

Rating Lecturer-Related Classroom Academically Dishonest Practices in Ghana's Institutions of Higher Learning, Fred Awaah, University of Professional Studies, Ghana

Abstract

The falsification in higher education comes with it attended plethora of problems including academic corruption (Macfarlane, Zhang, & Pun, 2014). The menace has become one that is eating deep into the fiber of high education within the Africa region with increase media reportages of promotion, accreditation, enrolment and grade frauds. Curbing this situation seems not to have had much attention in practice like it is on print therefore threatening the quality of higher education to stakeholders. This assertion finds support in the works of Damtew (2018) that, there have been public outbursts on the level of falling standards in higher education in Africa which has been associated with academic fraud. These observations seem to be reflective of the general heights that academic fraud has attained in recent times in the higher education space in Africa. In their work Curbing Student Related Academic Corruption in Sub Saharan Africa, Awaah and Abdulai (in press) did not depart from the opinions of the earlier authors; they argue that the culture has been heightened by the demands for excellent certification with good grades rather than education. In conformance to this culture, academic stakeholders have been found in diverse dishonest practices that are reflective of the words of Okebukola (2016) that academic corruption is any type of cheating those accords a person undue advantage in an academic enterprise. Whiles the above authors have observed the phenomenon from other lenses; little has been done in the area of rating the identified forms of academic corrupt practices relating to lecturers specifically in their classroom duties. Anchored on the Social Learning theory examines the most recurrent form of lecture classroom-related academic corruption. Data were obtained from an online questionnaire with 114 respondents. The findings show that the most recurrent form of lecturer classroom related academic corruption in Ghana higher education is lecturers not making available to students their Interim assessment grades before the main examination (53.5%), followed by lecturers not completing syllabus before close of semester (22.8) and in the third place was a number of practice including lecturers coming to lectures late, not completing syllabus within the semester amongst other with 23.7%.

Keywords: academic dishonesty, Ghana's higher education, rating

Introduction

Academic corruptions involve every form of dishonest practices within an academic environment which undermines academic integrity and may provide undue advantage to an academic stakeholder. Usually it reflects in cheating in examinations, falsifying entry requirements for the purpose of gaining admissions into universities, plagiarism, hacking the IT systems of universities to change grades, trying or actually bribing lecturers for good but undeserving grades amongst others. Much as these practices have been identified with students, other stakeholders like lecturers, university administrators, and accreditation bodies amongst other have been identified with similar corrupt practices. As Damtew (2018) puts it,

“Academic fraud is not the sole preserve of students. Academics, staff and management are reported to have been involved in nefarious acts ranging from manipulating and doctoring grades, results and reviews to trading grades for sexual favors, popularly known as ‘sexually transmitted grades’. Ethnicity, gender and religious bias have been also identified as factors that undermine academic integrity in a number of countries (ibid). These practices have overtime compromised academic quality and have resulted in the churning out of poor-quality graduates, undermining the integrity of universities and compromising trust in the labor market.

In recent times, academic fraud seems very pronounced amongst lecturers with very obvious acts like plagiarisms, publishing in predatory journals, exchanging grades for sex amongst others being on the rise. While these practices are obvious and considered unethical, there are a number of lecturer classroom-related academic corrupt practices which undermine the credibility of the university environment which seem equally rising but has seen little attention as a result of acceptance by students, faculty and university administrators. Ample evidence exist that in most universities, some lecturers do not teach the entire syllabus before the end of the semester, others do not make available to students marks of their Interim Assessment (IA) scripts before student go on vacation, others do not present course outlines to students at the beginning of the semester while others report for lectures very late and exit very early or do not appear for lectures’ at all. The practices may seem non beneficial to any stakeholder but a true reflection of the highlighted reveals that, lecturers are usually the beneficiaries; making time to take care of their own business when they report late and exit early; making time for their own business or leisure when they do not make the requisite time to complete the syllabus with students; skipping topics they are expected to teach when they do not provide course outlines to students at the commencement of the semester and entering grades that may not be a true reflection of the students’ performance when they do not actually make time to mark and present to students their actual grades for interim assessments.

The Problem

Despite ample evidence that exists on the occurrence of classroom related Academic Corruption amongst lecturers in Ghana’s higher education, there seems to be little evidence regarding the most occurring form amongst all the acts considered unethical by lecturers pertaining to the classroom. This research fills the gap in the area of academic corrupt acts by lecturers in relations to their work in the classroom and ranking the acts in order of frequency of occurrence in Ghana’s higher education.

