THE PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARDS LECTURERS AT **A GHANAIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT: *This study sought to determine how students perceive their lecturers and their attitudes towards same at a university in Ghana. The study adopted descriptive survey approach which utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Data were gathered from students from twelve academic departments in four selected colleges of the University. A simple random sample of 652 students participated in the study. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data which were analysed with the aid of SPSS version20. Qualitative data were gathered using interview which were analysed using content analysis methods presented through verbatim quotations of the respondents. The study found that respondents evaluated lecturers as strong in areas that include knowledge of subject; use good examples; stick to the syllabus; examples related to covered areas; and respect for, and interest in students but weak in teaching study techniques; providing interesting and meaningful learning activities; providing prompt and effective feedback; examinations allowing students to express their knowledge freely; and sharing personal experiences were rated poorly by the respondents. The results further show that students had positive attitudes towards lecturers by regarding them as role models in this study. It is, therefore, concluded that while there were strengths in lecturer's attributes in the university, there were also weakness. Recommendations were made to improve effectiveness of students-lecturers interaction.*

KEYWORDS: Attitudes, Students' Perception, Lecturers' Knowledge, Credibility.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly diverse and complex teaching and learning environment in institutions of higher learning, the area of primary concern is quality teaching. Therefore, attracting qualified lecturers has become the utmost consideration in institutions of higher learning. The expectation of every educational institution and general society is that lecturers would help raise the level of students' motivation to learn so that students' academic and non-academic achievements can be enhanced.

Over the last decade, research studies attempted to identify the kinds of teacher behaviours which were perceived by students to be important in helping or motivating their learning. The results of these studies (mostly in western countries) imply from the students' viewpoint that a good knowledge of the subject matter was not as important as one might expect at the university level (Dyson, 1996). Dyson's study of students' perceptions indicates that stimulation, availability and helpfulness, knowledge, preparation and organization, as well as concern and respect for students, are the vital factors influencing students' learning. In a similar study conducted by Palmer (2000) the results show that, students place an equal or higher value on basic teaching skills such as the ability to explain clearly, encourage interaction, and on the ability to motivate students by displaying enthusiasm and using a range of interesting ways to present content in the classroom.

Similarly, studies have reported students' expectations of their lecturers to include mixed traits (personal & professional) as well. For instance, Ramsden (2003) reporting on an Australian study suggested that students identified helpfulness, timely and extensive feedback, sympathetic staff, good quality explanations, and creating interest and motivation as the characteristics of good teaching. In line with Ramsden's report was that of Forrester-Jones (2003) who suggested three most important characteristic of a good lecturer - accessibility, enthusiasm, and passion. Adding to the list of studies on lecturer perception is the research study of Voss and Gruber (2006), which reveals that students prefer lecturers who are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, approachable, and friendly.

In a bid to recognize students' voices in academia, further studies (Forrest-Jones, 2003; Xiao and Dyson, 1999) have identified teaching strategies students expect from their lecturers as well. They include knowledge, communication, interest, and respect. Excellent teachers, according to Hattie (2003) and the University of Minnesota (2011), should have a positive attitude, good problem solving skills, monitoring of students' progress, and be passionate about teaching and learning. These writers appear to agree on several quality characteristics of good university teachers.

A Ghanaian case of students perception of their lecturers was reported by Anyan, Gyebi, and Yeboah (2014) their study cited two main attributes desired by students in the study collaborated earlier works (Voss and Gruber, 2006; Ramsden, 2003; & Forrester-Jone, 2003) citing personal and professional attributes. On personal competencies, the following were found: friendliness, patience, paying attention to weak students, personal appearance, love, and going extra miles to assist students. With regard to professional competencies, the following were found: good knowledge of the subject matter they teach, punctual to lectures, teach with teaching materials, and motivating students.

Indeed, reflection on teaching and how to improve student learning has become important aspects of every lecturer's job. The aim of improving educational quality invites the question of the extent to which the lecturer aids the process. As noted by Milliken and Barnes (2002), the learning needs of students have not been sufficiently acknowledged in institutions of higher learning. These issues raise questions that need to be considered by educational administrators. They also raise questions at the personal level regarding one's own practice and one's commitment to student learning. As lecturers progress with their day to day operation in the classroom, they need to know whether the implementation of good and effective teaching initiatives and strategies used are well received by the students. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse university students' perceptions of what makes a good university lecturer.

