

ETHICAL SENSITIVITY, ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND CAREER GROWTH OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

Career growth of academic staff in Uganda is influenced by a number of factors. Some of these factors include ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty of academic staff. This study attempts to examine the relationship between ethical sensitivity, academic dishonesty and career growth of academic staff in Ugandan institutions of higher learning. Career growth is important because academic staff have to keep on learning in order to meet the demands for the market. The research was based on academic staff in institutions of higher learning in Uganda. A sample of 300 was taken composed of academic staff in these institutions. Both private and public institutions were considered and priority was given to all the institutions of higher learning in all the regions that are the west, east, central, north and south. A survey questionnaire was used which was adopted from those used by previous scholars and was modified to suit the local setting. A response rate of 73% was achieved. The study established that ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty explained 65 % of the variation in career growth of academic staff. The results show that ethical sensitivity affects their career growth more than academic dishonesty. According to the results, when academic dishonesty was introduced the beta coefficients for ethical sensitivity dropped from 0.48 to 0.44. These results raise implications to the managers in these institutions of higher learning. This is the first study to document the effect of ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty on career growth of academic staff in institutions of higher learning in Uganda. Some of the academic staff in these institutions have failed to portray good ethical behavior in their profession which has resulted into their dismissal from these institutions. Though some have been dismissed, this has been done on a discretionary basis because others have been left to stay in these institutions despite the unethical conduct they possess. Institutions have not communicated the ethical code of conduct for the profession and this has left the ball in the hands of the academic to analyze the ethical issue and take a position whether ethical or not. Other academic staff have found it hard to analyze the ethical situation due to lack of enough information as regards the ethics of their profession. Academic staff in the institutions put more emphasis on accumulating wealth rather than focusing on career growth. This has made academic staff in the institutions lose or put less emphasis on career growth. Despite the increasing dismissals of academic staff and the increased resistances by academic staff to embark on career growth, the staff concerned with the administrative issues in the institutions have put no focus on the issues of ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty which have really acted as a stumbling block for career growth among the academic staff. The results show a correlation among the variables.

Keywords: Ethical sensitivity, Academic dishonesty, career growth, Academic staff, Uganda, Institutions of higher learning.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher learning have the duty of shaping moral behavior of future generations (Kelley et al., 2005; Weber, 2006). Despite the duty, institutions of higher learning find it hard to manage the behavior of their academic staff in these institutions. A number of activities are performed by academic staff which are in most cases taken to be unethical. Such activities include sex for marks, plagiarism, exchanging exams for money or marks for money, poor teaching and many others. This topic that has attracted much attention for many researchers and practitioners with the need of learning about ethics of academic staff in institutions of higher

learning. According to Bruhn (2002), leaders in these institutions are responsible for setting high moral standards of integrity for their academic staff because academic staff are regarded as moral guides and exemplars whose standards are expected to be a little above the rest in their institutions and are seen as people who aspire to reach personal development which could play a significant role in an organization striving to become a learning organization (Weber, 2006). High moral standards of integrity are taken to be measures that are used to prevent the misconduct of academic staff through creating a awareness of the unethical and ethical issues in the academic arena.

Despite the measures institutions of higher learning have put in place to take to control of the behavior of academic staff, there are many signs that are being shown by academic staff which are not in commensurate with the regulations of ethical behavior. The cause of the continuous academic misconduct of academic staff is that when violations become too transparent and widespread, the right of a professional to regulate itself is threatened and the profession's status can then be decreased (Rich, 1984, p. 4). Further still a number of universities do not have a professional ethical code of conduct for their academic staff and others only provide regulations about examination malpractices and nothing else. Failure to provide the ethical codes makes it hard for academic staff to identify the ethical from the unethical most especially the newly recruited academic staff. This shows that institutions of high learning have not created ethical awareness among the academic staff which has made academic staff have a low sensitivity to ethical issues (Robie and Kidwell, 2003; Sponholz, 2000). The lack of ethical awareness results into an ethical behavior which results to outright dismissal or failure of academic staff to grow into the career because they are benefiting more in the current position than when they seek for further growth and are given new positions.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between ethical sensitivity, academic dishonesty and career growth of academic staff so that we can determine the variance in career growth that is explained by ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty. The purpose of this paper is to increase knowledge on the factors that explain career growth in institutions of higher learning in Uganda given that few studies in Uganda have been undertaken in this area and other studies on career growth have taken place in other countries whose contexts are very different from Uganda. Such studies include Barnett, et al., (2007) The impact of organizational support for career development on career satisfaction, Tanova et al., (2008) The process of choosing a management career and Rasdi, et al., (2009), Towards developing a theoretical framework for measuring public sector managers' career success. None of these studies focused specifically on the effect of ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty on career growth. In this study, we examine the relationship between ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty on career growth of academic staff in institutions of higher learning in Uganda.

