



THE ETHICS OF TEACHERS' PRACTICES DURING EVALUATIONS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MAROUA

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ABSTRACT

University is more and more faced with the question of ethics these days, especially with regard to student assessment. Some deontologically reprehensible teachers' practices seem to persist in a setting where the student is in a weak position in the face of a lecturer with a great deal of control and a great capacity for harm. This paper examines the ethics of teachers' practices during students' evaluation from a systemic perspective through strategic analysis. Such practices include mark-buying, sexual harassment, and unfair subtraction of marks. The main question in this work is what can explain the persistence of this plight. The data collection process involved the interview of twenty (20) informants, comprising students' representatives and victims, and personal observations. After having taken stock of the most reported breaches from some lecturers at the University of Maroua, Cameroon, the work scrutinises the reason for their recurrence from three main points: impunity due to the poor application of regulatory provisions, the absence of a moral code in the recruitment procedure of lecturers, and the lecturer's freedom of impression.

Keywords: Ethics, Assessment, Mark-buying, Sexual harassment, Regulatory provisions, Teachers, University.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the unethical behavior of teachers in Cameroon universities. It explains the persistence of this unethical behavior through the weak enforcement of regulations, non-requirement of moral code during recruitment and the feeling free impression of lecturers.

1. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The lecturer is usually believed to have the yam and the knife regarding students' academic life at university. He has a greater control over decision making concerning his activities. Once a course has been assigned to him, he decides on the content, structure, references, teaching methods and assessment modes. Despite the existence of official recommendations, the lecturer keeps a greater decision-making freedom, which the BMD system does not reduce.

Concerning assessment, everyone seems to go at his convenience. Although the different evaluation steps are usually respected (students project, tutorials, and continuous assessments), the choice of the evaluation mode and the marking guide are not often controlled by the administration. It even happens that students' scripts are not returned; students only see their marks on publication.

Although much has been published on ethics in education in general, very little has been done on evaluation ethics, especially in the Cameroonian context. Yet, evaluation is one of the most sensitive academic activities, and the major students, teachers and even parents concern. It is the main stake of any education activity, as it attests to success or

failure. As a basic principle, every learner wants to succeed, sometimes at all costs. Students seem to be sometimes more interested in succeeding than in acquiring knowledge, which yet proves one's intrinsic value.

The indispensable nature of evaluation often leads to stress, which can be associated with what [Hadji \(2012\)](#) call "assessment fever", culminating into a "mark madness". From this perspective, school becomes anxiety-provoking and learners undergo "pedagogical torture". The fear of evaluation at university level can be accounted for by the fact that lecturers have all powers on their courses. This is, by the way, what led some university lecturers to adopt uncommendable attitudes, which cast some doubt on the objectivity of evaluation, which in turn raises the problem of the ethics of teachers' practices in connection to evaluation.

In fact, the ethics of evaluation is a matter of concern and remains, not only a professional issue, but also one of behaviour and consequently of conscience. According to Braxmeyer, Guillaume et al. quoted in [Mougenot \(2013\)](#) "evaluations represent 18 to 20% of a teacher's routine work". This is general the activity through which some lecturers exploit learners for material or immaterial advantages. Observation shows many abuses in the evaluation process of students. Complaints related to evaluation subjectivity abound in Cameroonian universities. Actually, students are forced into morally reprehensible practices, because of their obsession for success. Such practices as mark-buying, sexual harassment, tribalism, favouritism are often decried by students, since they question the objectivity of their academic performances. These practices which can be observed everywhere around the world go against the very goal of education and by ricochet, hamper the social, economic and political future of the country ([Ettien et al., 2007](#)). In that vein, Quinton, at a colloquium in Bordeaux, France, in June 2001 said that sexual harassment at university in France, whatever form it takes, is an irrefutable reality, just as is the setting of unannounced evaluations. According to [Miyouna \(2011\)](#) sexual harassment at university in Congo takes such forms as glances, insinuations, inappropriate comments, meeting suggestions, improper closeness, disreputable jokes, mockery, if not sexual assaults. University becomes a market where sex is exchanged for marks. [Desaulniers \(2000\)](#) notes that, in Quebec, "Students have classified these various ethical breaches into two categories, namely abuse of power and sexual abuse".

