


Ethics in Teacher Education: Key to 21st Century African Development

Agenda

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Cite this article in APA

Somba, A. M. & Zigama, J. C. (2025). Ethics in teacher education: Key to 21st century African development agenda. *Journal of education and learning*, 4(1), 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jel.v4i1.688>



A publication of Editon
Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 12.03.2025

Accepted: 11.04.2025

Published: 12.05.2025

Scan this QR to read the paper online



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to critically examine whether ongoing education reforms in Africa, particularly the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE), can establish a robust foundation for sustainable development by transforming the design, delivery, and management of Teacher Education programs. The teaching profession remains central to societal progress, yet it faces numerous systemic challenges that threaten its ability to meet contemporary demands. Despite CBE's alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its potential to prepare African nations for meaningful participation in the global economy, there are doubts about whether current reform efforts are sufficient to professionalise and ethically ground the teaching workforce. This review article adopts a qualitative analytical methodology, synthesising existing scholarly literature, policy frameworks, and reform reports related to Teacher Education in Africa. The analysis focuses on identifying structural gaps and ethical shortcomings in current Teacher Education practices and policies. The findings reveal a host of persistent challenges, including the lack of standardised Teacher Education program design, chaotic institutional management, politicised and corrupt teacher recruitment processes, and a fragmented approach to advocating for teachers' welfare and rights. These issues collectively undermine the effectiveness of education reforms and the professional stature of teachers. The article concludes that transformative change in Teacher Education is essential for the success of CBE and the broader sustainable development agenda. It recommends the mainstreaming of professional ethics into Teacher Education curricula, the establishment of harmonised regulatory systems, and the strengthening of unified advocacy mechanisms for the teaching profession as key strategies for revitalising education in Africa.

Key terms: Competency-based education, ethics of teaching profession, paradigm shift, sustainable development, teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession has long been recognised as the foundation upon which societies build their future. Teachers are not merely knowledge transmitters but also societal architects, responsible for shaping norms, values, and the trajectory of national development. In Africa, the urgency to build resilient, inclusive, and future-ready societies has placed the teaching profession at the centre of reform efforts aimed at achieving sustainable development and global competitiveness (Zickafoose et al., 2024).

In recent years, many African countries have transitioned toward Competency-Based Education (CBE), an approach that prioritises learner outcomes, applied skills, and continuous formative assessment over rote content delivery (Akinrinola et al., 2020). CBE is designed not only to address 21st-century skills but also to enhance education quality and relevance, particularly in preparing learners for employment and civic engagement (Masudi, 2024). Importantly, this educational shift aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2024).

However, the successful implementation of CBE depends heavily on the quality and ethical standards of teachers. A robust ethical foundation is essential for teachers to model the values, responsibilities, and behaviours expected in society and to uphold professional integrity in their instructional and institutional roles (Kopnina, 2020). Without ethics, even the best pedagogical strategies risk being undermined by corruption, favouritism, absenteeism, or abuse of authority—issues that continue to plague the teaching profession in many African contexts (Zhou, 2023).

Ethical standards guide teachers in making just decisions, respecting the dignity of learners, and fostering inclusive and safe learning environments—principles that are directly linked to the broader aims of SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) (UNESCO, 2025). Furthermore, ethical teacher conduct builds trust in the education system,

reinforcing public confidence and policy support for educational reforms (SACE, 2022).

Despite the urgency, ethics is often sidelined in teacher preparation programs. Many institutions lack comprehensive modules on professional ethics, and where such content exists, it is poorly integrated or treated as secondary (Mupira & Ramathan, 2021). This gap weakens the transformative promise of CBE and hinders the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals across the continent.

This article explores the essential role of ethics in enhancing the impact of Competency-Based Education and ensuring the alignment of teacher education with Africa's development goals. It argues that without mainstreaming professional ethics into teacher preparation and professional development, the implementation of CBE and the realisation of the SDGs will remain aspirational rather than achievable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Teachers in Society

The role of teachers transcends the simple transmission of knowledge; they serve as architects of the future, shaping not only the intellectual development of students but also their moral and social character (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Teachers are often seen as societal engineers who influence both academic outcomes and the broader social fabric. Their actions impact not only students' cognitive development but also their ability to navigate the world as responsible, ethical citizens (Ogunyemi & Okunade, 2020). By fostering social cohesion, teachers lay the groundwork for sustainable, peaceful societies where the values of equality, justice, and collective responsibility are nurtured (Serpell & Munene, 2021).

Beyond imparting academic content, teachers are crucial in instilling values such as respect, tolerance, and civic responsibility. These values are fundamental to the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), as they align with the objectives of building inclusive, just, and peaceful societies

(United Nations, 2020). Teachers help students become active participants in societal development by not only equipping them with technical skills but also by promoting critical thinking, empathy, and ethical decision-making (Sachs, 2021).

