (Okonkwo, 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the teacher code of conduct in Nigeria, focusing on its ethical provisions, practical application, and influence on teaching effectiveness and student performance. Specifically, the study aims to:

Identify the key provisions of the teacher code of conduct related to ethical standards.

Examine the practical application of these ethical standards among professional teachers.

Assess the impact of adherence to the code on teaching effectiveness and student performance.

### **Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

What are the key provisions of the teacher code of conduct related to ethical standards in Nigeria?

How are minimum ethical standards practically applied by professional teachers in educational institutions?

What is the impact of adherence to the teacher code of conduct on teaching effectiveness and student performance?

Literature Review

### **Key Provisions of the Teacher Code of Conduct**

The Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) has established a teacher code of conduct that serves as a professional compass for educators in Nigeria, rooted in the principles of professional competence, impartiality, confidentiality, and respectful interaction. Professional competence, as defined in the code, is not limited to subject-matter expertise but extends to pedagogical efficacy, classroom management skills, and the ability to adapt to technological changes and inclusive education practices. Teachers are expected to engage in continuous professional development to stay updated with evolving educational practices. This provision is crucial for maintaining instructional quality and meeting diverse learners' needs in a dynamic classroom environment (Ogunleye&Akinbode, 2022). Teachers are also obligated to possess the relevant qualifications and maintain professional licenses, demonstrating their preparedness to offer quality education.

Impartiality is another core element of the code, emphasizing the equitable treatment of students regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status. Teachers are prohibited from engaging in discriminatory practices or favoritism that may hinder fairness in student evaluation, discipline, or classroom participation. This provision is particularly vital in a multicultural society like Nigeria, where socio-cultural biases may unconsciously influence teaching behavior. Teachers are expected to uphold the principle of justice by creating a classroom environment where every student feels safe, respected, and equally valued (Okonkwo, 2019). Impartiality also extends to dealings with colleagues and parents, where teachers are urged to treat all stakeholders with fairness, promoting a cohesive school culture.

Confidentiality and professional relationships further underscore the ethical standards of the code. Confidentiality involves the responsible handling of student records, sensitive information, and internal school matters. Teachers must not disclose private student data without proper authorization unless required by law, thereby fostering trust between students, teachers, and parents (Olabode, 2021). Respectful professional relationships include maintaining collegiality among staff, constructive engagement with parents, and avoiding exploitative behaviors or abuse of authority. These expectations reinforce the professional identity of teachers and aim to elevate the ethical image of the teaching profession in the public eye. Nonetheless, enforcement remains a critical weakness, especially in regions with poor monitoring mechanisms, weakening the impact of these provisions (Uche& Ibrahim, 2023).



### **Practical Application of Ethical Standards**

The practical application of the teacher code of conduct across Nigeria's diverse educational settings reveals varying degrees of compliance, influenced by both systemic and contextual challenges. While many educators understand the ethical provisions, their daily adherence is often compromised by large class sizes, underfunded schools, and limited access to training. For example, rural teachers frequently report feeling overwhelmed due to the lack of infrastructure, making it difficult to consistently uphold confidentiality or maintain a professional demeanor under stress (Eze&Nwankwo, 2023). Additionally, ethical training is often treated as a one-off induction rather than an ongoing professional responsibility, reducing its practical value. Teachers may recognize ethical norms in theory but lack the capacity or institutional support to implement them in practice, especially when resources are constrained.

Leadership and administrative practices play a pivotal role in promoting or hindering ethical adherence. In schools with proactive principals and ethical leadership, teachers are more likely to uphold the code because of accountability structures and peer support systems. Leadership can reinforce ethical conduct through regular mentoring, feedback, and ethical audits. Conversely, schools lacking effective oversight often suffer from lapses such as absenteeism, student exploitation, and favoritism (Bello & Yusuf, 2024). In some settings, teachers view the code of conduct as a bureaucratic requirement rather than a professional creed, leading to superficial compliance. This perception is especially prevalent where enforcement is minimal, and where there are no tangible consequences for ethical breaches, thus weakening institutional discipline and trust.