Victims of such attitudes are usually unable to complain officially, because they believe they cannot have an upper hand on a lecturer who holds strength and the power for harm. They are usually scared of reporting their torturers, resorting in extreme cases to a trustworthy person for comfort and to share their sufferings. Girls seem to be more victimized. They are imposed some sort of right of the first night if they need help for their dissertation, to pass their exams, or to have a good mark in their projects, tutorials or continuous assessment which are under the total control of the lecturer. Sex for marks is a very old practice in Cameroonian universities. [Pondi \(2011\)](#) discussed this case at length, and explained the persistence of the plight by some dysfunctions of the university system and mostly by vulnerability factors inherent to students themselves.

The case of one lecturer in the University of Yaoundé I who was brought to the discipline council in 2013 is still fresh in memories. He was suspended for 4 years through decision n°18130589/MINESUP/SG/DAJ of July 16, 2013 on the following charges: sexual, moral, and physical harassment of students, violation of university dignity and deontology through the selling of academic services, serious violation of specific students' rights as stipulated by the common status of public university institutions students. The events had been recorded by one of the victims and published in Cameroonian media and on social networks. This seems no to have taught the minority sex addicts among lecturers a lesson.

It can be highlighted that many foreign students in the University of Maroua frequently complain that some lecturers extort money from them for good marks, which sometimes is not enough to pass their course. This has led a group of frustrated Chadians to confide in some university officials. Where the problem hurts the most is when uncompromising candidates are blacklisted and given poor marks. This is the case of two Chadian students who failed to graduate two consecutive years because of only one course. Their class representative reported that they had refused to pay to requested amount of money.

The fancy distribution of marks is also decried from time to time. Some students' representatives that were interviewed confessed that even for a group work students of the same group end up with different marks. This is injustice many unflinchingly go through.

Similarly, some complaints are connected to the subtraction of marks on such grounds as sloppiness or lateness during project presentations. Students are academically sanctioned for a dressing or ethical fault which no regulatory text provides. From the above, it is urgent to address the question of ethics in evaluation practices at the university level. Thus, this endeavour attempts to provide explanations to the persistence of unethical behaviours by lecturers in association with evaluation.

The work is based on the hypothesis that some university specific functioning contingencies may favour deontologically reprehensible evaluation practices. The aim is to account for structural or institutional factors that explain the spread of unethical evaluation practices. Contrary to Pondi in the treatment of sexual harassment, the focus is not on the self-reported answers of both victims and culprits, but on the lapses of the system where the lecturer evolves. These contingencies are namely, impunity due to the poor application of regulatory dispositions, the absence of a moral code in the recruitment process of lecturers and the lecturer's freedom of impression.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This work is based on the systemic approach, and uses strategic analysis to decipher how certain lecturers afford to violate deontological principles in evaluation matters, since they allow a global and holistic study of phenomena of different complexities and dynamics. According to [De Rosnay \(1975\)](#) the systemic approach enables the researcher to put together and organise knowledge for a better efficiency of actions. It is implemented together with strategic analysis by [Crozier and Friedberg \(1992\)](#).

The data were collected through interviews with 20 students comprising victims of abuses from lecturers and class representatives. The questionnaire was discarded as it was not believed to pertinently capture the complexity of the question. The snowball method was instead used to collect the data. In fact, the first cases led to the next, one victim referring the researcher to the next. Personal observation was used to complete the data. The analysis was qualitative, the inductions being made from the content of the data from the interviews.