Teachers' impact extends far beyond the classroom, influencing the communities and societies they serve. Well-prepared teachers act as change agents who shape the attitudes, behaviours, and aspirations of future generations. This is especially important in the African context, where rapid social and economic transformation is essential for meeting the goals of Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2015). As educators in Africa engage with diverse and evolving student populations, their role in facilitating social integration and fostering national unity becomes even more pivotal (Mugisha & Kato, 2021). Without ethically grounded teachers who prioritise both knowledge acquisition and social development, the ambitious goals of education systems—like improving literacy rates, closing achievement gaps, and promoting social justice—remain unattainable.

The relationship between teacher quality and development outcomes is well-documented. Research by Hanushek and Woessmann (2008) demonstrates that effective teachers are a critical determinant of national economic performance. In sub-Saharan Africa, where educational outcomes often lag behind global standards, improving teacher quality is essential to achieving sustainable development (Lewin & Stuart, 2003). Teachers contribute not only to immediate educational gains but also to long-term national prosperity through their role in shaping an informed, skilled, and adaptable workforce (Gustafsson & Ntabeni, 2020).

Furthermore, the ethical framework within which teachers operate has a profound impact on the long-term sustainability of educational reforms. Ethical leadership in the classroom promotes fairness, inclusion, and respect, all of which are essential for building a peaceful and equitable society (Rothstein & Newton, 2022). Teachers are also responsible for nurturing the values and attitudes that are crucial to

advancing the SDGs, including a commitment to equity, justice, and sustainability (Ogunyemi, 2022).

In summary, teachers are central not only to the achievement of academic goals but also to the creation of socially cohesive, economically prosperous, and ethically grounded societies. Their role is essential in realising global development goals, and the quality of education they provide is inextricably linked to national and global development outcomes (Mugisha & Kato, 2021; Sachs, 2021). Given the interconnectedness of education, ethics, and development, ensuring that teachers are well-trained, supported, and ethically grounded is fundamental to achieving the SDGs and Africa's long-term development agenda (African Union, 2015; UNESCO, 2022).

Competency-Based Education and the African Development Agenda

Many African countries have embraced Competency-Based Education (CBE) as a transformative response to the limitations of traditional, exam-oriented education models. These conventional systems have often failed to equip learners with the practical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills needed in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Graham & Amiel, 2021). CBE offers an alternative by prioritising outcomes that emphasise applied knowledge, creativity, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and lifelong learning competencies (Kabita & Ji, 2017; Nyabero & Mwebi, 2023).

CBE is not just an educational reform - it is an enabler of sustainable development. It positions learners as active participants in their own learning and encourages teachers to act as facilitators who guide learners toward mastery of specific, measurable competencies aligned with real-world contexts (Buchner & Fuchs, 2022). This learner-centred approach resonates strongly with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2022). Moreover, it directly supports SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) by cultivating

a skilled and adaptable workforce (United Nations, 2020).

The African Union's Agenda 2063 further reinforces this vision by emphasising the role of education and skills development in realising "The Africa We Want"—a continent characterised by peace, prosperity, and inclusivity (African Union, 2015). The implementation of CBE supports the development of Africa's human capital by linking education outcomes with market needs, community challenges, and innovation imperatives (World Bank, 2021). However, successful implementation of CBE depends heavily on the redesign of teacher education and in-service training programs to incorporate not only pedagogical competence but also ethical, technological, and contextual awareness (Wambugu et al., 2023).

Despite its promise, CBE faces challenges such as inadequate teacher preparation, insufficient infrastructure, and resistance to change among education stakeholders (Akinyemi & Adewuyi, 2022). These challenges must be addressed through coordinated policy efforts, investment in teacher capacity building, and the alignment of national curricula with both continental aspirations and global development agendas (Ngugi & Waweru, 2024).

In summary, CBE is central to advancing the African development agenda and achieving the SDGs. It presents a framework that not only nurtures individual potential but also fosters national competitiveness and resilience in the face of global economic and technological transformations.

Convergence between Ethics in Teacher Education, Competency-Based Education, and SDGs

The convergence between ethics in teacher education, Competency-Based Education (CBE), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a crucial nexus for advancing education systems that are both ethically grounded and responsive to the challenges of the 21st century. At the heart of this convergence is the recognition that the quality of education and the ethical standards of the teaching profession are central to achieving sustainable development, social equity, and economic growth.

Integrating ethics into CBE provides a strong foundation for teachers to not only acquire specific skills but also to operate within frameworks that promote ethical decision-making, fairness, and social responsibility (UNESCO, 2022).

