



Assessing Implementation of Teacher Code of Conduct in Enhancing Teachers' Professionalism in Mkuranga District, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigated the implementation of the Teacher Code of Conduct in public primary schools in Mkuranga District, Tanzania, addressing the critical gap between policy and practice. Despite a robust national framework and high teacher awareness, professional misconduct persists due to weak enforcement mechanisms. Employing a sequential mixed-methods design, the study collected qualitative data through interviews and focus group discussions with educators and parents, which informed a subsequent quantitative survey of teachers. Findings revealed a strong theoretical commitment to professional ethics among teachers (87.5% agreement), but qualitative evidence exposed inconsistent application, often attributed to a lack of ongoing training, mentorship, and safe reporting channels. The study concludes that awareness alone is insufficient without structured reinforcement. Grounded in Social Learning Theory, it recommends institutionalizing mandatory refresher training, case-based mentorship, and integrating code adherence into performance appraisals to foster a culture where ethical standards are consistently modeled, reinforced, and internalized.

Keyword : Teachers' Code of Conduct, Professional Ethics, and Policy Implementation

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Introduction

A Teacher Code of Conduct is a vital framework defining professional standards, ethical principles, and expected behaviors for educators, aimed at ensuring a safe, inclusive learning environment and upholding the dignity of the profession (UNESCO, 2020; Education International, 2021). These codes emphasize responsibilities such as integrity, fairness, and accountability, guiding teachers in their interactions with students, colleagues, and the community (Tanzania Teachers' Service Commission, 2019; OECD, 2021). The global rationale for such codes is rooted in international frameworks like UNESCO's recommendations and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which establish the teacher's role in protecting children's rights and promoting quality, dignified education.

Nationally, countries translate these global standards into actionable policies. For instance, Tanzania's Teachers' Service Commission Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Education and Training Policy outline specific expectations to address local

challenges like absenteeism and misconduct, aligning international principles with community-specific needs (Tanzania Teachers' Service Commission, 2015; Education and Training Policy, 2014). This dual alignment is evident worldwide, with countries like the United States, Canada, and the UK enforcing professional standards through bodies like the National Education Association and the General Teaching Council for Scotland, though challenges in enforcement and ethical violations persist (Goldhaber & Grout, 2021; Beijaard et al., 2022).

Within East Africa, similar efforts to institutionalize teacher ethics are underway, though with varying success. Kenya's Teachers Service Commission and Uganda's Ministry of Education implement policies and capacity-building programs to promote ethical practices, yet they face hurdles such as inadequate supervision in remote areas and limited funding (Waweru & Kamau, 2022; Nakanjako & Mugisha, 2021). Rwanda has integrated ethics training into teacher education, but rural areas still struggle with resource access and enforcement, a common theme across the region where systemic challenges hinder consistent application of ethical guidelines (Nsengiyumva & Uwitonze, 2022).

In Tanzania, the robust national policy framework is implemented at the district level by bodies like the Mkuranga District Education Office, which is tasked with monitoring compliance and conducting ethics seminars (Lugazo & Msuya, 2021; Mkumbo & Magesa, 2022). However, implementation is inconsistent due to a shortage of inspectors, limited resources, and underreporting of misconduct, leading to a gap between policy and practice in many schools (Mkuranga District reports, 2023). This highlights a critical need for stronger institutional support and community engagement at the grassroots level to ensure the Code of Conduct effectively fosters a professional and ethical teaching environment.

Statement of the Problem

The study addresses the persistent gap between the Teacher Code of Conduct established by the Tanzanian government and its actual implementation in Mkuranga District, where despite clear guidelines set by the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), cases of absenteeism, misuse of resources, and unprofessional teacher-student relationships remain common due to weak enforcement, limited monitoring resources, and delayed disciplinary action. This disconnect undermines teacher professionalism, school discipline, community trust, and the quality of education, leading to declining student performance and erosion of confidence in the teaching profession. While the national framework expects teachers to uphold integrity, accountability, and ethical behavior to create positive learning environments, inconsistent adherence across schools highlights the need for stronger accountability mechanisms. Accordingly, this study examined the extent of code-of-conduct implementation in Mkuranga, identified

key barriers to effective enforcement, and proposed strategies to enhance professionalism and accountability among teachers.