3. OVERVIEW OF UNETHICAL PRACTICES IN EVALUATION MATTERS

One of the most decried practices in evaluation matters is that fraud which is associated with selling marks for money. This is actually bribery. Marks and success may be negotiated in some cases. Reports from students representatives show that some lecturers subtly extort money from students to give them a good mark, especially for students projects, continuous assessments and tutorials the former control. The best-known case in the University of Maroua is that of that infamous lecturer who systematized the practice through some students intermediate he had hired. Despite all that he has never been sanctioned. In that respect, one students delegate at the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences had this to say: "Some of my classmates have given money to the lecturer through a student acting as that lecturer's representative. Those who pay write their names on a sheet of paper. But the majority did not pass. Everyone in class knows that, and anyone can investigate it." This marks buying is undertaken subtly, but ends up on the public place in most cases. As an illustration, one can note the case of a department which published an additive results slips for admission into Level 3, three months after the deliberations jury had been held. The results sheet carried only one signature, although it had to result from a formal jury whose members have to sign the results sheet. Investigations revealed that the two added students had paid to be on that list.

Students writing their dissertations seem to be hit with full force by this practice. They are often forced to "speak well", in order to be monitored. In that vein, a doctorate student reports: "I worked with my supervisor for the Masters. When I was admitted into PhD, he struggled to supervise me again. He offered to co-supervise me during pre-validation seminars. But I pleaded with the Head of Department to have him removed. This fellow asks for money, and not even in

a kind way. Some foreign students around him collect money from his supervisees. But money is not all!" Another method for extorting money consists in inviting students in a drinking spot to discuss the dissertation. After the discussion, the supervisor asks the students to foot the bill, forgetting that "the educator is not out for subjects, but to make autonomous people, willing and able to decide on their freedom (Pachod, 2006).

When recording examinations marks four years back, we noticed distinctive marks on certain scripts whose good marks did not seem to match the content. It could be guessed that there was a deal between the lecturer and the students concerned. But the nature of the contract is beyond our reach, because there are as many female as male students. It could therefore be a case of marks buying for male students and sexual harassment for female ones.

During the 2015/2016 academic year, a lecturer at the Higher Institute of the Sahel, the University of Maroua, substituted one candidate for another during exams. The case was revealed when, upon recording marks, the Head of the Department concerned noticed that a female student, who had travelled abroad, had an examination mark.

It is worth discussing the subtraction of marks following inappropriate behaviour. Some lecturers sort of bullying to exert their authority over their students. From interviews with students' representatives, it appears that some lecturers usually decide to subtract five to ten marks to punish students for sloppiness, for coming late to class, for submitting an assignment after the deadline, for providing a wrong answer in class, or for talking to their neighbour during exams. To illustrate this, a first year student reports: "The lecturer granted me permission to go out of the class. On my return, I noticed that my project group was presenting; I joined the group and we presented together. Surprisingly, I had a five-mark cut, though I almost did the whole work alone." In such circumstances, it should be stressed that the mark of the student does not match his or her real performance.

As for sexual harassment, it seems to be the most trivialized practice and the most widespread. It is also referred to as sexually transmitted marks. Some female students, in tears, recount their ordeal. One level 2 Sociology female student told us that she has failed the courses from the same lecturer on two consecutive years, because she did not give in to his passes. She said he called her, invited her, threatened and eventually promised to make her fail. She actually could not go to Level 3, because one of the requirements is the successful completion of all Level one courses. Another female student in the Department of Science of Education had a laborious defence of her DIPEN II dissertation, because she had refused to have sex with the examiner of her dissertation. This is what most of the interviewees call "settlement of accounts", which have collateral damages. This is the case of a Level 3 Spanish students' representative who declared he had a bad mark because he refused to serve as go-between between the lecturer and one of his classmates, the two having become enemies.