Competency-based education is designed to focus on the learner's ability to demonstrate mastery of specific competencies that go beyond traditional rote memorisation, emphasising practical skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Gustafsson & Ntabeni, 2020). However, for CBE to truly meet the needs of SDG 4 (quality education), it must be implemented in a way that fosters not only cognitive and technical skills but also ethical values such as justice, equity, and respect for diversity (Ogunyemi & Okunade, 2020). CBE's emphasis on outcomes-oriented learning aligns with SDG 4, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education, stressing the importance of teachers in promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015).

The integration of ethics into teacher education programs is particularly important in this context because teachers are not only responsible for delivering content but also for modeling ethical behaviors and promoting social values in students. Ethical teacher education ensures that future educators are equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern classroom, where issues such as diversity, inclusion, and social justice are increasingly significant (Sachs, 2021). By embedding ethics in CBE, teacher education can help create educators who are not only skilled in the technical aspects of teaching but also aware of their roles as stewards of societal values and change agents for sustainable development (Gustafsson & Ntabeni, 2020; Rothstein & Newton, 2022).

Furthermore, CBE's emphasis on personalised learning and student-centred approaches directly supports the ethical imperative of meeting the individual needs of all learners, regardless of background or ability. This approach mirrors SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), which calls for the elimination of inequalities within and among countries. Teachers trained within a framework

that integrates ethics and CBE are better prepared to provide equitable learning opportunities, adapting instruction to suit diverse learners' needs and fostering environments of respect and inclusivity (Mugisha & Kato, 2021).

Finally, the convergence of ethics in teacher education, CBE, and the SDGs underscores the importance of a holistic educational approach that addresses not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the ethical development of future generations. By equipping teachers with both the competencies required to succeed in a globalised world and the ethical frameworks to address pressing social challenges, education systems can contribute to the realisation of the SDGs, fostering long-term social and economic development (Sachs, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in African Teacher Education

Despite the promise of Competency-Based Education, numerous challenges continue to undermine the efficacy of teacher education programs in Africa. A lack of uniformity in the design and administration of teacher training programs creates disparities in the quality of teacher preparation (Ottevanger et al., 2007; Morrow, 2018). In some cases, teacher education institutions are poorly managed, contributing to substandard educational outcomes (Sayed & Ahmed, 2011; Okeke & Mthembu, 2020).

Lack of Uniformity in Teacher Education Programs

One major challenge is the lack of uniformity in teacher education programs. Different institutions have varying standards and curricula, leading to discrepancies in the quality of teacher preparation. This inconsistency hampers the standardisation of teaching quality across the education system (Muskin & Opoku, 2021; Adamu & Eze, 2019). Addressing this requires a comprehensive framework developed in consultation with educational experts, teachers, and policymakers to ensure that it meets the needs of the education system.

Chaotic Management of Teacher Education Institutions

The management of teacher education institutions is often characterised by chaos and inefficiency. Poor management practices result in inadequate resource allocation, suboptimal teaching conditions, and a lack of support for both teachers and students. This disarray undermines the effectiveness of teacher training programs and contributes to the overall decline in educational quality (Kipkebut & Mutai, 2022; Mutisya & Nyamwange, 2020). Improving management practices involves adopting modern management techniques and establishing accountability mechanisms.

Politicisation and Corruption in Teacher Recruitment

Teacher recruitment processes are often marred by politicisation and endemic corruption. In many cases, recruitment is influenced by political considerations rather than merit, leading to the appointment of unqualified or underqualified individuals (Bukenya & Ssewanyana, 2019; Afolabi & Udo, 2021). This compromises the quality of education and undermines the credibility of the teaching profession. Establishing a transparent and merit-based recruitment process, with anti-corruption measures, is essential.

Lack of Advocacy for Teachers' Rights and Privileges

A significant challenge is the lack of unity and voice in advocating for teachers' rights and privileges. Teachers often face poor working conditions, inadequate compensation, and limited opportunities for professional development. This lack of support can lead to low morale and job dissatisfaction among teachers, affecting their performance and the quality of education (Osei & Asare, 2020; Akpan & Usoro, 2019). Strong and unified advocacy from teachers' unions and professional associations is needed.

Mainstreaming Ethics in Teacher Education

One potential solution to these pervasive challenges is the mainstreaming of ethics in teacher education programs. Ethics should be treated as a central component of teacher training, guiding professional behaviour and ensuring accountability (Campbell, 2008; Okechukwu, 2022). By instilling a strong sense of ethical responsibility, education systems can address

issues such as corruption, favouritism, and poor management practices.

Promoting Ethical Conduct in Teacher Education

Promoting ethical conduct in teacher education involves integrating ethics into the curriculum and fostering a culture of ethical behaviour within institutions. This includes teaching prospective teachers about their ethical responsibilities and providing them with tools to navigate ethical dilemmas (Veiga-Simão, 2018). Ethical behaviour should be modelled by institutions, adhering to principles of transparency, fairness, and accountability.