Objectives of the Study

This paper identifies the four-lecturer classroom-related academically dishonest practices with the aim of finding out which of them is the most predominant in Ghana’s higher education, the causal factors to these dishonest practices and curative measures to curb the rising menace in Ghana’s educational system. In line with this, the following research questions will be answered;

- What is the most frequently occurring lecturer classroom-related Academic Corrupt practice in Ghana’s higher education?

- What is the cause of the identified forms of lecturer classroom-related Academic Corruption in Ghana higher education?
- What measures can be used to solve the identified forms of lecturer classroom-related Academic Corruption in Ghana's higher education?

Theoretical Framework

Literature has acknowledged the various forms of academic corruption as a major problem that occur as a result of high rate of dishonest practices among students and the resultant interference on learning and evaluation procedures in lecture rooms (Michaels & Miethe, 1989). In order to explain the phenomenon of academic corruption relating to lecturers and their work in the classrooms in Ghana's higher education institutions, there is the need to adopt theories that will provide more insight on academic corruption. Theories are propositions that explain social phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, the Social Learning Theory is adopted.

The Social Learning Theory is a psychological theory of deviance that is developed from a behavioral change (Lersch, 1999). Advocates of this theory see violation of rules as learned behavior that is attained and preserved through the same process as conforming behavior (Akers et al, 1979). The social Learning Theory argues that people's behavior is influenced by the environment in which they find themselves through observational learning (Bandura, 1977, Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961). Akers (1985) argues that the tendency to engage in academic corruption or desist from it starts from the family. However, the most important influence on students comes from the behavior and attitude of their peers and/or instructors (lecturers).

Literature Review

Academic corruption has been viewed from diverse spectacles by different scholars. Depending on the location, the nature of the academic fraud, and what is most prevalent within the environment, scholars have opined similarly and differently on the concept. Okebukola (2016) for instance opines that academic corruption is any type of cheating those accords a person undue advantage in an academic enterprise. The definition reflects the nature of academic corruption in Africa where the main focus is cheating in examinations, promotions, accreditation of institutions or other related instances. The strength of his opinions is clearly evidenced in the very obvious reason why stakeholders embark on academically dishonest practices in Africa (cheating). However, his opinion failed to consider instances where academic corrupt practices occur but do not actually result in any form of benefit to the stakeholder. For instance, many lecturers would mark scripts of students but do not present the scripts to the students before the close of the semester. This clearly is a practice which is not honest and can be classified corrupt but clearly, it does not advantage the stakeholder who is the lecturer although, psychologically, it disadvantages the student who expects to know his/her performance in the interim assessment before the main examination. Despite these criticisms, his observation clearly adds value to previous researches in this subject by emphasizing on the very obvious motive for academically corrupt practices, which is to

benefit stakeholders. Okebukola's work seem to find support in the works of Baig (2018) that academic corruption are unfair selection/promotion within the institute, appointments through nepotism or favoritism, professorial malpractice, favoritism given to selected students, unfair and biased assessment of grades, stolen resources from budget, exam questions sold in advance, forcing students to drop out, tendering process violation and illegal fees and ghost teachers. The opinions of both Okebukola and Baig find similarity in the very clear emphasis on cheating. The distinguishing opinion between the two remains in the emphasis made by Baig on the various forms of academic corruption while Okebukola summarizes all the thoughts in a short definition.

In Africa, though many instances of these corrupt practices seem evident, it is increasingly clear that lecturers are becoming a causal factor to the growing menace with most of them being guilty of either reporting for lectures late, exiting lectures before the expected time or not attending lectures regularly. This has had negative effects on students thus affecting academic quality over time. In her work *Lecturers' Competences and Students' Academic Performance*, Muzenda (2013) reports that subject knowledge, teaching skills, lecturer attendance and lecturer attitude have significant positive influence on students' academic performance. Her positions are one that should encourage rigorous reforms by institutions of higher learning especially in Africa to enact new laws that will ensure lectures attend lectures and deliver cause instructions within the time allotted to achieve the desired results of the course. While the positions of Muzenda still make a lot of relevance in literature, other writers may justify lecturer non-attendance to lectures on the increasing technology that make it easy to lecture from a distance. Such opinions have however witnessed counters by the writings of Billings-Gagliardi, and Mazor, (2007) that fears of the increasing availability of technology-enhanced educational materials has a negative impact on lecture attendance seem unfounded. While African institutions of learning are still engaging stakeholders in the many challenges related to academically dishonest practices, the issue of syllabus or course outlines being made available to students at the beginning of each semester seem to pose yet another challenge to managers of higher education. In their research *effect of Syllabus Tone: Students' Perceptions of Instructor and Course*, Harnish and Bridges, (2011) report that it is not uncommon for students to complain that faculty are unapproachable, while faculty complain that students are not engaged. Such perceptions, especially when formed at the start of a semester, can impact what students learn and how instructors teach; therefore, it is critical that these perceptions are prevented if a course is to be successful. A good starting point is the syllabus, which does not only inform students about a course and its requirements, but also creates a first impression about the instructor and his or her attitudes toward teaching. The opinion of Harnish and Bridges (2011) is clear testament that, for students to be courageous about their course and the tutor, a good starting point will be to make available to students the course outline or syllabus for the semester. A critique of her report however is the very obvious fact that, it is not enough for students to have the syllabus - it is important for lecturers to instruct professionally while students also make ample efforts to study the contents of the course outline. A good blend of this reduces the burden of the instructor especially when he/she is equipped with the skills, knowledge and attitude needed to perform on the job.