Another such case is that of a female student of the Department of Sociology/Anthropology who said she scored 8/20 for a group work where other group members scored 14/20. She eventually failed that course. When she came at the re-sit session, the lecturer publicly told her: "Do not waste your time, you will not pass my course". This would be due to the fact that the girl had refused to give in to his passes. One students' representatives said that one of her classmate was so harassed by a lecturer, who made her academic life harder, that she decided to drop out in Level 3 to write the First School Leaving Certificate level competitive entrance examination into the police.

It should, however, be noted that some female end up giving in to lecturers passes in a bid have the marks they were promised. This is the case of a female student who confided with her classmate after she had scored 15/20 in one course: "I cannot afford to repeat. I offered my body. There is no way out?" One can conclude that « when a girl gives in, she has better results, since in case there is a tutorial, it is the lecturer who draws the outline for the group she belongs in", as one student of the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences declared.

Actually, these lecturers implement all rational strategies meet their objectives, regardless of the undesirable consequences they may create. One such strategy they frequently use is described as follows, one Level four SVT students representatives at the HTTC reported: "Lecturers endeavour to punish female students in the amphitheater to justify themselves. Next, continuous assessment and students project marks are not published accidentally on purpose. So, the female students draw near to them for complaints and they seize the opportunity to meet their goal.

Our interviewees forgot not to mention blackmailing and threatening used by some lecturers against students who do not react as they expected. Such utterances can thus be heard: “You are dull. You do not even deserve to read sociology”. « You’d rather go out instead of following the presentation. All you know is chatting on the phone with boys.” “Do not waste your time, you will not pass my course. It is not worth the effort this year”.

This overview gives an idea of unethical practices that characterise evaluation. It was not possible to provide figures on the frequency of these behaviours, since very few students accepted to testify. However, the focus was not on the quantity of the event, as said earlier, but on its persistence against all odds. One should nonetheless scrutinize the factors that explain their persistence.

4. FACTORS EXPLAINING THE PERSISTENCE OF LECTURERS’ UNETHICAL BEHAVIOURS DURING EVALUATIONS

The breach of evaluation ethics which is materialised through deontologically reprehensible behaviours is fuelled by a number of co-factors. For sexual harassment specifically, [Pondi \(2011\)](#) came to the conclusion that ‘many socio-economic and cultural factors have exacerbated students’ vulnerability to sexual harassment by some students, but also sometimes by female lecturers (in the case of boys).’ To him, it has to do with : the low academic monitoring ratio, the fast-growing number of the university population, students’ financial insecurity, some parents failure to assume their moral and pedagogical responsibilities, and finally the inclination of certain female students towards the easy way to success who cannot stand sustained intellectual effort. One can note that he seems to give the central role to the student, notwithstanding the place of the lecturer and the university as whole. The present paper focuses not only on the variables that explain sexual harassment, but also on the entire nest of unethical behaviours lecturers display during evaluations. These variables are related to some systemic contingencies linked to the functioning of the university, namely impunity due to the non-implementation of regulatory provisions, the absence of a moral code in the recruitment process of lecturers, and the lecturer’s freedom of impression.

4.1. Impunity Due to the Poor Implementation of Regulations

Contrary to many countries like Canada and France, for example, no official document explicitly spells out the professional ethics of the lecturer in Cameroonian universities. This does not mean there is a legal vacuum licensing unethical behaviours. In fact there are scores of decrees, decisions, and circulars that regulate lecturers’ discipline. They have been compiled into what is known as the blue book. One understands that lecturers are not organised into an order or a corporation. It is time to note that each time evaluations or examinations are evoked, the only case looked into is that of students. As an illustration, one can cite the universities common dispositions regarding the sanctions to be implemented in case of students’ fraud, pursuant to Article 65 of Decree N° 93/007 of January 19, 1993.