Theoretical Review

Social Learning Theory (SLT), developed by Bandura (1986), provides the foundation for this study by explaining how individuals acquire behaviors, attitudes, and values through observation, imitation, and modeling within social contexts. The theory's key pillars observational learning, imitation, modeling, and reinforcement demonstrate how teachers and students learn professional and ethical behaviors by watching role models and responding to rewards or consequences (Bandura, 1986; Ormrod, 2011; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). In school settings, positive modeling by teachers and administrators promotes professionalism, while reinforcement mechanisms such as recognition or disciplinary action influence adherence to ethical standards (Skinner, 1953; Schunk, 2012; Bush, 2011).

SLT's strengths lie in its holistic integration of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors, acknowledging that learning occurs through interaction rather than in isolation (Bandura, 1986; Ormrod, 2011). Its broad applicability across educational, psychological, organizational, and clinical settings enhances its relevance, as it helps explain how individuals adopt ethical norms by observing others (Miller, 2011; Bandura, 2004). However, the theory is limited by its underemphasis on biological influences and the difficulty of measuring internal cognitive processes such as attention and retention, which are not directly observable (Mischel, 1999; Plomin et al., 2016; Schunk, 2012). These limitations complicate empirical assessments of long-term behavior change and the precise role of observational learning in shaping professional conduct.

In relation to this study, SLT helps explain how teachers' adherence to the Teacher Code of Conduct is shaped by their observation of colleagues, leaders, and institutional culture (Bandura, 1986; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Positive modeling by school leadership reinforces professionalism, while consistent use of rewards and sanctions further shapes teachers' compliance with ethical guidelines (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Bush, 2011). SLT underscores the importance of creating a school environment where ethical behavior is visibly demonstrated, reinforced, and embedded in organizational culture (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Therefore, the theory provides a useful lens for examining how social influences within Mkuranga schools affect teachers' professional behavior and for identifying strategies to strengthen adherence to the Teacher Code of Conduct (Bandura, 1986).

Empirical Literature Review

Shapiro (2020) explores how ethical dilemmas faced by educators can often stem from ambiguities within the Teacher Code of Conduct. The study highlights that while

Code of Conduct provide a framework for professional behavior, they may lack specificity in addressing contemporary challenges teachers face. The critique of this work lies in its failure to consider the diverse cultural contexts in which teachers operate, potentially limiting the generalizability of its findings.

Gordon's longitudinal study (2021) investigates the relationship between adherence to teacher Code of Conduct and student outcomes over time. The findings suggest a positive correlation between adherence and improved classroom management. However, the critique centers on the study's methodology, which primarily relies on self-reported adherence from teachers, raising concerns about bias and accuracy.

Miller (2020), examines various barriers to compliance with the Teacher Code of Conduct, including inadequate training and institutional support. The study provides valuable insights into the systemic issues affecting teacher adherence. However, the critique points out that it does not sufficiently address how individual teacher characteristics, such as personal values and ethics, may influence compliance levels.

Kowalski (2020), make comparative analysis highlights the differences in teacher behavior across various European countries based on their adherence to professional standards. The critique here is that while the study identifies significant trends, it may oversimplify the complex socio-political factors that influence educational practices in different countries.

The study of Bergström, (2021) focuses on how the Teacher Code of Conduct influences teachers' professional identity in Sweden. Bergström argues that adherence to these Code of Conduct fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility among teachers. The critique highlights the study's narrow focus on Sweden, suggesting that it may not account for variations in professional identity formation in other cultural contexts. Müller (2022), conducts a systematic review of the impact of teacher Code of Conduct on accountability in Germany, finding that adherence significantly affects perceived professionalism. The critique emphasizes the need for empirical studies to validate the claims made in the review, as many conclusions are drawn from theoretical frameworks rather than direct observational data.

Yamamoto (2020), examines the challenges teachers face in adhering to the Teacher Code of Conduct in Japan, particularly regarding cultural expectations. The critique suggests that the study does not sufficiently explore the role of administrative support in promoting adherence, which is crucial in understanding compliance. Chen's research (2021), analyses the effectiveness of Teacher Codes of Conduct in fostering ethical behavior among teachers in China. While the findings indicate positive impacts, the critique points out that the reliance on quantitative measures may overlook nuanced behaviors and ethical dilemmas that teachers encounter.

