

# Teachers' Handling of Ethical Dilemmas in Rubaga Division (Uganda): Complexities and Education Management Implications

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**Abstract** Motivated by the desire to explain increased misconduct among teachers in Uganda, the study sought to explore the different ethical dilemmas faced by secondary school teachers in Rubaga Division (Kampala - Uganda). More specifically, the study sought to find out the kind of ethical dilemmas faced by the teachers; to assess teachers' use of available legal frameworks to address the dilemmas; and, finally, to find out how teachers navigate through the dilemmas. The study used a descriptive case study design, and employed both a self-administered questionnaire and an interview guide as instruments. Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that teachers indeed encounter a multitude of ethical dilemmas. However, available legal frameworks are rarely used to solve the dilemmas or, if used, they are found to be quite irrelevant. Lastly, it was discovered that teachers apply a variety of both professional and odd strategies to navigate through the dilemmas. The study concluded that teaching being dynamic, teachers cannot operate without encountering ethical dilemmas: forewarned is fore guarded. Secondly, though necessary, external legislation (laws and policies) can only constitute the necessary but not the sufficient condition for smoothly navigating through ethical complexities. Lastly, ethical dilemmas ultimately call for more strongly formed and informed consciences (internal legislation) rooted on a strong moral compass such as virtue ethics. Educational administration and management implications are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Ethical dilemma management, philosophy of education, educational administration and management

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## 1. Introduction

Although teachers are expected to play both academic and moral roles, among others [1], fulfilling both is not without challenges, including dilemmas [2,3,4]. Such dilemmas may spring from a contradiction between fixed educational policy and teachers' personal beliefs, or from teachers' interactions with other members of their role set [5]. The decisions that teachers take in such cases are not only educational but also societal, and thus require high standards of ethical thought [6]. However, how prepared are teachers for such high ethical thinking and application?

Whereas Uganda's Teachers' professional code of conduct requires that teachers be of good personality [7], the reality is different – ethical misconduct has continued to grow, including sexual harassment of minors and embezzlement of school funds [8]. How do teachers come to stoop so low! Some posit that, compared to other professions, teachers' work is associated with too much pressure [9], hence more dilemmatic situations, and hence the current study.

The study aimed at investigating the kinds of ethical dilemmas faced by secondary school teachers in Rubaga Division (Kampala - Uganda), and how teachers navigate through them. More specifically, the study sought;

- i. To find out the kind of ethical dilemmas prevalently faced by secondary school teachers.
- ii. To assess teachers' use of available legal frameworks to address ethical dilemmas.
- iii. To find out how teachers navigate through the ethical complexities they encounter at work.

## 2. Background

The term "teacher" refers to a person who has undergone training in learner instruction, in particular, and education, in general; implying acquisition of certain unique professional knowledge, skills and attitudes [10]. The teacher of focus for the current study is a secondary school teacher operating in Rubaga Division, Kampala (Uganda). This teacher may be a classroom teacher (mainly charged with student instruction and guidance) or a head teacher (largely doing administrative work). It is

assumed that either way there are ethical dilemmas regularly encountered.

An “ethical dilemma” is a problem in which issues of right and wrong are at stake; it springs from one’s conflicting obligations and usually demands taking complex decisions [3,11,12,13]. This study focuses on those ethical dilemmas (or moral conflicts) that are associated with teachers’ work [14]; that is, those that teachers usually encounter in their multiple relations with the different members of their (teachers’) role-set such students, parents and management [4,15]. Scholars particularly view teachers’ dilemmas as the tensions between teachers’ internal beliefs about their work and the external expectations imposed upon teachers [14]. According to [14], these tensions pivot around pedagogical, professional and democratic issues.

Normally ethics are better appreciated using philosophical lenses. The study therefore used two theories borrowed from philosophy. The first is the deontological ethical theory, which premises its moral contentions on an assumed existence of a “general morality” that follows doctrines of rights, duties, and/or justice [7]. Accordingly, the rightness or wrongness of an act is taken to be independent of the consequences it produces; an act is taken to be good or evil in and of itself [16]. However, although morality may be guided by rules – implying legal resolutions to ethical dilemmas – some dilemmas exist exactly due to absence of strictly rule-based solutions, or because they lie beyond the boundaries of existing regulatory regimes [2,17]. Such a limitation with “rule ethics” (deontology) warranted borrowing of another theoretical lens, namely the postmodern view of ethics (as presented by Zygmunt Bauman). [18] contends that since human existents live in different socially constructed worlds, no overarching ethical claims can be made; all ethics are relative to given socio-cultural contexts within which they arise, and hence no universal ethical givens [3,15]. The study hoped to gain from the balance occasioned by these two polar views of ethics and morality.