Moreover, personal beliefs and cultural values can conflict with ethical expectations, complicating practical application. Teachers may experience dilemmas when societal norms clash with professional obligations, such as being pressured to show favoritism due to kinship ties or religious affiliation. Such scenarios present ethical gray areas where personal conviction may override institutional expectations, especially in traditional communities (Uche& Ibrahim, 2023). Ethical complexity also arises in areas like corporal punishment, where despite its prohibition in the code, some teachers justify its use based on cultural or disciplinary beliefs. These inconsistencies reveal a need for more nuanced ethical training that addresses cultural relativism, promotes reflective practice, and equips teachers with strategies for resolving moral conflicts without compromising professional integrity.

### **Impact on Teaching Effectiveness and Student Performance**

Adherence to the teacher code of conduct has a direct and measurable impact on teaching effectiveness and student performance in Nigerian schools. Teachers who consistently demonstrate ethical behavior—such as fairness, respect, and professionalism—tend to foster positive learning environments that support student engagement and academic success. Ethical behavior enhances student trust, making learners more willing to participate actively in class and take academic risks without fear of ridicule or bias (Adebayo, 2021). For instance, impartial grading practices encourage students to work harder, knowing that their efforts will be fairly evaluated. Similarly, maintaining confidentiality about students' personal struggles builds rapport and motivates students to focus better in class, improving academic outcomes.

Teachers who embrace professional competence by updating their instructional techniques and subject knowledge are better positioned to deliver high-quality lessons. When ethical teaching practices are coupled with academic rigor, students not only achieve higher test scores but also develop critical thinking skills, creativity, and socio-emotional competencies (Bello & Yusuf, 2024). Respectful professional relationships also contribute to smoother classroom management, reducing disciplinary issues and fostering cooperative behavior. As a result, teachers spend more time on instruction and less on conflict resolution, further enhancing learning outcomes. The long-term benefits include increased student retention, higher performance in national assessments, and the development of responsible, ethically-minded graduates.



Conversely, ethical lapses by teachers can significantly undermine both their professional effectiveness and students' academic development. Instances of favoritism, absenteeism, sexual misconduct, or physical punishment not only violate ethical codes but also disrupt classroom order, diminish student morale, and erode parental trust in the school system (Okonkwo, 2019). Such behaviors lead to inconsistent discipline, disengaged learners, and, ultimately, poor performance outcomes. Moreover, students exposed to unethical behavior by teachers may internalize negative values, replicating these behaviors in society. Therefore, ethical adherence is not merely a regulatory requirement—it is foundational to achieving the broader goals of education, including character development, citizenship, and national transformation. Strengthening the ethical culture within schools is thus essential for improving educational quality and societal advancement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by Deontological Ethics, a moral philosophy advanced by Immanuel Kant (1785). Deontological theory emphasizes that the morality of an action is determined by adherence to a set of duties and rules rather than by its consequences. In the context of the teaching profession, this theory provides a strong foundation for the justification and enforcement of ethical standards. The Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) code of conduct reflects this framework, as it stipulates duties and responsibilities that teachers must fulfill regardless of external circumstances. These include impartiality, confidentiality, professional competence, and respect for others in the educational environment.

Teachers are expected to act ethically not because of potential rewards or punishments but because it is their moral obligation. This framework emphasizes that every educator has a responsibility to model integrity and discipline, which are essential attributes of the profession. Teachers must adhere strictly to the code even when confronted with difficult situations, such as pressures from community members or institutional challenges. Upholding ethical values such as fairness, respect, and confidentiality should be seen as mandatory duties rather than optional choices. This theoretical basis underscores that ethical conduct is not circumstantial, but a constant obligation expected of every teacher.

