

SEX AND MORALITY AT TEACHERS' COLLEGES

Ami N. Sundar

Introduction

In recent years there has been a lot of talk on the standard of behaviour of student teachers while under training. There have been reports of certain incidents involving sex and morality on College campuses. Such behaviour/actions were branded as unprofessional and not befitting the status of teachers. A number of opinions have been expressed in the media, and likewise, interested groups have put forward their views either in favour of or against the argument. The springboard for a real controversy arose in 1981 when in the Parliament an Opposition member questioned the then Minister for Education about an alleged incident at Nasinu Teachers' College. The Minister in reply announced that he would keep such an institution clean of sex, immorality, drunkenness and violence.

Thereafter, discussions were held on numerous occasions with the student teachers and staff of the Nasinu Teachers' College on the above subject by the Ministry officials. It was evident however that people differed in their views and it became clearer to the writer that perhaps there was a need to gauge the opinion of the student teachers of the College and teachers who have gone through the College at one time or another. The purpose of this study was to establish the current thinking of the student teachers and teachers on this subject in the hope of developing an awareness in the decision-makers on the disciplinary code of behaviour expected at the College.

Subjects

The total student population, numbering 61 and 89 first and second year students respectively were involved. In addition, another 515 teachers from 39 primary schools, classified as urban between Suva and Nausori, were selected for their views on the topic.

Procedure

Each student teacher of the College was asked to fill in his/her opinion on the questionnaire attached in Appendix I. Then, the second year student teachers during one of their educational research periods visited the 39 schools mentioned above and had asked all the teachers to poll their views on the forms.

Analysis

Of the 150 student teachers, 144 filled in their views and of the teachers population, 82% responded to the questionnaire. It was interesting to note while the sex of the College population was equally matched the teacher population tipped very heavily (79%) in favour of the females. Similarly, 65% of all those polled were Indians while the Fijians and Others made 34 per cent and 1% respectively. The student teacher population of about 99 per cent were under the age of 25 years while only 9% of teacher population formed the same age category. A significant point worthy of note was that 37% of the teachers polled were of 40 years of age and over. It was also found that 41% of all teachers polled had less than 10 years of teaching experience with about 12% having 30 years or more of teaching experience.

On the various questions posed, it was found that 91% of teachers and 71% of student teachers did not approve of student teachers of both sexes being housed in the same building at the College. There were, however, 26 per cent student teachers who were in favour of such an option. The teachers (88%) and student teachers (53%) did not approve of sex among student teachers with some 36% of student teachers approving it. It was revealed that both the teachers (94%) and student teachers (71%) did not like pregnancies to occur and similarly 78% of teachers and 45% student teachers did not like such student teachers to be allowed to complete the course, though 50% of student teachers did want them to complete the course.

On the question of drinking on the College campus the teachers were strongly opposed (98%) to it and 65% of student teachers held a similar view. It was felt by 74% of student teachers that the present standard of behaviour at the College was a good one while the teachers were equally divided because of not knowing enough about the College rules. There was no doubt that 82% of teachers and 65% of students wanted to maintain a high standard of sex and moral behaviour at the College and over 50% in both the groups thought that presently the College was open enough to allow for free association. It was revealing also that teachers (82%) and student teachers (58%) did not want western influences to govern their code of behaviour. It was also felt by the teachers (78%) and student teachers alike (81%) that sex and morality should form a part of the teacher training course. Lastly, both the teachers (73%) and student teachers (80%) did not approve of tutors getting involved or having sexual relationships with student teachers.

Discussion

It was evidently clear that a large majority of teachers held conservative views about sex and morality. There were a number of issues like drinking, having sex or getting pregnant and encouraging student teachers to live together, which were seen as against their principles of morality. While the teachers in many respects had stronger views about upholding a high standard of behaviour, the student teachers were rather ambivalent on some of the questions, perhaps because they were involved in the survey itself. It was not clear whether the higher percentage of female teachers and the age differences between the teachers had any effect on the responses to some of the questions though one trend seemingly showed that the teachers held a more conservative view on sex and morality in Fiji's society. It was also clear that sex and morality should form a part of teacher training programme and that western influences be kept out when formulating the code of behaviour at teachers' colleges. The study demonstrated the fact that teachers are mindful of their professional status and any attempt to liberalise the code of behaviour would not be accepted by the society.

Conclusions

While the outcome of the study illustrates the conservative attitude on part of the student teachers of Nasinu and the teachers involved in the study, it also demonstrated the fact that Fiji's society was perhaps concerned about the sort of behaviour they expect from teachers on such a vital issue. The study points out that the present code of behaviour is satisfactory and any attempt to liberalise it would not be in the interest of the College and of Fiji's society as a whole.

4. Do you approve of pregnant student teachers to remain and complete the course at Colleges?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know
5. Do you approve of student teachers being allowed to drink on College campus?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know
6. Do you think the present standard of behaviour of student teachers at the Colleges is satisfactory?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know
7. Do you support the Teachers' Colleges to uphold a high standard of sex and moral behaviour?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know
8. Do you think the Teachers' Colleges are open in allowing free association of student teachers?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know
9. Do you think the Teachers' Colleges should allow Western influences to govern the code of behaviour?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know
10. Do you think the Teachers' Colleges should teach sex and morality as a part of the teacher training course?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

11. Do you approve of sex relationship between students and lecturers?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

12. Please state your expectations on the sex and morality in Fiji's society:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....