The study was carried out in a Ugandan socio-cultural setting, where formal education started in the late 1870s introduced by Christian missionaries [19,20]. However, it was not until 1927 that the first formal law to guide teacher ethics was passed in Uganda – the 1927 Education Ordinance [19]. This ordinance boosted teachers’ ethical conduct by both demanding for the registration of all teachers and providing for the punishing of undisciplined ones [16]. Thus, during colonial administration in Uganda, teacher ethics was not debatable [20]. However, from 1971, teacher ethical challenges begun appearing due to employment of unqualified teachers following President Idi Amin’s expulsion of Asians [7,16]. The situation further deteriorated with the liberalization of education services in the country (from the early 1990s), which made some schools start behaving like profit-maximizing firms [21].

Though not yet concretely taxonomised, today teachers’ dilemmas seem to range from classroom issues (such as cheating for students in national exams, [8]) to issues outside the school compound [20] such as Education Officers demanding for sex from female head teachers before signing their documents. Also a certain “pressure to

perform” compounds teachers’ dilemmas, whereby head teachers’, parents’ and students’ demands (over teachers) often conflict with each other.

Yet available research was done from a Higher education context [13] not that of secondary schools; or it approaches ethical dilemmas only from the perspective of teachers’ knowledge of the code of conduct [7]. Other studies relate teacher conduct with students’ academic performance only [16], leaving the issue of teacher ethical dilemmas largely unattended to. The current study believes that the issue of teachers’ ethical dilemmas is too critical of teacher practice in particular, and educational administration and management in general, to be left unexamined properly, hence the current study.

### 3. Literature Review

Available literature on teacher ethical dilemmas outside Uganda reveals that these dilemmas often result from teachers’ choices amidst different sets of principles [9]; for example, dilemmas due to school policies and teachers’ personal ideas, and between students’ best interests and school policies [2,22]. However, these studies are premised on foreign contexts, leaving the Ugandan/African education context unexamined.

For Uganda, [23] notes that whereas in the past different indigenous societies used their respective moral standards, today the same societies use both native and imported standards of ethical behaviour introduced by Eastern and Western countries. This two-fold set of standards might be one of the serious fonts of teachers’ ethical dilemmas [24].

Moreover, it is prescriptively posited widely that ethical control over teachers is to be done using one of two approaches [25] – the external, which alludes to use of legal frameworks like laws passed in parliament [17,26]; and the internal, which implies individual personal beliefs (teacher conviction) [27,28]. Yet in the Ugandan context, teacher ethics are said to be mainly controlled through external legal frame works such as the Teachers’ professional code of conduct, National Constitution, and The 2008 Education Act [29,30,31]. As much as each of these policies may be used to exert ethical control over teachers, the National Constitution remains the supreme source of all legal action [27]. However, in general, the ways in which teachers use the above legal frameworks in resolving ethical dilemmas remained to be established.

Available studies specifically hinging upon such legal frameworks do not show how teachers apply the written laws in question; for example, [32] notes that legal policies only provide the necessary frameworks for prosecuting teachers in courts of law, but they do not help teachers in resolving ethical dilemmas. Also [33] found that teachers failed to use the available legal frameworks for approaching ethical dilemmas, hence questioning the potential usefulness of such external legislation. However, [33] does not delve deep into how teachers actually fail(ed) to make use of the legal frameworks. Other available studies, such as [7] and [16], limit themselves to teachers’ knowledge of the code of conduct, and not on how teachers use the code to resolve ethical challenges. For [25], in developing countries (like Uganda) implementation

of such set laws has not been done mainly due to lack of funds. Thus, the current study sought to examine whether and how teachers make use of available legal frameworks to resolve ethical dilemmas.

However, according to [17,34,35], ethical dilemmas may be resolved using either one theory or another, or a combination of different theories. Teachers might therefore approach ethical dilemmas basing on universal moral rules (such as Kant's deontology) or on more relativist approaches (such as utilitarianism) [27]. Those teachers who believe in relativism are said to approach ethical dilemmas from different directions; that is, for them there is no fixed way of resolving an ethical dilemma but rather different ways [25]. On the other hand, teachers who believe in being controlled by (external) rules usually wait for the rules to tell them where their duty starts and where it ends [18]. However, with amplified complexity, which is characteristic of the Ugandan society today, new challenges arise that put new demands on teachers [36]; perhaps rendering both the law and government circulars wanting in providing ready ethical answers [32]. These considerations might allude to the importance of solid teacher consciences, although Ugandan teachers' formation and training in such deep holism is doubtful.