Ali, (2022) conducted a study focused on the perception and impact of Teacher Code of Conduct in Pakistan. The critique notes that while the findings provide in-depth insights into teacher experiences, they may not represent the views of teachers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, potentially skewing the results.

Nkansah's study (2021), investigates the implementation of Teacher Code of Conduct in Ghana and their influence on professional ethics among educators. While the findings show a positive relationship between adherence and ethical behavior, the critique emphasizes the need for longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of these behaviors over time. Adediran (2022) explores the various challenges faced by teachers in Nigeria concerning adherence to the Teacher Code of Conduct. The critique of this work points out that while it identifies significant obstacles, it lacks practical recommendations for overcoming these challenges, limiting its applicability. Tchombang (2020) analyzes the adherence to professional standards among teachers in Cameroon. The critique highlights that the study's focus on compliance might overshadow the importance of teacher empowerment and support systems that are essential for fostering ethical behavior.

Mhando (2020) examines the adherence to Teacher Code of Conduct in Kenya, highlighting both successes and failures in implementation. The critique notes that while the study identifies key issues, it lacks a comprehensive approach to understanding the socio-cultural factors that influence teacher behavior. Mugisha (2021) critically analyzes the effectiveness of Teacher Code of Conduct in Ugandan schools, finding gaps between policy and practice. The critique points out that the study could benefit from perspectives that are more diverse. The perspective included student and parent viewpoints on teacher adherence. Suleiman's (2022), mixed-methods study investigates how adherence to the Teacher Code of Conduct affects teacher performance in Tanzania. The critique highlights the study's comprehensive approach but suggests that further exploration into how these codes communicated to teachers could enhance understanding of compliance. Ng'wandu (2022) discusses the challenges faced by teachers in adhering to the Code of Conduct in Tanzania, including insufficient training and lack of resources. The critique underscores the need for more empirical data to support the claims made and to provide concrete recommendations for improvement.

Kibanda (2021), examines the influence of the Teacher Code of Conduct on educators' ethical behavior in Tanzania. The critique suggests that while the study highlights the importance of Code of Conduct, it does not fully explore the complexities of individual teacher motivations and the influence of community expectations. Msuya (2020), assesses the implementation of the Teacher Code of Conduct in primary schools, finding varied levels of adherence. The critique points out that the study's reliance on surveys may not capture the nuanced realities of teacher experiences, suggesting a need for more qualitative research to enrich the findings.

Methodology

This study adopted a sequential mixed-methods design in Mkuranga District's public primary schools, where initial qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions with educators and officials informed the subsequent quantitative phase, comprising structured teacher questionnaires. A stratified random and purposive sampling strategy ensured both representativeness and the inclusion of key expert perspectives on the implementation of the Teacher Code of Conduct. The research upheld validity and reliability through instrument pre-testing, methodological triangulation, and member checking, while adhering strictly to ethical protocols. Quantitative data were analyzed statistically and qualitative data thematically, with the integration of both datasets providing a comprehensive understanding of awareness, enforcement, and challenges surrounding professional conduct.

Findings and Discussion

The focus of this specific objective is on the way the visited teachers adhered the code of conduct. The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data and presented in tables and quotes respectively.

Table 1. Teachers' Adherence to the Code of Conduct

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I maintain professional ethics	50 (62.5%)	20 (25.0%)	5 (6.2%)	3 (3.8%)	2 (2.5%)
Teachers in my school follow the Code of Conduct	30 (37.5%)	28 (35.0%)	10 (12.5%)	7 (8.8%)	5 (6.2%)

Source: Field Data, 2025

The study revealed that teachers in the surveyed schools generally demonstrate a strong personal commitment to professional ethics. Quantitative data showed that 87.5% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they maintain professional ethics, highlighting that ethical conduct is valued at an individual level. However, qualitative findings from interviews with heads of school and ward officers indicate that while teachers respect the Teacher Code of Conduct; this respect does not always translate into consistent application. One head of school explained, "*The Code of Conduct is there, but it is like a book on the shelf as teachers know it exists, but they don't open it often.*" This suggests that awareness of ethical standards alone is insufficient to ensure that they actively applied in daily teaching practices.