The section dealing with lecturers’ discipline looks vague and does not clearly describe breaches to ethics during evaluations. The special status of higher education personnel, pursuant to Article 51 of Decree N° 93/035 of January 19, 1993 thus has this to say : Without prejudice to particular texts spelling out the obligations of the different categories in the public services, the professional behaviours and misconducts subject to disciplinary sanctions in the present Decree are as follows :

1. Breaches of rules of general law as provided in Article 48 ;
2. Breaches of professional duties, and namely those concerning teaching diligence, actual presence at one’s service and actual involvement in research activities, the monitoring of researchers in one’s unit, miscellaneous evaluations, supervision of students, preparation and invigilation of exams, professional secrecy, marking, participation in examination juries, professional secrecy in connection exam questions and juries deliberations.
3. Participation in fraud during exams or complicity in fraud or attempted fraud during exams;
4. Ordinary law offences;

5. Participation in subversive activities;
6. Participation in any activity contrary to the university deontology and dignity.

What should be highlighted here is that the misconducts students most often complain against are not described in these texts which have frozen for more than a decade. Given that students, and especially female ones are at high risk in the university milieu, one may rightfully expect these texts to unambiguously address the most recurrent morally reprehensible behaviours, especially those occurring during evaluations, namely sexual harassment, mark-buying, and marks subtraction for other-than-academic reasons among others. In other deontology codes such as the one regulating the Corporation of Alternative Medicine Physicians of Quebec ([Code de Déontologie des Enseignants de la Corporation des Praticiens en Médecines Douces du Québec \(CPMDQ\), 2005](#)) behaviours to avoid are explicitly mentioned, on the basis of frequently observed facts. An excerpt of the code thus reads: "The lecturer shall show proof of an irreproachable conduct towards students, whether physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. The lecturer shall neither take advantage of a student either physically or spiritually. That is: sexual intercourses with students are forbidden. It is forbidden to borrow money from a student... the lecturer shall have no economic tie with students. » These provisions are unambiguous and prevent anyone to hide behind the vagueness of facts, whose interpretation may depend on the subjective analysis of human laws.

Besides the general character of laws in Cameroon, they are not sufficiently propagated in the university milieu to raise general awareness, even though ignorance of the law is no excuse. Had these laws been implemented, the situation would not have been that worst. In fact, lecturers hardly face justice in the case of such acts. This can be accounted for by two main reasons, namely the scarcity of formal complaints from the victims, and most importantly the difficulty to prove the facts.

In effect, we are informed by the history of the Cameroonian university, from its reform in 1993 to present, that very few lecturer have been brought before the disciplinary council for breaching ethics through subjectivity during evaluation. The most famous case is that lecturer in the University of Yaoundé I, who was sentenced to four years off campuses in 2013 for sexually harassing a student. Yet, harassment, mark-buying, unannounced evaluations are regularly denounced under cover of anonymity in suggestion boxes that crowd the campus of the University of Maroua, or even by directly meeting some university officials. The latter has usually doubted the veracity of the facts or, in the best cases, asked the plaintiffs to submit evidence as the law requires, something the latter can hardly do. Although the victims have the possibility to complain, the procedure is very difficult. The response of the institution being subjected to material evidence, the victims feel abandoned in face of the lecturer accused and sometimes in face of the latter's colleagues. Actually, they are usually asked to show text messages in their phones, to submit tape-records of conversations or any other material evidence. In that context, they resign themselves or confide with someone to share their sufferings. This is the case of one sexually harassed female student who reports: "I complained to our Head of Department about my case; he asked me why I denied such a young colleague a chance. Can he not marry you? He asked me. By the way, do you have proofs he is courting you? He continued, adding that when students failed a course, they were prompt to accuse the lecturer of having given them a poor mark because they refused his passes."

Yet, it is common knowledge that some lecturers display undesirable attitudes. Almost everyone discusses it in private on campus, even university top officials, but nothing is done to give and exemplary sanction to the culprits. The scarcity or low implementation of sanctions is not far from turning these attitudes into lecturers' habits.