Literature names other probable ways of navigating through ethical dilemmas; namely, use of "trial and error", reflecting on what went wrong and then make future adjustments accordingly, or teachers simply giving up when they feel frustrated [33,37,38,39,40]. However, none of these studies addresses itself specifically to teachers' ethical dilemmas in the context of Uganda.

## 4. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive case study design. According to Gay as cited by [21], the least accepted representation for such a study is 10 percent. Accordingly, ten (10) schools out of the 92 schools in Rubaga Division were sampled. However, since there is no specific answer to the question of how many participants should be involved in a qualitative study [41], the researchers collected data from the study population until a point of saturation. This led to 52 teachers and nine (09) head teachers participating in the study.

Two instruments were used – an open-ended questionnaire and an interview guide. Fifty copies of the questionnaire were sent to all the ten schools. However, only 35 questionnaires (70%) were returned. Out of the planned 20 teachers for interview, seventeen (17) (85%) participated. On the other hand, out of the expected ten (10) head teachers, nine (9) were available for interview (90%). Seven out of the ten (10) schools selected were privately owned, and three were government owned. Sub-groups of the schools' population were represented in the sample in the same proportion as they existed in the population, that is, 7:3.

Reliability of the instruments was met by pilot-testing them. Whereas qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis; quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Finally, for ethics, permission to collect data was sought from school heads. Also head teachers and teachers were briefed about the study and

they had the authority to accept or refuse participation in the study. Besides, their identity was kept anonymous while reporting findings.

## 5. Findings

To enable a contextualized interpretation of the findings, respondents' bio-data are the first to be presented. Respondents included 33 (54.1%) male and 28 (45.9%) female teachers. These fell under the age brackets of 20-30 years (n = 29; 47.5%), 31-40 years (n = 19; 31.1%), 41-50 years (n = 7; 11.5%), plus 50 years and above (n = 6; 9.8%). On the other hand, respondents' teaching experience 1-5 years (n = 20; 32.8%), 6-10 years (n = 19; 31.1%), 11-15 (n = 19; 7%), 16 and above (n = 10, 16.4%). Respondents were therefore of appropriate experience to provide a variety of reliable answers. Next is a more particular presentation of findings, objective by objective.

### 5.1. Ethical Dilemmas Faced by Secondary School Teachers

The study discovered that teachers face a number of ethical dilemmas, which can be categorized into four themes, basing on the source; (1) Teacher professional roles/responsibilities vis-à-vis available resources; (2) School "policies" vis-à-vis teacher personal integrity; (3) Teacher interactions with different stakeholders; and, lastly, (4) Parents' and students' competing interests.

#### 5.1.1. Teacher Professional Responsibilities vis-à-vis Available Resources

There are ethical dilemmas that arise from conflicts between teacher roles and responsibilities, on the one hand, and available school resources, on the other. Where schools do not adequately facilitate teachers to fulfil their professional obligations, teachers find themselves in a dilemma; like one teacher T of a Science subject, who reported that,

*Sometimes the school does not provide enough laboratory materials and you find it hard to distribute the few available items to all students. You find that in subjects like Chemistry there are some students who have always shown no interest and then those who have always shown passion for the subject. I have to make a choice between giving more and enough chemicals to the students who have shown love for the subject and then less to those who show no interest. It's difficult to be fair to each and every learner [Teacher T, Teacher Questionnaire]*

However, there were also teachers who reported that the lack of resources notwithstanding, it is the teacher's duty to meet the individual needs of learners no matter the circumstances. One said;

*My main duty is to meet the individual needs of all my students. I achieve this through advocating for students' needs which places me in a difficult position in relation to colleagues, parents/guardians and even the school administrators... [Teacher Y, Teacher Questionnaire]*

These narratives imply that although teachers improvise to counter the scarcity of resources at school, they often find themselves in a dilemma as to how to treat all

learners equally, or how to cover up for what is not available.

The above findings are in agreement with [42] who posited that education systems like that of Uganda and other third world countries are struggling with high enrollments of children in schools amidst declining resources. This clearly means that teachers, as the main players in the use of the scarce resources, are at times placed between a rock and hard place as to how they should use the few available resources. However, the findings disagree with UWEZO as cited by [42] that teachers improvise and innovate when resources are not available. The majority do not.