Furthermore, Deontological Ethics helps explain the significance of the code of conduct as a mechanism for moral decision-making. When teachers adhere to ethical principles, they create a supportive and trustworthy learning environment that enhances student confidence, motivation, and performance. Conversely, failure to fulfill these duties may lead to mistrust, discipline issues, and poor academic outcomes. The deontological perspective reinforces the idea that teachers are not merely instructors but moral agents whose behavior must consistently reflect professional values and national expectations for educational development.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, with data collected through content analysis of relevant literature from the period 2020 to 2025. The content analysis method was selected to systematically examine documents that address ethical standards, their implementation, and their effects on teaching and learning in Nigeria. The materials reviewed included TRCN policy documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, and reports from educational stakeholders and organizations. These sources were chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the teacher code of conduct is interpreted and applied within the Nigerian educational system.

The documents used in this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance and alignment with the research objectives. A total of 25 publications were analyzed. The analysis process involved identifying and coding recurrent themes and patterns related to ethical provisions, challenges to implementation, and impact on teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Categories were developed inductively, based on the frequency and relevance of themes found across the reviewed literature. Key themes included professional competence, fairness, confidentiality, institutional support, and enforcement mechanisms. The use of content analysis enabled a deeper understanding of the textual



data, capturing the nuanced ways in which ethical standards are perceived and practiced in educational settings.

## **Results and Discussion**

This section presents the results of the study, organized in line with the three guiding research questions. The findings are based on a systematic synthesis of recent literature and provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation dynamics of the teacher code of conduct in Nigeria, with attention to processes, expected outcomes, responsible actors, and institutional challenges.

### **Processes of Code Implementation**

The literature identifies four major processes involved in the implementation of the teacher code of conduct in Nigeria: development and dissemination of ethical guidelines, capacity building and professional training, institutional oversight and enforcement, and ethical feedback and review mechanisms (Ogunleye&Akinbode, 2022; Uche& Ibrahim, 2023). The development of ethical guidelines is led by the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), which formulates, publishes, and distributes the code to guide professional behavior. However, gaps in communication and poor accessibility of these documents, particularly in rural areas, hinder widespread understanding and uniform application. Eze and Nwankwo (2023) observe that many educators are aware of the code but lack detailed knowledge of its provisions, limiting full compliance.

Capacity building and professional development are crucial for equipping teachers with the skills and awareness to apply ethical principles effectively. Despite this, professional ethics training is often irregular, underfunded, or conducted as one-off events with minimal follow-up (Bello & Yusuf, 2024). Enforcement mechanisms also remain weak. Many schools lack functional disciplinary committees or clear procedures for reporting ethical violations. Where such mechanisms exist, enforcement is inconsistent, with some violations, such as absenteeism or favoritism, going unpunished due to institutional laxity or community influence (Okonkwo, 2019).

Feedback and ethical review processes are also underdeveloped. In most educational institutions, there are no structured platforms for teachers, students, or parents to raise ethical concerns or seek redress. This absence of feedback loops stifles accountability and allows unethical behavior to persist. However, recent reports suggest that some schools are beginning to explore peer-review systems and ethical clubs as innovative ways of promoting ethical reflection and monitoring among educators (Olabode, 2021).

### **Goals and Intended Outcomes of Code Implementation**

The implementation of the teacher code of conduct in Nigeria is designed to achieve several interconnected goals. These include ensuring professionalism among teachers, promoting fairness and equity in the classroom, protecting student welfare, and enhancing the overall credibility of the teaching profession (Adebayo, 2021). By setting clear standards, the code aims to foster a culture of responsibility and accountability that supports effective teaching and learning.

Key intended outcomes include improved teacher-student relationships, higher levels of classroom discipline, increased student engagement, and better academic performance. Ethical teaching practices, such as impartial assessment, confidentiality, and respectful interaction, are associated with positive classroom environments where students feel safe, respected, and motivated (Eze&Nwankwo, 2023). In turn, this enhances learning outcomes and builds public trust in the education system. Furthermore, the code seeks to reduce unethical practices such as corporal punishment, sexual harassment, examination malpractice, and favoritism—behaviors that have historically undermined education delivery in Nigeria (Okonkwo, 2019; Uche& Ibrahim, 2023).