When asked whether teachers in their schools follow the Code of Conduct, 72.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Nevertheless, 22.5% of teachers were

neutral or disagreed, indicating a gap between general awareness and consistent behavioral adherence. This further supported by the finding that 55% of teachers reported having witnessed breaches of the Code of Conduct. The combination of these quantitative and qualitative findings emphasizes that despite initial exposure to the Code of Conduct during induction, without structured follow-up programs such as refresher trainings, workshops, and mentorship, ethical principles may not fully internalized or applied in complex, real-life classroom situations.

The study also examined the perceived practicality of the Code of Conduct. Most respondents (75%) considered the Code of Conduct practical and applicable in their teaching environment, demonstrating that its guidelines are relevant to daily school life. Yet, a notable minority expressed disagreement or uncertainty, which suggests challenges in contextualizing the Code of Conduct to specific classroom dilemmas, such as conflicts with students or parents, or navigating professional gray areas. Interviews reinforced this point, with one head of school noting, *“Teachers encounter new challenges every year without refresher training, they might not see how the Code of Conduct applies in those situations.”*

These findings have significant implications for education policy. Policies such as the Teacher Code of Conduct intended to guide ethical and professional behavior, but policy effectiveness depends on implementation. The observed gaps between awareness and consistent application suggest that current policies may be insufficiently supported by ongoing professional development requirements or monitoring mechanisms. Strengthening policy implementation through mandatory refresher trainings, structured mentorship programs, and routine school-level audits can ensure that teachers not only know the Code of Conduct but also actively apply it in their work. Additionally, policy should incentivize continuous engagement with ethical standards, for example by linking compliance with performance appraisal and professional recognition.

The observed gaps between awareness and consistent application are not unique to this context; they reflect a broader challenge, as evidenced by Mugisha (2021), whose critical analysis of the Teacher Code of Conduct in Ugandan schools similarly identified significant gaps between policy and practice. This recurring issue suggests that current policies may be insufficiently supported by ongoing professional development requirements or monitoring mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening policy implementation through mandatory refresher trainings, structured mentorship programs, and routine school-level audits is crucial to ensure that teachers not only know the Code of Conduct but also actively apply it in their work.

From the perspective of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), teachers' behavior is shaped by observation, modeling, and reinforcement. The absence of structured follow-up programs limits opportunities for teachers to observe the practical application of the Code of Conduct, discuss ethical dilemmas with colleagues,

or receive feedback on professional decisions. Consequently, knowledge of the Code of Conduct may remain theoretical rather than habitual. Implementing termly workshops, mentorship sessions, and case-based discussions would create a social learning environment that reinforces ethical practices and encourages consistent adherence.

The study further revealed that, teachers in the surveyed schools generally demonstrate a strong personal commitment to professional ethics. Quantitative data showed that 87.5% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they maintain professional ethics, highlighting that ethical conduct valued at an individual level. However, qualitative findings from interviews with heads of school and ward officers indicate that while teachers respect the Teacher Code of Conduct; this respect does not always translate into consistent application. One head of school explained, *"The Code of Conduct is there, but it is like a book on the shelf teachers know it exists, but they don't open it often."* This observation reflects the gap between theoretical awareness and practical application.

In addition, teachers may understand the principles of the Code of Conduct, yet without structured reinforcement, these principles remain abstract. Over time, competing demands such as lesson planning, administrative tasks and student discipline take precedence, causing teachers to rely on habitual routines rather than consciously applying ethical standards. The head's comment highlights the importance of embedding the Code of Conduct into daily practice through structured engagement, ensuring that it becomes a living guide rather than a document that rarely consulted. It also suggests that schools need ongoing strategies, such as workshops and mentoring, to keep ethical considerations at the forefront of professional conduct.

When asked whether teachers in their schools follow the Code of Conduct, 72.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Nevertheless, 22.5% were neutral or disagreed, indicating a gap between awareness and consistent adherence. The finding that 55% of teachers reported witnessing breaches of the Code of Conduct further supports this. These results show that despite initial exposure during induction, without structured follow-up programs such as refresher trainings, workshops, and mentorship, ethical principles may not fully internalized or applied in complex classroom situations.