### 5.1.2. Existing School “Policies” vis-à-vis Teacher Personal Integrity

Teachers reported that there are school policies that conflict with teachers’ personal integrity on such issues as pedagogical approaches and learner behaviour control. Some schools require of teachers to do things that they (teachers) think are unbecoming. For example, one teacher narrated that,

*At one of the schools I had just been employed, the Director of Studies [DoS] asked me to make sure that I give every student a high mark. He [DoS] said this because he wanted parents to get an impression that the school teaches very well, in line with his earlier communication to parents that the school had employed better teachers so they should expect better results. I personally thought this kind of policy was against my personal integrity as a teacher. But what to do, since I needed to keep my job [Teacher R, Teacher Questionnaire].*

Similarly, another teacher reported that,

*The school wants me to cover a 3 month’s syllabus in just 2 months. I personally feel ethically offended as a teacher and am at crossroads on what to do. I may have to lose my job if I fail to cover the syllabus as the school requires, but I also find it unethical to cover the syllabus hurriedly at the cost of students’ understanding [Teacher N, Teacher Questionnaire]*

Both teachers’ narratives reflect competing values between teachers’ integrity and school interests or “policy”. Schools unleash undue pressure on teachers by forcing them to take professionally questionable moves. Thus, teachers are not solely responsible for the ethically unsound decisions they often make.

These findings are in agreement with [43] who noted that institutions have policies which at times happen to contradict with teacher personal beliefs and integrity. This further agrees with [9] who argues that teachers contradict with policies such as examination and curriculum policies which they don’t find to be fitting.

### 5.1.3. Teacher Interactions with Different Stakeholders

This theme deals with ethical dilemmas that arise from teachers’ interactions with fellow teachers, parents, administrators and learners. For example, although school administrators are expected to guide teachers ethically, they at times require them to do things that breach teachers’ professional ethics, such as requiring them to inflate prices in budgets. Teacher W noted that,

*When making a budget for the laboratory equipment, the head teacher forces me to inflate the prices. Personally I think that is wrong [Teacher Y, Teacher Questionnaire].*

Similarly, another teacher noted that,

*When we organized students’ elections, the top administrators wanted me as the chairman electoral commission to change results so as to get a prefect who will fulfill their interests. To me doing such a thing is totally against teacher professional ethics. I was in a dilemma, whether to obey my bosses or do the most right thing where all students are supposed to be given an equal opportunity to select leaders of their choice [Teacher G, Teacher Questionnaire].*

However, some teachers reported ethical dilemmas springing from dealing with students’ parents and guardians. Some parents want teachers to act outside their professional ethics or personal integrity. A teacher noted that,

*The school has spent 5 months without paying us and I have a family to look after. However, at the end of last term I was approached by one of the parents to the students in my class, she wanted to pay me to help give the learner the examination questions so that he [the learner] goes through [them] before examination time, and then he gets a better grade. Sincerely speaking at that point I was very broke. But should I take the money? I was between a hard rock and a hard place [Teacher K, Teacher Questionnaire]*

Another example is about corporal punishments. As much as parents are aware that caning was abolished by the Government of Uganda, they still hold it in high esteem. Many of them encourage teachers to cane the children;

*Parents are much aware that the Ministry [of Education] abolished caning in schools and asked us to adopt better and non-physically abusive ways to discipline learners. However, there are parents who keep asking us to cane their children. They keep threatening that if we do not take action on the children, they will take them to other schools where there is caning. I find it ethically dilemmatic. We want high student numbers in our school, yet parents give such orders and threats [Teacher R, Teacher Questionnaire].*

The most common ethical dilemma under this third theme was the desire for teachers to protect their colleagues even when they have found them contravening the law. This was evidenced by teachers who see their colleagues “cook marks” [forge results] or engage in sexual relationships with learners, among others, and get confused as to what to do. One teacher narrated that,

*In our school we are not allowed to handle directly any money from parents or guardians. But I usually see a certain teacher who goes up to the extent of calling parents and he advises them that their children need coaching. He asks them to send extra money so that he offers the children extra help. I am almost forced to report that teacher because sometimes it’s too much. However, he is also good at instructing and produces good grades. My only fear is that he will be dismissed in case the administration gets to know [Teacher T, Teacher Questionnaire]*

Although the teacher was behaving unethically, he “produced” good student grades. Thus, the reporting teacher opted to give his unethical colleague a second chance!

Another example is that of a teacher who saw his colleague “cooking” examination results.

*The Head teacher told us to hand in student marks for Beginning of term exams since the [parents’] visitation day was approaching. Time for marking was not enough. So what some teacher did was: he just got a mark sheet and started awarding students marks arbitrarily basing on their previous performance in the End of term exams. Then he handed over results to the Head teacher but without marking students’ scripts! I as a professional wondered about this behaviour, and didn’t know how to handle!* [Teacher G, Teacher Questionnaire]

As narrated above, the teacher witnessed his colleague polluting examination results, he therefore had to choose between reporting him or not, each of which had negative consequences.