Addressing Ethical Challenges in the Teaching Profession

Addressing ethical challenges in the teaching profession requires a multi-faceted approach. This involves establishing clear ethical standards and guidelines for teachers, providing ongoing ethics training, and creating mechanisms for reporting and addressing ethical violations (Enu & Annor, 2020; Andoh, 2019). Promoting ethical conduct can enhance the credibility and professionalism of the teaching profession.

Ethical Leadership in Teacher Education

Ethical leadership is essential in teacher education institutions. Leaders should exemplify ethical behaviour and create an environment that encourages ethical conduct among staff and students. Promoting values such as honesty, integrity, and respect, and ensuring that ethical considerations are integrated into decision-making processes is crucial (Walker, 2020; Louw & Tiro, 2021). Ethical leadership sets a positive example for prospective teachers and contributes to the overall improvement of the education system.

Ethical Teaching and Sustainable Development Goals

The relationship between ethical teaching and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is clear. SDG 4, which aims to provide quality education for all, cannot be realised without addressing the ethical dimensions of teacher education. Ethical teaching practices ensure that

education systems are equitable and inclusive, providing all students with the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background (UNESCO, 2015; Liyanage & O'Neill, 2019).

Moreover, ethical teaching is essential for creating a society that values fairness, justice, and social responsibility. These principles underpin the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063. Teachers who embody these values in their professional practice can inspire the next generation of leaders, innovators, and citizens (African Union, 2015; Nyakundi & Siringi, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The transformation of teacher education in Africa through Competency-Based Education (CBE) presents a timely and strategic opportunity to align national education systems with global development goals. However, this transformation cannot be sustainably achieved without embedding ethics at the core of the teaching profession. While CBE emphasises mastery of skills, learner-centeredness, and real-world application, it also inherently demands high levels of teacher accountability, professionalism, and moral integrity (Mupira & Ramrathan, 2021; Zhou, 2023). Teachers must not only be competent but also ethical in their interactions with learners, colleagues, and the community at large. The implementation of CBE calls for a redefinition of teacher roles, shifting from mere content deliverers to facilitators of learning and mentors of values and attitudes (Masudi, 2024). This redefinition reinforces the need to mainstream ethical training in teacher education programs to ensure that teachers internalise and model the principles of fairness, inclusivity, respect, and responsibility. Ethical teaching practices enhance learner trust, promote equitable treatment, and safeguard the dignity of all learners - foundational principles of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 5 (gender equality), Goal 10 (reduced inequalities), and Goal 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) (UNESCO, 2025). Moreover, the attainment of the SDGs depends heavily on the integrity and ethical commitment of educators to champion transformative learning experiences that address local and global challenges. Without ethical grounding, even the most well-designed CBE curriculum risks becoming a

technical exercise devoid of the humanistic values required to build just and sustainable societies (Kopnina, 2020).

Recommended Strategies for Reforming Teacher Education and the Teaching Profession

Reforming teacher education and the teaching profession requires a comprehensive and strategic approach. The following strategies can help address challenges and enhance the quality of teacher education and the teaching profession:

Developing a Comprehensive Framework for Teacher Education

A comprehensive framework for teacher education involves setting clear standards and benchmarks for training programs. This framework should be based on best practices and evidence-based research and developed in consultation with educational experts, teachers, and policymakers. Establishing a standardised curriculum and ensuring consistency in teacher training can improve the quality of education.

Enhancing Management Practices in Teacher Education Institutions

Enhancing management practices requires the adoption of modern management techniques and the establishment of accountability mechanisms. This includes regular evaluations, stakeholder engagement, and the use of technology to streamline administrative processes. Improving management practices creates a

conducive environment for effective teaching and learning.

Ensuring Transparent and Merit-Based Teacher Recruitment

A transparent and merit-based teacher recruitment process involves setting clear criteria for selection, conducting rigorous assessments, and preventing political interference. Anti-corruption measures should be put in place to prevent bribery and favouritism. Prioritising merit and integrity attracts and retains high-quality teachers.

Advocating for Teachers' Rights and Privileges

Advocating for teachers' rights and privileges requires strong and unified advocacy from teachers' unions and professional associations. This includes lobbying for better working conditions, fair compensation, and opportunities for professional growth. Policymakers should recognise the importance of investing in teachers and prioritise their well-being in educational reforms.

Mainstreaming Ethics in Teacher Education

Mainstreaming ethics involves integrating ethical principles into the curriculum and promoting a culture of ethical behaviour within institutions. Teaching prospective teachers about their ethical responsibilities and providing tools to navigate ethical dilemmas is crucial. Ethical leadership should be promoted to set a positive example for prospective teachers.

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