Students' awareness of their grades usually is a motivator to their continual input to studies, thus there is the need for lecturers to make known to students their results at all stages of examinations that students may embark on. While this is common a practice and adhered to by lecturers, in a number of instances, lecturers do not make available to students the results of their interim assessments before examinations which have adverse effects on student performance. This finding supports the works of Taras (2003) that students' expectations of their grades were closely related to the amount of time and effort which they had invested in their work. This was external to the actual standard of their work and their awareness of this.

Methodology

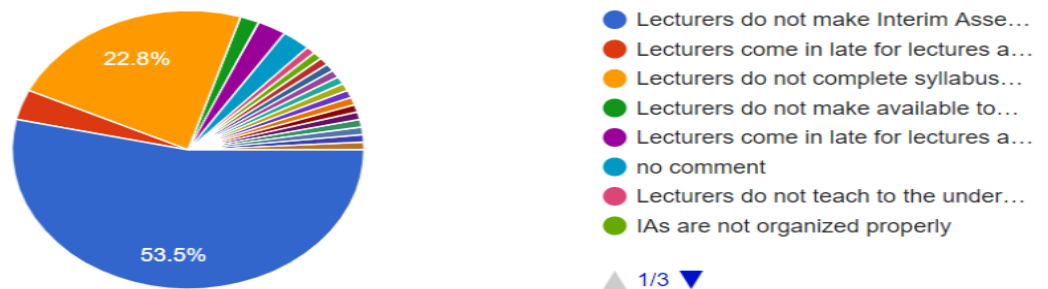
The population for this study comprises of all current university students in Ghana at 2018/2019 academic year. A snowball sampling technique was used to reach the sample population. However, a total of 114 students responded to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was created through Google forms and administered to students through social media platforms and electronic- mails. The students' responses together with theories and literature reviewed on the subject is the basis of the analysis.

Findings

Graph 1: Responses on the most Recurrent form of Academic Corruption in Ghana's Institutions of Higher Learning

Which of the following is the most occurring form of classroom related dishonest practice of your lecturers? (Please tick only one)

114 responses



The graph above rates lecturers not making interim assessment marks available to students before examinations with a total percentage of 53.5%. Lecturers coming into the classroom late and exiting early or not appearing for lectures at all rates second with a percentage of 22.8. Other practices such as lecturers not completing syllabus before close of semester, lecturers not making available to students the course outline, improper organization of interim assessments and others accounted for the remaining 23.7% of the other classroom dishonest practices by lecturers.

Discussion of Results

Lecturers do not make Interim Assessment grades available to student before close of semester was rated the most occurring lecturer classroom-related academic corruption in Ghanaian universities with a record 53.5% of respondents alluding to this. Respondents attributed the inability of lecturers to make available interim assessment marks to students before the close of the semester to a number of factors. One of the reasons identified is the inability of lecturers to mark interim assessment scripts. A respondent aptly summarizes this in a few words: *“They do not mark the IA papers”*.

Respondents attributed this to lecturers being lazy, lack of effective supervision by management to ensure lecturers avail IA marks to students, lecturers sometimes withhold IA grades in order not to discourage persons who did not perform, lecturers avoiding being questioned by students for grades wrongly awarded, family pressures and lack of time due to part time teaching in other institutions. It is to be noted that, students are affected psychologically when their grades are not made known to them at a reasonable period after examination. This has the tendency of affecting their performance in subsequent examinations. This assertion is supported by the works of Taras (2003) that students' expectations of their grades were closely related to the amount of time and effort which they had invested in their work.

Rated most concurrent lecture classroom related academic corruption is lecturers not completing syllabus before the close of the semester with a percentage of 22.8. Respondents attributed this to frequent absenteeism of lecturers, most lecturers teach in more than one University hence do not have time to complete syllabus. In addition to laziness, some lecturers lack certain skills to teach and too much contents for a given course. In the word of one respondent, *“Because the slides they structure for the semester is too much”*.