The above findings mean that the interactions that teachers have with other education stakeholders also bring about ethical dilemmas. The interactions affect teachers’ ethics positively or negatively. Thus, in their struggle to keep peaceful interactions with colleagues, teachers end up falling into ethical dilemmas.

However, one Head teacher noted that as administrators, they too face ethical dilemmas, for example when she dismissed a teacher because of the teacher’s indiscipline. Surprisingly, the School Director (owner) returned the teacher to work in the same school after two days.

*We had two good teachers who, however, had a high affinity for girls. They used to lock themselves in the computer lab with the girls. As Head teacher, I used my powers to dismiss the teachers because the girls used to complain about this issue. However, to my surprise, after two days, the Director called me to his office and he told me that we could not let these teachers leave school for reasons he said surpassed my understanding* [Head teacher A, Head teacher interviews]

Such incidents reveal how private school Heads are sometimes overpowered by their bosses to the extent of stomaching certain practices they would not personally want to tolerate, but for fear of losing their jobs.

These findings partially agree with [44] that ethics are all about relationships with others, hence teachers have to experience dilemmas as a result of their multiple interactions at work spaces. However, the findings disagree with [2] and [28] who note that instead of teachers confronting other education stakeholders, teachers should just make their (teachers’) beliefs clear from the very beginning. This can improve the relationships they have with other stake holders. Even then, teachers are left in a dilemma as par [31] who discourages teachers from making adverse reports to anyone on the conduct of fellow teachers without first informing the concerned teachers about the contents of the report.

#### 5.1.4. Parents’ Vs. Students’ Competing Interests

The last category of teachers’ ethical dilemmas comprises of those that come from parents’/guardians’ and students’ competing interests. An analysis of teacher narratives indicated that most teachers face ethical

dilemmas when trying to sort issues between parents/guardians and the best interest of the students. The first example is from teacher R who reported that;

*I have a student that is very good in sciences. He is interested in doing sciences yet the parents want him to do arts subjects simply because the parents want him to follow their footsteps. However, I as a teacher am now confused on what I should do, because I have tried to talk to the parents and they seem hesitant about it. At one point they thought I was pushing their child to follow what I say. Much as I see the boy capable, I may not do much so as to avoid conflicts with the parents* [Teacher R, Teacher questionnaire].

As seen above, it is clear that one of the highly valued ethical roles of a teacher is suppressed. This means that parents or guardians at times do not consider the teacher’s advice as important. However, one other teacher noted that, when they are making each decision, they always consider the best interest of the student given today’s highly competitive education market,

*As per now the education market is very competitive, the students now days have a very big stake in determining where to study from. If you make a decision that does not favor him/her, you may end up losing the student to another school. Therefore sometimes you find yourself at cross roads on the best decision to take* [Teacher R, Teacher questionnaire]

The challenge in the above case for the teacher is to make a decision whereby he has to ensure that he meets the best interest of the students. According to the above teacher, in case he makes a decision that does not favor the learner, he is more likely to lose him to another school. That implies that the current competition for students in different schools is also a major cause for teacher ethical dilemmas as teachers always have to work so hard so as to impress the learners so as to keep them at their schools.

Teachers reported also cases of conflicting ethically with parents to the extent of almost having physical fights; a case in point is narrated by teacher T,

*A teacher was at one time confronted by a parent in the presence of his learners. The parent was accusing the teacher for what he termed as harassing the son because of sending him back home for incomplete school fees. The teacher had been instructed to send all those who had incomplete fees and he was therefore working on directions of the administration. However, when the parent brought back the child, he confronted the teacher and he started beating him up. So the teacher was puzzled, whether to defend himself and fight back in front of the learners or just let it go* [Teacher T, Teacher questionnaire]

Thus, the teacher has to choose between defending himself and letting the parent suffocate him in front of the students. Once the teacher fights back, she will be considered unethical, and if he allows to be beaten, he will be considered lazy.

In a different case, the other teacher witnessed a dilemma where the parent protected his child who exhibited misconduct at school. Teacher R narrates that,

*At times I witness situations in which neither parents nor students behave in an appropriate way. For example students attacked and abused their teachers and their parents supported them, other times parents*

*insult teachers in the presence of their children thus showing their children that this behaviour is not bad at all.* [Teacher R, Teacher questionnaire]

In the above narrative, the teacher is witnessing a parent who encourages children to exhibit disrespect and poor conduct towards teachers, and on the other hand. The teacher is in a dilemma on who to blame for disrespect in that case as both the parent and the child have shown characteristics of disrespect.