Ghanaian lecturers are also expected to contribute to quality teaching and learning, hence, the expectation of society on education appears to be that students who graduate from universities would have acquired the relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes and expertise required to enhance their productivity. Unfortunately, issues are sometimes raised by employers about the quality of products of universities in Ghana regarding relevant knowledge, skills and competencies in their discipline or training as well as the general knowledge and attitudes required to make them fit into society.

Despite the importance of knowledge about students' perception and attitudes towards university teachers as key informant to effective teaching and learning and the abundance of research on these aspects of the school setting in many communities in America, Europe and elsewhere (e.g. Voss and Gruber, 2006; Milliken & Barnes, 2002), there appears to be a little

of such studies in African communities, especially in Ghanaian universities. This study is, therefore, desirable to extend knowledge on the subject in contemporary Ghanaian university environments dominated by high demand for quality university education. This paper, therefore, was set out to investigate students' perception of lecturers, and also, examine their attitudes towards lecturers. Consequently, two main research questions guided the study as:

1. What are the perceptions of students about lecturers' attributes regarding their professional responsibilities?

2. What is the nature of students' attitudes towards their lecturers?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To achieve the objectives of the study, a descriptive survey research design was adopted. The design permitted the researcher to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data in order to appreciate how the two complement each other in helping to understand the issues at stake. By this design, students' perceptions of their lecturers' attributes were established on the basis of both statistical and thematic evidence.

Study Sample

Random sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. Twenty students (20) from each academic level (level 200, level 300 and level 400) other than Year 1 students were randomly selected from (12) academic departments to participate in the study. Therefore, 652 students from level 200 to 400 constituted the samples for this study. However, 30 significant others were contacted for one-on-one interview to gain an in-depth knowledge about the emerging issues. The interviewees included 10 lecturers and 20 students from a teacher education university.

Research Instruments

A questionnaire employed by Koutrouba, Baxevanou, and Koutroumpas (2012) for a study of high school students' perceptions and attitudes towards teacher power in the classroom in Greece was adopted and reviewed to suit the Ghanaian context. Also, an interview protocol was followed to explore the lived experiences of students on their views on their interactions with lecturers in the qualitative data gathering process.

The face validity of the survey instrument was done by colleague lecturers, whilst Quality Assurance practitioners, retired lecturers, professors, past student leaders and past students with adequate knowledge in the area under investigation provided the content validation results. The instrument was subsequently reviewed and restructured to minimize ambiguities of expressions and statements. The reliability of the instrument was also determined by using the test re-test reliability technique. In this procedure, the draft instrument was administered to 20 respondents drawn from a different university in the same city, outside the study area but with similar characteristics as those in the main study. A correlation coefficient of 0.72 was obtained indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. The questionnaire data was organized under themes, while the audio tape recorded interview data were transcribed after listening to each tape repeatedly for data immersion. The quantitative data were analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Service Solutions version 20 (SPSS) statistics. The minimum level of lecturer's performance for this study was assessed using MS ISO (2000) standard. Content analysis was also used to analyse qualitative data collected. Codes were assigned and themes generated from the discussions. However, verbatim quotations were also used to support the quantitative data based on mixed method approaches to data reporting (Creswell, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Before administering the instrument, permission was sought from the Registrar and participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their confidentiality assured to conduct the study in the University was sought and granted. Indeed, the university was not prepared for their name to be mentioned. Participants were told that participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the liberty to opt out of the study at any stage if they so desired.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Biographic Information of Respondents

The data for the study was drawn from students of diverse backgrounds in the study university. Table 1 shows a brief description of the survey participants' biographic details. The male respondents were more than the females by 21% (n = 134). As a reflection of the age statistics in the university, 97% (n = 632) of the participants were below 30 years with 3% (n = 19) between 31 and 40 years. Data obtained from different level of university education was almost the same (Year 2 - 34.8%; Year 3 - 37.7%; Year 4 - 27.5%).

Table 1: Biological Details of Students

Variable	Variable Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	393	60.30
	Female	259	39.70
Age	Under 30	632	96.90
	31-40	19	2.90
	41-50	1	0.20
Programme of Study	Science & Technology	359	55.10
	Art & Social Sciences	293	44.90
University Level	Year 2	227	34.80
	Year 3	246	37.70
	Year 4	179	27.50
Student Status	Fee-Paying	147	22.50
Nationality	Ghanaian	608	93.30
	Non-Ghanaian	44	6.70

Source: Field Data, 2014. (n = 652)

Lecturers' Knowledge and Credibility

Lecturers' knowledge and credibility was measured using a five-point Likert type scale in the quantitative data. Table 2 presented the findings based on students' degree of consent to items referring to lecturers' attributes/actions which are considered to be linked to the display of a lecturer knowledge and credibility in the university. About 32.4% of respondents rated lecturers' ability to teach study technique as 'slightly' with the lowest mean score (M = 2.96) among lecturers' knowledge and credibility.