When lecturers do not complete syllabus within the semester, it reduces student confidence in the course and also the lecturer. This has tendencies of undermining studies since students are likely not to give much attention to the given course. This act has however become an acceptable norm by students, lecturers and university authorities, making lecturers considering the act normal. The deviance behavior is not new in literature. The continual perpetration of this act finds conformance with the Social Learning theory which is a psychology of deviance. Authors like Lersch (1999), Akers et.al (1979) and Bandura (1977) have espoused that advocates of this theory see violation of rules as learned behaviors that is attained and preserved through the same process as confirming behavior.

The respondents rated lecturers coming to lectures late and exiting early or not appearing for lecturers in most instances as part of the last categories of lecturer classroom related academic corruption which formed part of the remaining 23.7%. They attributed this to factors like personal busy schedules of lecturers and laziness on the part of lecturers.

This occurrence in the Ghanaian higher educational institutions has negative effects on students thus affecting their academic quality over time. Muzenda (2013) puts it differently

“subject knowledge, teaching skills, lecturer attendance and lecturer attitude have significant influence on students’ academic performance”.

The respondents rated lecturers not making course outlines available from the beginning of the semester as part of the remaining 23.7% rated last. Such perceptions, especially when formed at the start of a semester, can impact what students learn and how instructors teach; therefore, it is critical that these perceptions are prevented if a course is to be successful. A good starting point is the syllabus, which not only informs students about a course and its requirements, but also creates a first impression about the instructor and his or her attitudes toward teaching. This position is supported by the works of Harnish and Bridges (2011) that, for students to be courageous about their course and the tutor, a good starting point will be to make available to students the course outline or syllabus for the semester.

Conclusion

This study rated the classroom related to academic corruption among lecturers in Ghana’s Higher Educational Institutions. The study concludes that, lecturers do not make interim assessment grades available to student before close of semester was most occurring lecturer classroom-related academic corruption, with lecturers not completing syllabus before the close of the semester rated second. Others such as lecturers coming in late and exiting early or not appearing for lecturers, lecturers not making course outlines available from the beginning of the semester and others were collectives placed in the 3rd place. This occurrence of these academic dishonesty is largely as a result of lecturers being lazy, lack of effective supervision by management to ensure lecturers avail IA marks to students, family pressures and lack of time due to part time teaching in other institutions, frequent absenteeism, lecturers are not meant to teach or lack certain skills to teach students, too much contents for a given course, failure on the side of the management of the university or faculty and forgetfulness on the part of lecturers.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations have been made in line with the identified practices. They are discussed under the appropriate headings.

Lecturers Do Not Make Interim Assessment Grades Available to Students before Close of Semester

In line with the finding that management is lax on supervision of lecturers, it is recommended that management makes it a policy to ensure Interim Assessment marks are made known to students within a stipulated period to enable students aware of their performance before the main examinations. Also, as a matter of policy, student representatives in the class should be empowered through an institutional reform to enable them question lecturers who do not make Interim Assessment marks known to students before the end of the semester. This will reduce fear of victimization by students to confront lecturers on the issue. In line with the finding that lecturers do not mark interim assessment scripts; compulsory early marking is recommended to ensure lecturers make available to students their scripts and grades before the main

examination. Further, to ensure all lecturers comply with marking policy, there should be a portal that displays all Interim Assessment marks for the semester before exams. Lecturers who do not mark will be exposed by the portal for appropriate sanctions. Surveys like this should be conducted after the IAs so that students will know the lecturers who do not submit their marks to the students.

Lecturers Come in Late for Lectures and Exit Earlier or Do Not Appear for Lectures at All

In line with the finding that lecturers come in late and exit early, it is recommended that, there should be a clock in and clock out systems for lecturers to ensure they work in line with the expected schedules of the university in the classroom. Further, there should be regular lecturers' assessment on attendance by the university. Attendance log book should be made available in various lecture rooms each day. This should be backed by reviews by management and appropriate actions taken by management on defaulting members. Regular checks on lecturers by an assigned officer of the university should be in place.

Lecturers Do Not Make Course Outlines Available to Students at the Beginning of the Course

Hinged on the finding that lecturers are guilty of this as a result of lacking the requisite skills, it is recommended that lecturer are equipped with the skill, knowledge and attitudes needed to teach the entire contents of the course. This can be done through periodic trainings. Universities should ensure a portal is created to host all course outline for the semester.

Lectures Do Not Complete Syllabus Before end of Semester

Prescribed penal measures should be meted to lecturers when found guilty. Students' assessment on lectures should be taken more seriously and necessary sanctions meted out to underperforming lecturers. Each course should be taken at least twice a week in order to help lecturers complete their syllabus for the semester.

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