Moreover, the fear of lecturers' retaliation prevents students from reporting their behaviour. Impunity and especially group solidarity make them assume that they can suffer the consequences in other courses by other lecturers. They believe that lecturers have an enforcement and influence power in face of students whether they are right or wrong, as commented by [Desaulniers \(2007\)](#). This falls in line with the following comment from an alleged victim of sexual harassment: "Sir, if I am protected by Faculty authorities, I can write and sign my complaint. But if they do not believe themselves in what we say, how dare we?" These comments not only express reluctance to overtly stand against the lecturer, but also the fear of the situation turning to their disadvantage. The

rules of the game are not fair; the lecturers abuse their mental edge on the students to impose their exigencies. Hence, “the authority relationship between the lecturer and the students seems to impede awareness of the negative consequences of the efforts undertaken.” (Braxmeyer, Guillaume et al., quoted by Mougnot (2013)). Constraining rules have uncertainty zones which give actors some flexibility (Crozier and Friedberg, 1992). Lecturers use the uses of the imposed rules as a strategy to meet their objectives.

In this impunity trend, some lecturers do not return continuous assessment or students projects scripts. In case of injustice, the student has no means to complain in the absence of evidence. Heads of Departments who are the closest academic authorities to lecturers are informed, but no deterrent measure is undertaken.

Nonetheless, in state universities, there is a branch of the central anti-corruption and ethics unit set by the ministry of higher education. It comprises a few members, of which the general students representative, whose role is to sensitise the university community on ethics, to fight corruption and its corollary, and to protect students against all unethical behaviours on campus. To that effect, one toll-free number was set for victims, and an attention team created in the social and medical centre. However, it is now obvious that most students are unaware of such a structure and do not know that toll-free number. Upon an interview with a member of that unit at the University of Maroua, it must be concluded that no student has ever complained, although cases of breach of ethics are unquestionably glaring.

Other dissuasive measures implemented in the university to « control » the behaviour of lecturers is their evaluation by students every year. Students are given the opportunity under cover of anonymity to underline their lecturers’ breaches and provide a general appreciation. Even there, the predefined and strictly closed questions orientate their appreciation on more deontological than ethical aspects. Teaching diligence, regularity, epistemological mastery, pedagogical relations with students and the use of ICT in their teaching are some of the aspects considered. However, the efficiency of a training is not only subject to pedagogical and deontological variables; moral competence may also inform and complete the evaluation guide. Pachod (2006) rightfully holds that “the professional is no longer defined solely by his high and updated knowledge, nor by his expertise in responding to problem situations. Beyond the technician and the engineer, the professional is ethicist”.

The explicit spelling of morally and deontologically reprehensible attitudes in relation to evaluation, as well as the implementation of related sanctions may not only serve as remedial actions to such attitudes, but may also prevent them.

4.2. The Absence of a Moral Code in the Recruitment Process of Lecturers

At university, the diploma is officially considered as the only criterion for the recruitment of a lecturer. This is not a Cameroonian specificity; many countries, if not the majority do as much (Perrenoud, 1995). High diplomas are required, PhD or Master in some cases, regardless of the moral competence of the prospective lecturer. By the way, there is not physical contact with the candidate, and therefore he is not known enough; only his file is scrutinized. Resorting to interviews, be it just to check the candidate’s ethics, is hardly considered.

If field experience can increase pedagogical quality to improve on teaching competences of the lecturer (Pastre et al., 2006) this is not often the case for the acquisition of know-how, especially in the case of adults, in the case of those who assume they have nothing to learn from anyone like university people. In this situation, it is logically difficult to get to a conscious and planned implication of those who are immediately concerned by ethical rules because of their profession. This explains why one notices in Cameroonian universities that ethics in certain lecturers practices may be questionable. Filtering prospective lecturers may lead to the risk of hiring morally questionable people who may abuse their lecturer’s power to engage in dishonest attitudes. On campus, some lecturers show, in discreetly tape-recorded conversations, that they have the right to resort to such practices. One has thus overheard such declarations as: “This year, there is a new supply”, alluding to the young female first year students; “A goats food lies where it is tied”; “These are the advantages of the profession”; “It is Article 2”. These are clumsily used to justify the ransom of students and sexual harassment.