Ethical sensitivity and career growth

There is a need for institutions of higher learning to find the need to employee knowledge workers who have lifelong learning skills and the capability for continuous update their knowledge. This is because students have to be trained to make them more suitable for employment in the corporate world. While some academic staff are nervous about institutions of higher learning changing, other academics argue that unless institutions of higher learning cater more to the changes in employment needs of students and to the needs of employers for suitably trained individuals, they will become less vital as students opt for training programs in other educational institutions (Jackson, 1997; Milliman 1992). However the acquisition of these skills is affected by the interaction of personal attributes, external environmental factors and behavior in career decision making. This depends on the influence of self efficacy beliefs and outcome expectation on goals and behavior (Chowwen, 2006). These can serve as a barrier to the extent that they are unrealistic or to the extent that they reduce the likelihood that a worker behaves in a manner that increases her success, development and satisfaction at work (McWhirter et al., 1998). Therefore Universities must proactively investigate policies and strategies to motivate and enhance their developing academic staff. Not doing so will lead inevitably to limits on the institution's capacity to attract, retain, and nurture those with the essential qualifications, academic ability, and commitment necessary for higher education to perform its unique role in the university (Evans and Meyer, 2005).

Around the world, there is an increasing trend towards a growing awareness of ethics (Pelletier and Bligh, 2006). Ethics do not just become more famous in large organizations or due to big scandals; they can arise in any kind of business as they are present in the everyday decision making of these organizations. Ethics in an organization normally begins with the employer and they can also be imposed by the institution. Employees have to follow the ethics of their profession. In professional ethics, besides the institutional approach of stimulating ethical behavior, there is a strong influence of ethics on a profession. Professional ethics brings out all issues and values of how someone should conduct him or herself in society. Excluded from professional ethics are only those acts which are private (Rich, 1984). Professional codes of ethics communicate ideals, objectives,

principles, standards, rules and procedures Professional ethics have got two functions (Brien, 1998). Firstly, professional ethics bind the professional community together and the professional culture is embedded in these ethics. Secondly, they form the basis for trust between profession and society. Professional ethics of academic staff can be communicated through ethical codes. A number of academic staff in institutions of higher learning have engaged in certain unethical acts without them knowing that they were unethical. Others have had doubt on some of the acts on whether they are accepted in the academic arena. This all rotates around the issue of ethical sensitivity. Leaders of these institutions have failed to create a awareness of the professional code of conduct to their academic staff (Robie and Kidwell, 2003; Sponholz, 2000). According to Resty (1983); Narves (2001), academic staff fail to tell the sensitivity of the issue due to their inability to discern ethical issues in the academic environment. Lack of ethical sensitivity may lead to dismissals of academic staff in the institutions or lead to a number of punishments to be sanctioned (Caboni, Braxton, Deusterhaus, Molly Black, Mundy and Meaghan (2005). Dismissals from the institution break the career path of the academic staff.

Academic dishonesty and Career growth

Academic dishonesty has been defined by Lambert et al. (2003, p. 98), as the behavior that academic staff show that breaches the academic integrity of institutions of higher learning. Academic dishonesty is a fundamental issue for academic integrity of higher education institutions, and one that has lately been gaining increasing media attention. It is likely that academic staffs who do not respect academic integrity while at institution will not respect integrity in their professional and personal relationships. Integrity is more than just an integral part of academic career. It is an attribute that is applicable to all aspects of life. Being an individual of integrity requires personal awareness of the type of person you want to be successfully (Rosamond, 2002, p. 168).

Academic staff engage in a number of academic malpractices. Some of these could be performed intentionally and are known to them while others are unintentional and not known to them. These practices include plagiarism by academic staff (Leatherman, 1999; Blum, 1988), poor teaching (Baty, 2002), sexual activities with students in exchange for grades and accepting money or gifts in exchange for grades (Robie & Kidwell, 2003; Tabachnick et al., (1991); Birch et al., (1999).), self interest on issues of work load (Wolfe, 2001), and using crude language in the classroom (Wilson, 2001), sexual harassment by the academic staff (Larsson, 2003; Jacobson, 2001; Tuana, 1985) and relations between academic staff and students (Heller, 1986; Fogg & Walsh, 2002).