Table 2: Students' Perceptions of Lecturers' Knowledge and Credibility

Attributes	Not at All	Slightly	Moderately	Much	Very Much	Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
Have sound and high degree content knowledge of discipline	18 (2.8%)	54 (8.3%)	153 (23.5%)	202 (35.3%)	197 (30.2%)	3.82
Go beyond Textbooks	36 (5.5%)	98 (15%)	199 (30.5%)	202 (31%)	117 (17.9%)	3.41
Combine practice with theory	38 (5.8%)	89 (13.7%)	203 (31.9%)	208 (31.9%)	114 (17.5%)	3.44
Teach study technique	57 (8.9%)	153 (23.5%)	253 (38.8%)	135 (20.7%)	54 (8.3%)	2.96
Relevant real world examples in lessons	30 (4.6%)	88 (13.5%)	195 (29.9%)	204 (31.3%)	135 (20.7%)	3.50

Source: Field Data, 2014, (n = 652)

However, a significant number of respondents (65.5%) perceived lecturers as having much sound and higher degree content knowledge of their academic disciplines with the highest mean score (M = 3.82). This is consistent with the interview data collected. For example, both students and lecturers commenting on this responded:

> They [Lecturers] know their subject area and deliver very well. I [student] see them as highly qualified for the position and have specialist knowledge in their subject area and able to pass the knowledge to students (Student 1).

Similarly, another student stated:

> I think my lecturers' have adequate knowledge of their subject areas because when they teach I understand and obtain very good grades in their mid-semesters and end-of-semesters exams (Student 3).

This finding collaborates Chauraya, Madzanire, Maphosa, and Zikhali (2014), and Schleicher's (2012) view that without content mastery, the teaching endeavour becomes futile.

The results, however, established that lecturer's weakness to teach students study techniques was low. Respondents rated this item low. Some of the views expressed by the respondents in this regard were:

> To me [sic], I think lecturers, i mean all lecturers do not help us when it comes to learning, all what they know [sic] is teaching, teaching without showing us how to learn the stuff so that we can produce what they teach us during examinations, no wonder some students continue to trail papers. (Student 10).

Helping students to better regulate their learning through the use of effective learning strategies is very crucial to students as they pursue their education. The results, therefore, suggest that effective study skills are of concern to students in this study. With regard to lecturer's ability to use good examples in their lessons, participants' rating was high. The results, therefore, suggest that respondents were satisfied about their lecturer's delivery approach.

Students' Views about Lecturers' Content Delivery

The second research objective for this study sought to examine how students viewed their lecturers' lesson delivery approaches. From the results presented in Table 3, 18.7% of respondents rated lecturers' ability to provide interesting and meaningful learning activities (M = 3.32) as the lowest among the items considered. Below 50% (n = 322) of respondents believed their lecturers showed enthusiasm in their works with 37% (n = 205) moderately thought so.

Table 3: Students' Perceptions of Lecturers' Instructional Delivery

Attributes	Not at All 1	Slightly 2	Moderately 3	Much 4	Very Much 5	Mean, M
Are enthusiastic.	22 (3.4%)	70 (10.7%)	238 (36.5%)	205 (31.4%)	117 (17.9%)	3.48
Have strong and unambiguous presentation skills.	22 (3.4%)	79 (12.1%)	235 (36%)	235 (36%)	81 (12.4%)	3.42
Provide interesting and meaningful learning activities.	25 (3.8%)	97 (14.9%)	253 (38.8%)	200 (30.7%)	77 (11.8%)	3.32
Give clear explanations.	12 (1.8%)	88 (13.5%)	239 (36.7%)	203 (31.1%)	110 (16.9 %)	3.48
Use good examples.	17 (2.6%)	47 (7.2%)	203 (31.9%)	227 (34.5%)	153 (23.5%)	3.68

Source: Field Data, 2014. (n = 652)

The data, revealed that 32% (n = 208) of respondents perceived lecturers' use of good examples as 'moderate' (M = 3.68). This did not differ much from the interview data as students in responses stated:

> *Some lecturers continue to use the old materials and the old ways of doing things[traditional learning environment] thereby not making their lectures interesting, in fact, some continue to teach without power points making it difficult for some of us*

to understand (Student 13). Another student reflecting on this said "The view that lecturers continue to use old learning materials has implications for technology integration literacy and multimedia design. When lecturers use instructional technology, students' diverse learning styles are perhaps accounted for. (Student16).