On the other hand, teachers also noted that, at times schools education goals are not consistent with the expectations of the parents, for example one teacher noted that,

*We as teachers find ourselves conflicting with the way parents rear their children. Therefore, as much as you try to correct the child at school, he or she when changes to the old ways when he or she goes back home. Thus at times parents criticize us for values that we impart on their children that they may not like* [Teacher D, Teacher interviews]

According to the above narrative, the teachers is in an ethical dilemma, whether he should follow the way the child is reared at home or follow the school's policy on child rearing. Through this process, the teacher finds himself contradicting with parents and guardians of children.

In brief, the views of the teachers cited above show that, ethical dilemmas faced by teachers are at all levels of the teachers' interface with students, parents, administrators and even with fellow teachers. Implicit in the teachers' views is that they sometimes have to act in favor of their jobs. However, in most cases, teachers are not sure of what to do in relation to a particular ethical dilemma.

Yet in general these findings concur with [45] as well as [33] who found that competing values of students' best interests are the major sources of ethical dilemmas among teachers. However, [46] clearly state it that there is no specific definition for the best interest of the student; "best interest" varies from one society or school (of thought) to another. This makes it hard to exactly tell whether the teacher has acted in the best interest of the student or not.

## 5.2. Teachers' Use of Available Legal Frameworks in Addressing Dilemmas

The second study objective sought to find out how teachers used the available legal frameworks to address ethical dilemmas. These are legal frameworks such as the [29], [30] and [31]. In their responses, teachers reported that they rarely referred to these legal frameworks to address ethical dilemmas. For example, one teacher noted that;

*Sometimes ethical dilemmas arise when you're in class teaching, and at times it's not easy to master all the contents of the available frameworks which would imply that you have to first go back and read through the legal frameworks if you're to address the issue accordingly* [Teacher T, Teacher interview]

Similarly, another teacher observed that;

*Even if the legal frameworks are within easy reach, when they are sent from the Ministry or Government, they [public officials] do not organize any workshops on how to use them [policies] to solve ethical dilemmas.*

*We can't also use a document we do not know* [Teacher R, Teacher interviews]

More so, one other teacher noted that;

*Rules and regulations should not be followed automatically because of the complex nature of ethical dilemmas which requires critical thinking, not blind compliance. And on top of that such policies in and of themselves are by no means an adequate resource for preparing and sustaining moral professionals* [Teacher V, Teacher interviews].

The above findings mean that often teachers find the available legal frameworks to be irrelevant in solving their ethical dilemmas, for example when rules/policies are too complex for easy interpretation and application. That further means that teachers may intentionally refuse to consult available legal frameworks to resolve ethical dilemmas because they know the frameworks won't provide any direct solutions.

In this case, may be one Head teacher was justified in contending that;

*As much as it is useful to know the Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct and other guiding legal frameworks, let's remember that these provide only overall guidance for what we should do as professionals. They are usually inadequate resources for resolving specific ethical dilemmas* [Head teacher H, Head teacher interviews].

The above statement means that knowing the legal frameworks does not necessarily mean that one automatically becomes an expert in solving ethical dilemmas with ease. Similarly Teacher J noted that,

*In cases where the stated rule under the legal framework does not apply to a given situation, it is hard for teachers to infer to the fundamental values behind the legal frameworks to make ethical decisions in a short period of time. Therefore, at the end of the day, we just have to follow our consciences* [Teacher J, Teacher interview].

In the same context, one Head teacher noted that,

*Because of the open ended nature of the legal frameworks, we at times look towards our own understanding inferring that the legal frameworks are not suitable to help us resolve ethical dilemmas. Rather we use legal frameworks as general guidelines so as to show how we could act and we always go beyond these guidelines to use our own consciences, or we consult our colleagues* [Teacher Y, teacher interviews]

According to Teacher Y's narrative, teachers look beyond codes and run to their colleagues to seek for concrete advice on how to resolve an ethical dilemma. However, one wonders how empowered teachers are to give advice to each other. Teachers may need to be empowered to provide informed advice. This finding is in agreement with [38] who noted that legal frameworks (such as codes of conduct) cannot cover every possible incidence in the teachers' work, and therefore existing ethical dilemmas may not be solved by the available codes. This finding also agrees with [47] who note that some ethical dilemmas can only be resolved by consultation of colleagues. [39] and [40] agree, however adding that, when faced with ethical dilemmas, teachers should complement codes of conduct with their own professional experience so as to make sound decisions.