Yet, following Khan (2006) one must acknowledge that “in certain respects, the idea that teaching requires a specific moral commitment from all those who aspire to this occupation is as old as the invention of modern education, in its special “form” of the late XVIIth century because it is inherently linked with what is at the origin of its invention, namely the eminence of the social importance of education.”

It remains clear that the evaluation of human morals, which is under constant construction, is very complex. However, it is possible to implement an inquiry of morality as it is the case in the recruitment of military and security personnel. Ethical competence is an important criterion in the scale of a teachers competencies. It may be a guard rail that filters lecturers worthy of the name, concerned with moral and professional conscience. This ethical competence can be understood through many indicators as mentioned in Gohier *et al.* (2010) but all have an impact on the respect of students and their development.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to make sure that the prospective lecturer be susceptible to « ethical sensitivity which fosters concern for others and caring in interventions” (Gohier *et al.*, 2010). The use of psychometric tests can be envisaged to that end. The importance of “a legal ethical framework to a deontology code” seems to be a solution for the recruitment of trustworthy people as recalled by the Orientation Committee for the Training of Teaching Staff (Cofpe, 2004).

Only an ethically competent lecturer is able to foster a humanistic education, which, according to Teresa Yuren, quoted by Quiton (2001) is that which fulfills the following conditions among others:

It is one where human dignity is the horizon and the last criterion

It takes place through the implementation of values which help meet radical needs: freedom, conscience, sociality, objectivity and universality

It produces didactic conditions for the learner to:

- Freely and responsibly build his personality and life project
- Respect the freedom of others and oppose all forms of domination.

It contributes in helping the learner consciously build his identity and that of the community as a member of the human species.

The failure to select lecturers on ethical criteria seems a serious impediment to the promotion of ethical principles on the campus. In that case, there is high risk of recruiting morally questionable lecturers, who, instead of training, educating, protecting their learners will consider them as tools to exploit, to sexually, financially, and physically take advantage of. If trainers are not role models via their behaviour, their relationship with the learners, one cannot expect a milieu which is conducive to justice and equity in their training.

4.3. Lecturers’ Freedom of Impression

Lecturers are considered an elite group. Their cultural and intellectual give them a valued social status. They have a certain reputation in the Cameroonian socio-professional milieu, despite their constantly challenged poor working conditions and low salary. They have been granted a special status, which set them off from other civil servants who are recruited through a competitive exam and whose careers are managed by the Ministry of public service. Lecturers are linked to their recruiting universities through their contract or recruitment document, as the case may be. They are managed both administratively and financially by their university as advancement, grade bonus, and change of rank are decided by the university board of directors. This really sets them off from other civil servants and makes them feel invulnerable. But, those who feel this power to the point of risking their careers are those who have reached at least the rank of Senior Lecturer. The Rector cannot decide on the dismissal or the suspension of the salary of a lecturer from this rank up. As a reminder, there are four ranks at university: Assistant Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor. The Assistant Lecturer only becomes a member of the corps after he has changed to the next highest rank. He is recruited on a maximum six-year fixed term contract. After this period, he must change rank lest his contract is terminated. This policy is highly dissuasive to them, even

though it is hardly implemented. Assistant Lecturers are therefore more concerned with their career, because of their limited flexibility, and therefore seem to behave more carefully.

Once the rank of Senior Lecturer is reached, things change. The lecturer gains freedom of movement and expression; he is not monitored and always finds a reason for his actions. He now has total responsibility for teaching and evaluating students.