During FGDs with teachers provided additional insights into unprofessional practices. One participant explained, *"Although we know the Code of Conduct, not everyone follows it. Sometimes issues go unreported to protect reputations."* This statement reflects the social and cultural dynamics within schools that affect ethical behavior. Teachers may fear negative consequences, social conflict, or damage to professional relationships if they report colleagues who breach the Code of Conduct. The quotation illustrates how peers influence and informal social norms can override formal policy guidelines, creating an environment where misconduct may persist unaddressed. It

also emphasizes the importance of establishing safe reporting mechanisms, mentorship, and a supportive school culture that encourages accountability. By addressing the social pressures that discourage reporting, schools can reinforce the practical application of the Code of Conduct and ensure that ethical violations always checked.

Parents also contributed to the discussion of teacher professionalism, noting instances of late-coming, poor communication, and lack of respect toward students. However, they also recognized that many teachers serve as positive role models. One parent commented, *"We appreciate teachers who are punctual, communicate well, and treat students with respect; they set the tone for good behavior in the school."* This quotation emphasizes the dual perception of teacher behavior from the community perspective. While some teachers fall short of professional standards, others exemplify ethical practice, positively influencing both students and parents. It highlights the importance of recognizing and reinforcing exemplary conduct while addressing deficiencies. Engaging parents and community stakeholders in monitoring and supporting teacher professionalism can help schools maintain higher ethical standards and accountability.

The perceived practicality of the Code of Conduct was generally high, with 75% of respondents considering it applicable to their teaching environment. Yet, a minority disagreed or was unsure, highlighting challenges in translating theoretical knowledge into real-life application. Interviews reinforced this, with one head of school noting,

Teachers encounter new challenges every year conflicts with students, demands from parents, and unexpected professional dilemmas. Without refresher training and practical guidance, they might not see how the Code of Conduct applies in those situations, and this can lead to inconsistent ethical decisions (Interview, July 2025).

This expanded quotation underscores the dynamic nature of teaching and the continuous ethical challenges that arise. It highlights the importance of structured, ongoing professional development, case-based discussions, and reflective practice to help teachers navigate complex scenarios. It also illustrates that the Code of Conduct alone is not sufficient; its effectiveness depends on practical reinforcement, context-specific application, and continuous engagement. These findings have significant education policy implications. While the Teacher Code of Conduct is a key policy document guiding ethical and professional behavior, the gaps between awareness and consistent application indicate weaknesses in implementation. Policies must go beyond induction by ensuring continuous professional development, structured mentorship, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms. Linking compliance to appraisal systems or recognition programs could further enhance adherence and accountability.

This quotation from head teacher underscores the dynamic nature of teaching and the continuous ethical challenges that arise. The head teacher's concern about teachers struggling to apply the Code aligns with the findings of Shapiro (2020), who

posits that such ethical dilemmas often stem from inherent ambiguities within the Codes of Conduct themselves, which may lack the specificity needed to address contemporary classroom challenges. This illustrates that the Code of Conduct alone is not sufficient; its effectiveness depends on practical reinforcement and context-specific application. Furthermore, while Shapiro's (2020) critique regarding the failure to consider diverse cultural contexts highlights a potential limitation in its generalizability, it simultaneously strengthens the argument from the field: a one-size-fits-all Code is inadequate.

From the perspective of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), teachers' behavior is shaped by observation, modeling, and reinforcement. The absence of structured follow-up programs limits opportunities for teachers to observe ethical decision-making, discuss dilemmas, or receive feedback. Implementing termly workshops, mentorship sessions, and case-based discussions would create a social learning environment that reinforces ethical practices and encourages consistent application of the Code of Conduct. Integrating these strategies ensures that knowledge of the Code of Conduct become habitually applied in daily teaching, rather than remaining theoretical.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is concluded that while teachers in Mkurunga District demonstrate a strong awareness and personal commitment to the Teacher Code of Conduct, this knowledge frequently fails to translate into consistent professional practice due to a lack of ongoing reinforcement, contextual guidance, and robust accountability mechanisms. To bridge this theory-practice gap, it is recommended that the Teachers' Service Commission, in collaboration with school heads, institutionalizes mandatory, regular refresher training and case-based mentorship programs to help teachers navigate complex ethical dilemmas. Furthermore, policy implementation should be strengthened through systematic monitoring, safe reporting channels for misconduct, and the integration of Code adherence into performance appraisal systems to foster a culture of continuous professional ethics. These actions, grounded in the principles of Social Learning Theory, would create an environment where ethical behavior is consistently modeled, reinforced, and internalized, thereby enhancing the overall professionalism and integrity of the teaching force.

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