Despite these well-defined goals, the study finds that many schools fall short of expected outcomes. Weak institutional enforcement, inadequate training, and socio-cultural pressures continue to impede full compliance with ethical standards. In rural areas especially, teachers often operate in difficult conditions with minimal support, which limits their ability to implement the code consistently. These shortcomings weaken the effectiveness of the policy and highlight the need for stronger



administrative commitment and context-specific implementation strategies (Ogunleye&Akinbode, 2022).

### **Entities Responsible for Code Implementation**

The implementation of the teacher code of conduct involves several key actors operating at different levels. At the federal level, the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) is the primary regulatory body responsible for developing, disseminating, and monitoring the code. It works in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education and relevant state agencies. TRCN also oversees the registration, licensing, and professional conduct of teachers, and has the legal authority to sanction violators of the code (Bello & Yusuf, 2024).

At the state and local levels, education ministries, school boards, and individual school administrations are responsible for operationalizing the code within their jurisdictions. They are expected to organize training workshops, conduct periodic evaluations, and enforce disciplinary measures. However, limited autonomy, inadequate staffing, and funding shortfalls reduce their capacity to execute these responsibilities effectively (Olabode, 2021). School principals, in particular, play a pivotal role in modeling ethical leadership and ensuring that teachers adhere to ethical standards in daily practice.

Non-governmental actors, including professional associations, civil society organizations, and parent-teacher associations (PTAs), also contribute to the promotion of ethical conduct in schools. These groups often support advocacy, training, and community sensitization programs. For example, some NGOs have partnered with state education ministries to provide ethics training and to set up anonymous reporting systems for abuse or misconduct. However, the involvement of these actors remains uneven, and greater collaboration is needed to strengthen grassroots oversight and accountability (Uche& Ibrahim, 2023).

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study confirm that while the teacher code of conduct in Nigeria is a well-intentioned and necessary policy, its implementation is undermined by a range of institutional and contextual factors. These include insufficient training, poor enforcement structures, lack of awareness, and resistance stemming from cultural norms and administrative inefficiencies. These issues reflect broader systemic challenges that continue to affect educational policy implementation in Nigeria. The analysis aligns with deontological ethics, which stresses that teachers have a duty to act ethically regardless of context or consequences. However, the presence of conflicting personal values, community expectations, and institutional weaknesses often results in deviations from this ideal. This tension highlights the need for more robust ethical education and stronger institutional support to guide teachers in resolving ethical dilemmas.

The findings also emphasize the critical role of institutional reform and capacity building. Without effective monitoring, well-funded training programs, and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, the code of conduct will continue to fall short of its objectives. However, there are signs of progress, including emerging peer review systems, ethics clubs, and digital feedback platforms in some regions. These initiatives demonstrate the potential for innovation and adaptation, especially when implementation strategies are tailored to local contexts.

In summary, although the implementation of the teacher code of conduct faces significant obstacles, it remains a key instrument for professionalizing teaching and enhancing educational outcomes in Nigeria. Strengthening ethical culture in schools through regular training, active stakeholder engagement, and strong enforcement mechanisms is critical for the realization of the code's full potential.

### **Conclusion**

The teacher code of conduct in Nigeria provides a robust framework for ethical teaching, promoting professional competence, fairness, confidentiality, and collaboration. However, challenges like weak enforcement, resource limitations, and ethical dilemmas hinder consistent application.



Adherence to the code enhances teaching effectiveness and student performance, creating a positive learning environment. To address gaps, Nigeria must invest in teacher training, robust monitoring, and institutional support to ensure ethical standards translate into improved educational outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Implement regular, context-specific training programs to enhance teachers' understanding and application of the code of conduct.

Establish ethical review committees in schools to monitor compliance and address violations.

Provide adequate resources and administrative support to reduce barriers to ethical adherence, particularly in under-resourced schools.

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