Ethical obligations of academic staff have always been an important topic for discussion by the public and research has been carried out about causes and effects of misconduct (Robie and Kidwell, 2003; Sponholz, 2000). Within institutions of higher learning, there are developments that have taken place that may result in increased levels of unethical behavior. Some of these developments include the request for many publications from academic staff regardless of the quality of content in them (Feist, 1997), for someone to be blamed the unlawful act has to be done intentionally (Bruhn, 2002, p. 476), unethical acts being hidden under the umbrella of academic freedom, ethical issues being had to be discovered due to lack of a professional code of conduct and evidence for the occurrences of the misconduct may be had to get even if the act occurred repeatedly and normally that may be under looked or at times such an act may occur when there are few people around or may be acceptable within the institutions setting or may be taken to be a characteristic of a given academic staff and may not be given any attention (Bruhn, 2002, p. 477).

Lack of integrity threatens the academic profession. Institutions of higher learning are expected to behave ethically in its pursuit of knowledge, and the existence of academic integrity is considered as the cultural glue that enables academic staff to function successfully (Rosamond, 2002, p. 168). This enables academic staff create new knowledge, discover new facts, generate new ways of looking at previously known facts and original analyses of old ideas. In an increasingly competitive and research-driven tertiary environment, Academic dishonesty must be addressed to protect the very foundation of the tertiary sector. Academic dishonesty reduces the intellectual level and moral capital required by academic staff to develop and progress.

METHODOLOGY

The study took on a cross – sectional and quantitative study design. A cross – sectional design was adopted because the study was undertaken at one point in time and a quantitative approach was deemed fit to meet the objectives of the study. Data that was required was collected from within the institutions of higher learning in Uganda. A self – administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. Researchers were provided with letters introducing them to the respondents. They approached the firms with the introductory letters and requested to see academic staff in institutions of higher learning in Uganda. The statements in the questionnaire were anchored on a five (5) point Likert scale: - 5 – strongly agree, 4 – agree, 3 – Am not sure, 2 – disagree and 1 – strongly disagree. This was preferred because more often than not, respondents might truly feel neutral about a

given topic, and presenting to these respondents a scale without a neutral midpoint can introduce respondent bias as respondents are forced to choose a more positive or negative response. Some researchers point out that in many cases respondents will accentuate the negative in an experience (Inforsurv, 2006).

Institutions from the eastern, central western and northern regions were chosen as well as private and public universities were considered. This was done in order not to get biased results and to make sure that the sample was proportional. The researchers focused on academic staff in these institutions. As per the record of the Uganda national council of education, there were fourteen universities in Uganda in 2010. There has not been any additions as per the record in 2010 so the list remains the same. 300 questionnaires were distributed to the academic staff and 219 were returned a response rate of 73% being achieved. We assessed the variables based on the perception of the academic staff. Career growth was measured using Milliman (1992) and had a reliability coefficient 0.72. Ethical sensitivity was measured using Narves (2001) and had a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Academic dishonesty was measured using Tabachnick et al., (1991) and Birch et al., (1999) and had a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Measures were tested for reliability using the Cronbach Alpha Co-efficient. The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Correlation analysis was used to determine the nature of the relationship between the variables and hierarchical regression analysis to determine the variance in the dependent variable explained by independent variables.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics of respondents

41% of the academic staff were from private institutions while 58% of the academic staff were from public institutions. 15% were from Makerere University Business School, 5% were from Mutesa royal University, 16% were from Mbale University, 21% were from Nkumba University, 20% were from Makerere University and 23% were from Mbarara University. 20% of the Universities were 60 and above years, 64% were between 1 and 20 years while 16% were between 21 and 40 years. 31 percent had served less than a year, 21% were between 1-2 years, 23% were between 3-5 years, 16% were between 6-10 years and 1% were over 10 years.