This view was echoed by a Head teacher who noted that, *The activities, realities and responsibilities involved in teaching far exceed what may be inscribed in the so called legal frameworks. Restricting one's ethics to principles in codes, laws and standards is severely restrictive* [Head teacher A, Head teacher interviews]

The finding implies that teachers find it odd to expect them to primarily follow written laws and policies. However, the finding disagrees with [48] who believes that it is knowledge of ethical obligations that is more likely to promote ethical behaviour.

Teachers further reported that at times they fail to match up to the standards of the code because what it says is different from what is actually practiced on the ground. For example one noted that,

*Some things in ethical codes are not applicable. The code contradicts many normal day to day issues. For example, popular culture and professionalism interpret dress code differently* [Head teacher T, Head teacher interviews].

Other respondents noted that legal frameworks are often quite dogmatic, full of dos and don'ts, leaving no room for personal assessment and application; they take teachers for granted. In this regard, one Head teacher observed that,

*The teachers' professional code of conduct, is mainly instructing teachers on the dos and don'ts. It starts with statements such as, "a teacher shall not", and "a teacher shall always". Such statements are more of orders for soldiers; they are not meant for teachers who deal with varieties of people from different cultural backgrounds* [Head teacher, Head teacher interviews].

Thus, many teachers are not feel contented with what is in the legal framework; hence need for more flexible guidelines. This means that even if teachers are availed with copies of codes of conduct, they find them to be quite closed-ended and enslaving, – not giving teachers a chance to think outside the fixed rules.

In brief, the findings under the current objective indicate that teachers' general use of legal frameworks in coping with and/or solving ethical dilemmas is not uniform. Whereas some teachers refer to the frameworks only to find them unhelpful; others are so biased against the frameworks that they do not seem to refer to them anymore. Teachers of both categories take codes of conduct to be too theoretical in nature to be of practical use in solving day to day dilemmas with ease. There is therefore a gap between theory and practice of legal frameworks use in the context of secondary schools in Rubaga Division.

It should also be noted that even those teachers who reported to have applied legal frameworks to resolve ethical dilemmas, they actually failed to mention specific examples of the dilemmas that they resolved using legal frameworks. This implies that a teacher's possession of a legal framework does not necessarily mean that the teacher knows how to use it.

The above findings are in agreement with [25] who concluded that teachers in developing countries like Uganda rarely use the available legal frameworks since in most cases teachers are preoccupied with other economic survival activities. However, the findings only partially agree with [8] who notes that when an ethical dilemma

arises in a school, educators can consult their professional code of ethics for guidance.

The fact that teachers find the legal frameworks less helpful, rhymes with [9] and [2] who note that although legal frameworks are fundamental to preserving ethical standards in teaching, they (frameworks) face many constraints.

### 5.3. How Teachers Navigate Through Ethical Complexities

This was the study's third objective. In their responses, teachers and Head teachers reported that there are no established guidelines on how to concretely deal with ethical dilemmas. Teachers mainly use their professional judgment and personal beliefs. For example, acting in the best interest of the parents, Teacher T narrated that;

*Sometimes parents bring for us children known as "hidden dropouts". These are learners who are not interested in learning. They do everything possible to be dismissed from school. For such cases, even when they do illegal actions like stealing others' food, you may need to spare them because you know they have no interest in studies. You just do continuous guidance and counseling* [Teacher T, Teacher interviews]

Thus, Teacher T chooses to act with a more sounding reason of ensuring that the learner stays in school. However, there are other teachers who, when faced with such dilemmas, leave them unattended to, because they lack knowledge of what to do, think that problems are far beyond their positions, have fear of potential consequences of getting involved, or feel that there is nothing they can do. For example, Head teacher M reported that,

*Am just holding this position because the Ministry [of Education] requires me to do so, otherwise the School Director [owner] is always at school and takes all decisions which in most cases overpowers my professional views as the Head teacher. In most cases when am faced with such a dilemma, there is nothing much I can do. I am not independent any more* [Teacher M, Teacher interviews].

Therefore, as much as teachers may want to resolve ethical dilemmas professionally, sometimes they are constrained by their bosses who do not give them a chance to exercise their powers. This further means that often teachers are not independent in their decision making, especially in private for-profit schools like that of Teacher M. This finding agrees with [2] and [33] who note that when some teachers confront ethical dilemmas, they choose simply to ignore due to fear of negative consequences, including distress from their bosses.