He behaves as if he has gained back the freedom his academic elders confiscated. This autonomy gives him more action flexibility. According to Crozier and Friedberg (1992) any collective action structure is like a power system. At this level, the lecturer thinks he has got the power for harm or support to students, and the latter think as much. All sexual harassment cases observed in the University of Maroua and reported by the informants were perpetrated by Senior Lecturers or Associate Professors. By the way, we overheard a young Senior Lecturer exclaim, after the Rector seriously reprimanded him for driving students into sedition: "the Rector can no longer harm me; I am already a Senior Lecturer".

In fact, these freedom spirit and permissiveness are just apparent as reality is different. Actually, like any administration, it is possible to sanction a reprehensible civil servant. As for lecturers, they can be sanctioned from a simple warning to contract termination after their trial at the disciplinary council. These sanctions depend on how serious the breach is, and are pronounced by the Rector, the Minister of Higher education or the President of the Republic.

The freedom, better still, the invulnerability morally questionable lecturers allegedly have seems to be backed by the university system which hesitates to sanction them. In this case, the administration seems to protect the lecturer more than the student, despite the unethical nature of the formers behaviours during evaluations, by giving a deaf ear to what is said and known to everyone.

5. CONCLUSION

The ethics of lecturers' practices, especially during evaluations is of crucial importance these days. It is a challenge to the entire university community as well as to policy makers, because the poor implementation of ethical principles regarding evaluations hard hits academic excellence and the quality of training. It is obvious that equity and the improvement of the quality of education depend on ethical questions. Revealing morally reprehensible lecturers practices seems to be a must, particularly in an environment where the learner is vulnerable and must compromise to succeed.

Obsession for success, for the completion of a dissertation and defending it with the best possible mark, for succeeding in a course, sometimes through shortcuts, weakens the student's position in face of academically powerful lecturers who hold their future in their hands. The excessive use of their power, associated with impunity and the feeling that they are invulnerable foster the persistence of unethical practices at university, where freedom and permissiveness are pervasive.

The Cameroonian university system is also quite vague on certain cases of breach of university ethics and deontology by some lecturers. Legal documents are sometimes too general to unambiguously indicate how to fight the most recurrent breaches, namely mark-buying, sexual harassment, abusive subtraction of marks, although they are a secret to no member of the university community.

A rereading of those texts for their contextualization seems necessary in order to prevent, persuade and constrain all offenders to choose a better option. Also, facilitating procedures for the victims is part of the solution since, as seen earlier, they find it difficult to complain, to be listened to or to convince the university administration of the injustice they go through. This was found to make them reluctant and fearful, and eventually reducing the number of official complaints. This is a serious lacking which would have increased the chances of those lecturers of succeeding in their enterprises.

One can question the impact of the anticorruption and ethics promotion unit at university, whose role is actual to fight the abovementioned plights. Is it well equipped for its mission? Are its members committed enough to the task? Are they entitled to results?

In any case, it must show proof of its existence on campus, through a better visibility, its proximity to the students via information and sensitization activities, and most importantly by taking its responsibilities when any breach of honour and dignity of students is attested so as to actually dissuade offenders.

It therefore seems opportune to stress the necessity for an anticipated resolution of the problem. The recruitment of lecturers appears as the decisive step.

Officials have the possibility to request outstanding moral rectitude from prospective lecturers. Lecturers who are not interested in ethics and who do not care about the consequences of their actions on themselves and their victims contribute to the bad reputation of the institution, even if they form the minority. The systemic approach, which requires the responsibility of all actors in the prevention and the resolution of these ethical drifts, is thus envisaged.

Finally, sanction should not be favoured to the detriment of conscience awareness. One therefore agrees with Cofpe (2004) that controlling through sanctions and punishments is a risk when ethical preoccupations is reduced to the adoption of a deontology code.

“Ethics should be a permanent questioning and debate” (Bourgeault, quoted in Cofpe (2004)) something which is however propitious in the university milieu. These questionings may trigger conscience awareness, which may stop injustice caused to the learners.

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