Correlation

Descriptive statistics and Zero order correlations among the study variables are presented in table 1

Table 1; Zero Correlation (N= 218-219)

	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age of respondents(1)	2	1.1	1						
Marital Status(2)	1.6	0.6	-0.5	1					
Sex of respondents(3)	1.4	0.5	-0.1	0.1	1				
Work experience(4)	2.3	1.1	0.706**	-0.5	-0.1	1			
Ethical Sensitivity(5)	3.4	0.5	0.145*	-0.1	-0.1	0.389**	1		
Academic Dishonesty(6)	3.1	0.5	-0.2	0	-0.1	0.182**	0.281**	1	
Career growth(7)	3.4	0.5	0.160*	-0.1	-0.1	0.309**	0.602**	0.297**	1
*Correlation is significant at the 0.005 level (2-tailed)**Correlation Significant at 0.001 level (2-tailed test)									

Source: Primary Data

All respondents from these Universities were undecided on Ethical sensitivity (mean=3.3), academic dishonesty (mean=3.1), and Career growth (mean=3.4). This is because all the means of the variables were below 4 on the item scale. The study findings indicated a significant positive relationship between ethical sensitivity and career growth ($r=0.602^{**}$, $p<0.01$) and a significant positive relationship between academic dishonesty and career growth ($r=0.297^{**}$, $p<0.01$). Findings on academic dishonesty and ethical sensitivity showed that academic staff need to be aware of ethical issues in order not to engage in academic dishonesty. So institutions of higher learning have to ensure that they communicate the ethics of the academic profession to all academic staff in their institution. This could be through provision of a professional code of conduct which many universities have not done. They pin examination regulations or regulations about examination malpractices and nothing else. This is supported by Kohlberg's (1984) theoretical framework of moral development who asserts that when faced with temptation to engage in any academic unethical behavior, academic staff are confronted with an ethical decision whether to comply with the academic norm not to engage in the malpractice or to give into temptation and engage in academic dishonesty. Findings on ethical sensitivity and career growth showed that

ethical sensitivity among academic staff makes them to behave ethically .This also explains the positive relationship between academic dishonesty and career growth. This supported by Rosamond,(2002)who says that academic staff need integrity in order for their profession not to be threatened .Academic staff in institutions of higher learning are expected to behave ethically in its pursuit of knowledge, and the existence of academic integrity is considered as the cultural glue that enables academic staff to function successfully. Academic staff are fired from theirs in case they engage in academic dishonesty which hinders their career growth though some institutions retain them despite the unethical behavior. Others reject career growth because they are satisfied with the current position and embarking on career growth may push them into a position where the benefits may reduce.

Table: 2 Hierarchical regression analysis with the career growth of academic staff as the dependent variable

	modell	Std error	model2	Std error	model3	Std error	co linearity	VIF
							Tolerance	
Constant	3.23**	0.21	0.85*	0.3	0.60*	0.3	Na	na
work experience	0.19**	0.05	.48**	0.04	0.16**	0.04	0.37	2.7
sex of respondents	-0.08	0.08	-0.02	0.06	-0.04	0.06	0.95	1.05
marital status	0.00	0.07	-0.07	0.06	-0.04	0.06	0.65	1.54
age of respondents	-0.06	0.05	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.44	2.29
ethical sensitivity			0.48**	0.09	0.44**	0.09	0.48	2.07
academic dishonesty					0.16**		0.74	1.36
R	0.33		0.63		0.65		Na	na
R square	0.11		0.4		0.42		Na	na
Adjusted R square	0.09		0.38		0.4		Na	na
F-statistics	6.48		19.89		18.75		Na	na
Sig	0		0		0		Na	na
R-square change	0.11		0.09		0.02		Na	na
F-change statistics	6.48		31.74		6.88		Na	na
Sig F change	0.00		0.00		0.00		Na	na

Note: n=218, **regression is significant at 0.01 level,*regression is significant at the 0.05 level, standardized coefficients are reported.