However, the finding is in disagreement with [45] who argue that at times teachers decide to pass over a specific decision to a colleague just in case the decision surpasses their position. The finding further disagrees with [34] who indicate that teachers always have solutions to ethical dilemmas, namely, either following laws or finding "other ways" which they find fitting, including seeking for advice. Yet advice given is not necessarily applicable to a particular case;

*Our seniors or mentors are very ready to advise us on different ethical dilemmas. But the advice given does*

*not necessarily turn into usable advice. I can therefore decide to ignore the advice. I do this in good faith [Teacher B, Teacher interviews].*

Such behaviour is in agreement with what [14] refers to as “principled resistance”.

There were also teachers who revealed that instead of turning to their bosses for advice, they used to turn to their senior colleagues, or to continuous professional development (CPD) as a way of gaining skills in coping with ethical dilemmas. However, many of such teachers later discovered that their senior colleagues and even CPD did not address their needs. One teacher narrated that,

*At first I thought that by turning to teacher development workshops, I would get solutions to some of the ethical dilemmas. However, none of the workshops directly addressed solutions to concrete ethical dilemmas. In fact most of the workshops only addressed pedagogical issues. We need teacher development workshops aimed at providing us with concrete solutions to ethical dilemmas [Teacher N, Teacher interview].*

These findings agree with [7] and [16] that senior professionals are meant to offer professional guidance like sensitization about the legal frameworks. Therefore, in principle, senior teachers play a vital role in guiding junior teachers for better ethical development, though the practice may be different. Thus, this study’s findings largely agree with [45] that teachers single handedly settle their ethical challenges apart from situations where they are in collision with their fellow teachers.

One other prevalent approach in resolving ethical dilemmas was through “trial and error”, as one teacher noted;

*We use trial and error. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t. You just need to reflect on what you have done and accordingly make future plans [Teacher W, Teacher interviews].*

The finding that teachers keep trying different approaches to solving ethical dilemmas is in agreement with [37] and [8] who note that teachers approach ethical dilemmas through trial and error, however when they fail, they reflect on what went wrong and try again. This further agrees with [38] who contends that teacher ethical dilemmas cannot be solved but resolved through managing them in different ways. Hence in determining the best answer to an ethical dilemma, teachers need to try out different ways [8].

However, given that teachers are dealing with youngsters, they [teachers] may easily make mistakes that are not easy to erase away from youngsters’ minds. Yet, in general, it is also impossible for teachers to categorically do away with all dilemmas; dilemmas are likely to keep recurring, hence need for both information and integrity.

## 6. Study Conclusions and Educational Administration & Management Implications

This study, which sought to explore the different ethical dilemmas faced by secondary school teachers in Rubaga Division (Kampala - Uganda), discovered that teacher interaction with stake holders of varied interests is the main trigger of ethical dilemmas. It also found out that

available legal frameworks are inadequate in addressing ethical dilemmas among teachers; and, lastly, that teachers’ pragmatic handling of ethical dilemmas sends conflicting messages to learners, hence need for a stronger moral compass such as virtue ethics.

The study therefore concludes that teaching being dynamic – actively involving different human existents on a daily basis – it just cannot operate without encountering ethical dilemmas. Such dilemmas are a part and parcel of not only being human, but, more so, of being and acting professional among human agents. Secondly, though necessary, laws (external legislation) do not constitute the sufficient condition for smoothly navigating through ethical dilemmas. They may only supply a strong starting point (necessary condition) for further reflection and debate. Ethical dilemmas ultimately call for more strongly formed and informed consciences and minds (internal legislation informed by virtue ethics, for example); particularly in the continuously complex world that teachers operate in today.

These conclusions lead to several implications for educational administration and management today. First, they point to an urgent call for educational administrators and managers (at school, district and national levels) to regularly organise refresher workshops for retooling teachers’ in moral reasoning and ethical practice. When teachers from different schools get together to share on the ethical dilemmas, which they face at work, and how they can navigate through them, it helps to prepare them for their next round of dilemmas.

A second implication is that of not only providing staff with copies of key policies on teacher professionalism, but also educating them on key contents and even down toning content for teachers’ application (synchronising policy guidelines with practical realities on the ground). This will help to close the gap between the theory and practice of legal frameworks.

Lastly, educational administrators and managers need to ever keep in mind the kind of key client they have – a young learner with a tender (delicate) conscience. It does not help leaving such young learners to the care of the teacher alone, without both administration and management also getting closely involved for mutual support. Remember the African saying (that): It takes a whole village to raise a child! Considering the kind of demands (pressures) surrounding teachers, as well as teachers’ lack of experience (sometimes), school administrators (such as Head teachers and Deputies) should not expect classroom teachers to do much unaided by the (more) seasoned example of school administration. Although ethical dilemmas are here to stay, they become less dilemmatic when the school community confronts them together as a team (of practitioners).

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