How Students View Lecturers' Organisation and Preparation

Five constructs were used to measure how students view their lecturers' lesson organisation and preparations in the university. According to the results in Table 4, 30.6% of the respondents rated lecturers' ability to provide prompt and effective feedback on assessment (M = 3.05%) as moderate (lowest) among the items considered under lecturers' organisation and preparation. The results, however, indicated that 68.9% of the respondents rated lecturers' ability to stick to the syllabus (M = 3.89) as the highest among the items considered.

Table 4: Students' Perceptions of Lecturers' Organization and Preparation

Attributes	Not at All 1	Slightly 2	Moderate ly 3	Much 4	Very Much 5	Mean, M
Provide comprehensive syllabus with content and methodology.	28 (4.3%)	60 (9.3%)	173 (26.5%)	258 (39.6%)	133 (20.4%)	3.63
Communicate clear course objectives	17 (2.7%)	71 (10.9%)	193 (29.6%)	212 (32.5%)	159 (24.4%)	3.63
Lay out all materials needed for assignments.	44 (6.7%)	124 (19.0%)	237 (36.3%)	163 (25.0%)	84 (12.9%)	3.18
Provide prompt and effective feedback on assessment.	65 (10.0%)	134 (20.6%)	222 (34.0%)	167 (25.6%)	64 (9.8%)	3.05
Stick to the syllabus.	20 (3.1%)	37 (5.7)	146 (22.4%)	245 (37.6%)	204 (31.3%)	3.89

Source: Field Data, 2014, (n = 652)

Participants commenting on the same issue stated that:

> *Most come to class well prepared to the extent that they are able to respond to questions posed by students. (Student 7).*

The results agree with that carried out by Chauraya et al (2014) in Zimbabwe indicating that students perceived lecturers as implementing teaching and learning activities in accordance with the course outline (syllabus).

Equally important to lecturers' ability to stick to the syllabus, 36% (n = 199) participants, however, perceived a weakness in lecturers' ability to provide prompt and effective feedback. The implication is that students are not giving enough feedback services to monitor their academic progress. On fairness, the study showed that most participants were generally satisfied by lecturers' ability to provide examples related to covered areas.

Discussion of Key Results

The study examined, firstly, the perceptions of students and attitudes towards lecturers at a Ghanaian teacher university. On the other hand, the results established lecturers' weakness in the provision of interesting and learning activities. The latter might be explained by large class size without commensurate space and equipment for effective learning activities in the university.

Interpersonal relationship or rapport attributes identified in the literature indicated that students appreciate lecturers who take an interest in their students and in developing interesting classroom atmosphere. Rating for the interpersonal relationship attribute was strong; a good sign of lectures effectiveness in a Ghanaian teacher university. As regards lecturer's legitimate power, most participants perceived strength in lecturers' ability to reprimand students.

The study also examined, secondly, the attitudes of students towards lecturers. The participants' responses from the qualitative data seemed to suggest that in spite of lecturers' limitations, students' attitudes towards lecturers was good. Many responses with related comments seemed to suggest that students appreciated the roles of lecturers in their academic, moral and social development and, therefore, accorded them the needed positive attitudes they deserve. Some of the comments included:

They are our role models. They are very supportive and facilitate the provision of some services such as registrations, counselling and others. We see them as parents on campus." (Interview Data, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The study established that students held positive perceptions on the teaching performance of lecturers in the following attributes: knowledge of subject matter, use good examples, stick to the syllabus, examinations closely related to covered areas, respect for and interest in students, and reprimand recalcitrant students in case of negative behaviour. Though 'reprimand recalcitrant students to prevent negative behaviour was perceived to be 'good' it was not deemed strong among lecturers. On the other hand, the findings established that respondents perceived lecturers' weakness towards the following: teach study techniques; provide interesting and meaningful learning activities; provide prompt and effective feedback; examinations allow students to express their knowledge freely; share personal experiences; and criticize students for social-out of school choice. The study further established that students' attitudes towards lecturers were positive and showed cordial relationship between lecturers and students.

Recommendations for Practice

Against the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. New recruited lecturers should be given orientation on students' perceptions of effective and ineffective lecturers so as to prepare themselves for the needs of students as primary consumers of the learning process. The ramification of this to higher education management and human resource practices cannot be overemphasized.

2. Professional development courses in teaching are very important to assist lecturers to gain relevant skills and expertise in teaching. Universities are encouraged to provide the requisite funding, to support lecturers in this endeavour;

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