Hierarchical analysis explains the extent to which the independent variables predict career growth. In model 1 control variables of age of the respondent, sex of the respondent, work experience of the respondents, marital status and work experience were introduced. In model 2 the construct for ethical sensitivity was introduced. The R square change on the introduction of the construct for ethical sensitivity was 9% and f change statics was (F-static 19.892, β =.480, Sig F change=0.000). In model 3 another construct for academic dishonesty was introduced, ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty were significant predictors .The R square change was 2 % and f change statics was (F-static 18.753, β =0.16,Sig F change=0.000).When academic dishonesty was introduced the beta coefficient for ethical sensitivity dropped from 0.48** to 0.44**..Findings on ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty showed that academic staff made academic staff need to be aware of ethical issues in order not to engage in academic dishonesty. So institutions of higher learning have to ensure that they communicate the ethics of the academic profession to all academic staff in their institution. This is supported by Kohlberg's (1984) theoretical framework of moral development who asserts that when faced with temptation to engage in any academic unethical behavior, academic staff are confronted with an ethical decision whether to comply with the academic norm not to engage in the malpractice or to give into temptation and engage in academic dishonesty. Findings on ethical sensitivity and career growth showed that ethical sensitivity among academic staff makes them to behave ethically .This also explains the positive relationship between academic dishonesty and career growth. This supported by Rosamond,(2002)who says that academic staff need integrity in order for their profession not to be threatened .Academic staff institutions of higher learning are expected to behave ethically in its pursuit of knowledge, and the existence of academic integrity is considered as the cultural glue that enables academic staff to function successfully.

This is in line with hypothesis two and hypothesis one. (H4 & H1). According to the regression results the independent variables predict the dependent variable by 65%. Ethical sensitivity involves creating awareness of the ethical issues of the organization. Institutions of higher learning ensure ethical awareness within their institutions. This helps improve the ethical decision making process of academic staff. They are able to identify ethical issues from unethical issues. Lack of awareness results into academic dishonesty of academic staff. This leads inevitably to limits on the institution's capacity to attract, retain, and nurture those with the essential qualifications, academic ability, and commitment necessary for higher education to perform its unique role in the university as some staff may be dismissed as result of lack of ethical sensitivity (Evans and Meyer, 2005). There were no issues of multicollinearity because the tolerance factors were above 0.10 and the VIF factors were less than 5.0. A tolerance of less than 0.20 or 0.10 and/or a VIF of 5 or 10 and above indicates a multicollinearity problem (O'Brien 2007).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Practical implications

The university administrators in institutions of higher learning should provide punishments to those academic staff who engage in academic dishonesty rather than carrying out right dismissals for the staff because this has a negative impact on their career growth. But if the behavior with that particular person then dismissal is the best approach. Such behavior has continued to exist in institutions of higher learning because those who behave academically dishonest are not punished neither are they dismissed. This creates room for the act to continue because there are no actions taken in case such behavior occurred. This means that the individuals will continue with the career with in these institutions.

In order to encourage career growth in institutions of higher learning institutions, the life span theory should be adopted such that when employees enter the organizations they do not behave academically dishonest for example selling results because they know any time they may be dismissed from the organizations. Frequent dismissals encourage academic staff to find out all ways in which they can amass wealth before they are dismissed. This may motivate employees for focus on their careers rather than thinking about how to make money within a given period.

Institutions should also create awareness of the institutional ethical codes to the academic staff. Basically most institutions in Uganda do not avail these even to the newly recruited staff. So makes it hard for the staff to tell whether what they are doing is acceptable or not within the boundaries of the institution. The act could be right to them based on the theory of ethical egoism though it could be to the institution.

Theoretical implications.

Our study looked at ethical sensitivity, academic dishonesty and career growth in institutions of higher learning in Uganda. All these were stated to be important factors for career growth. Few studies have been carried out in relation to career growth and our study makes a number of contributions to the theory and study of career growth in relation to the study variables. The study contributes to an understanding of ethical sensitivity, academic dishonesty and career growth of academic staff in a developing country. Given that most studies on ethical sensitivity, academic dishonesty and career growth of academic staff are more in developed countries and few in the developing countries, further research in the area be carried out in these institutions. All the variables were found to be significant predictors of career growth. This has been covered in studies of Rich, (1984), Jackson, (1997); Milliman (1992), Robe and Kidwell, (2003) and Sponholz, (2000). The findings focus on the correlation between the variables.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Limitations of the study.

- Items used were not developed for career growth environment but were developed for an ethical setting environment.
- There is need for a qualitative study to be carried out because more views can be obtained from the respondents when it is used.
- The measures used have been used by researchers in the international world and not the local environment in Uganda.
- The instrument that was used is closed ended and some of the data may not be captured.
- The researcher did not survey all universities due to time constraints and results can not applied to all.
- Data on the how the ethical sensitivity and academic dishonesty relate to career growth is still limited and more research is required.

- Some behaviour is difficult to categorize under ethical or unethical based on the situations under which they occur.

Areas of further research

- Similar research be carried out in other Universities in Uganda
- Longitudinal survey be carried out in the same area.

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