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Favouritism in Higher Education Institutions: Exploring the Drivers, Consequences and Policy Implications

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Abstract

Purpose: Favouritism is one of the most harmful informal practices in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that affect the success and growth of the institutions, especially in recent decades. However, as destructive as favouritism is, most institutional managers seem to perpetuate its practice either because its negative effects are not well appreciated by the leaders or because the leaders have never been unfavourable of the favouritism act. This study explores favouritism and all its mutations, its causes and effects, and how to curb it in the HEI context.

Methodology: The study was qualitatively driven. Valid data were solicited from 60 staff of the University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale, Ghana, through an interview session and analysed. Based on the results and insights from secondary data, the study discusses three main types of favouritism in HEIs: nepotism, cronyism, and patronage. We found that favouritism of any form is cancer that can affect employees psychologically, emotionally, and even mentally.

Findings: As a result, we conclude that the principle of fairness in the selection of employees is directly related to the level of public trust in the institution's ability to serve its stakeholders and has deeper organisational implications that determine the ethos in the HE domain and that failure, on the part of institutional managers, to employ a trusted merit-based recruitment and selection procedures in the recruitment of employees is one of the factors that can significantly contribute to the spread of unrest in the HEI space.

Recommendations: Given this, we recommend, among others, that managers and administrators of HEIs avoid playing favourites by instituting an anti-favouritism policy that seeks to check murky recruitment and selection procedures and promote trust in employees in the promotion and reward systems in HEIs.

Keywords: *Favouritism, Nepotism, Cronyism, Patronage, Higher Education Institutions*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Favouritism in developing countries is giving preferential treatment to members of one's group, such as family, friends, or members of one's political party. This can result in unequal access to resources, opportunities, and benefits. It is a fact that favouritism has become an important subject matter as corporations and both governmental and non-governmental organisations are becoming more ethical (Derya et al., 2011).

Widespread favouritism is one of the main obstacles to good governance and organisational development in most developed countries. In general, the public perception of favouritism is ambiguous. Many developed countries disapprove of it because it is unfair to those who do not have good connections. Others, however, endorse it because it can help people to enforce their rights (Loewe et al., n.d.). While some countries consider it a form of corruption, others believe it is not because it is not linked to money. A third group claims favouritism is a form of corruption when it circumvents the law but not if it is used merely to speed up procedures.

Some developed and developing countries believe favouritism is closely linked to traditional values, social norms, and culture. Thus, as we know it today, favouritism permeates the operations of almost all governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Organisations typically have a set of strategic objectives and ambitions that they hope to achieve to succeed and flourish. To help guide their operations and decision-making processes, they create vision and mission statements that communicate their overarching purpose and direction. These statements help to ensure that everyone within the organisation is working towards the same goals and objectives. Similarly, individuals have their ambitions and goals, particularly regarding finding employment. To secure employment, individuals must have developed certain skills and competencies in demand in the job market; all other factors remain constant.

The competencies required by industry often inform the curriculum development of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Thus, HEIs are established to impart the knowledge and skills needed to develop the workforce necessary for the economic development of a nation. Because of this, any university seeking relevance in Ghana today must produce graduates armed with the relevant industry competencies to seek employment or even employ other people. To this end, one can comfortably conclude that the university’s role is to generate knowledge as a basis for development and to develop the human capital required to catalyse national development. Universities are agents of development, helping people out of poverty and contributing to achieving global goals.

Higher education has become increasingly important on national agendas. Over the past decades, it has undergone profound mutations and reforms worldwide, as portrayed in a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) review of tertiary education policies (OECD, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to ensure that the right expertise is hired to work in HEIs. Berry et al. (2011) observed a need for a conscious effort by the Management of HEIs to recruit qualified and professional administrative and academic staff since they directly influence graduates' learning outcomes and employability. However, not all HEIs follow the appropriate policies and guidelines to recruit qualified and professional teams for their institutions (UNESCO, 2014).

The overwhelming problem observed in most HEIs is a gross mismatch between skills, capabilities, and values in recruitment and selection. It has become a normal practice among the management of most HEIs in Ghana that one cannot find employment unless there have close connections in the institutions where they are seeking the employment, despite having

the right qualifications, appropriate experience, knowledge, skills, and character for the job at hand. It has also been observed that the election and appointment of university leadership, such as deans, directors, and heads of departments, are influenced by the University management and not based on merit. These assertions are noticeable from the assessment of promotion documents of staff members, their recruitment and posting, the appointing of staff to headship positions, and even the posting of national service personnel into the University.

When favouritism is noticed in an organisation by staff who happen to be unfavourable in the favouritism act, they turn to break their citizenship and the loyalty that has been built over the years. This phenomenon naturally leads to low productivity, unrest, turnover intention or turnover. Thus, a discussion on favouritism in the high education context is urgently needed to highlight the woes that accompany its practice. Unfortunately, the literature on favouritism in higher education is largely unavailable. The few documented works on the subject do not adequately address favouritism involving staff in HEIs. Therefore, it is on this basis that we made this effort to provide a detailed discourse on Favouritism in HEIs.

To achieve our objective, we reviewed relevant literature on the subject. We also solicited the opinions of staff with relevant knowledge, experience, and expertise in the recruitment and selection process at the University for Development Studies (UDS) in Tamale, Ghana (purposive sampling) who were within our reach and were available and willing (convenient sampling) to participate in the study. The data were analysed based on the current trends of favouritism by considering the types of favouritism, causes of favouritism, the impact of favouritism and how to curb favouritism in HEIs.

Thus, this paper presented an overview of favouritism in the recruitment and selection process, followed by a discourse on favouritism in HEIs and types of favouritism in HEIs. We also present the causes of favouritism in the HEI context. We discussed extensively; some proposed solutions to curb all forms of favouritism. Finally, we present recommendations to the leadership of HEIs on managing favouritism and all its mutations to engender a positive work climate in a university setting.

We wish to acknowledge that our paper was guided by insights from several theories of favouritism: In-group Favoritism, Social Identity Theory, Homophily Theory, Implicit Bias, Evolutionary Psychology, Social Exchange Theory, Power and Status Theory, and the like.

We did what we did because there are many different theories of favouritism, and there is no one theory that can explain favouritism in all cases. Some theories of favouritism focus on the person doing the favouritism, while others focus on the person or group that is favoured.

Besides, the theories provide different perspectives on favouritism and are subject to ongoing research and debate. Thus, discourse on favouritism is multifaceted and influenced by psychological, sociological, and cultural factors.

Favouritism in the Recruitment and Selection Process

All employees, regardless of their skills and experience, are entitled to equal treatment, as illustrated in the Ghana Labour Act 2003, Act 651 in Section 68, which states that every worker should receive equal pay for work of equal value without any discrimination, and per the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, which recognises the right to fair remuneration and equal pay for work of equal value (Section 24(1)). The Constitution of Ghana also clarifies that all human beings are equal before the law and that no person can be discriminated against on any grounds, be it gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed, or social or economic status. However, HE in Ghana has been characterised by political influence and favouritism, usually during recruitment.

While the recruitment and selection process aim to identify and attract potential candidates from within and outside an institution, most parts of the process have elements of subjective judgment inherent in them. Experience shows that a successful appointment can produce results that impact favourably on the wider aspects of institutional life, while a poor one can have damaging effects on institutions.

According to Keles et al. (2011), one of the negative effects of favouritism on the recruitment and selection process is that candidates are recruited based on their friendships and ties with some managers in the organisation where employment is being sought. These people may not have sufficient knowledge, skills, and qualifications for the job. They may not perform as well as other candidates with appropriate qualifications and experience. Failure of the institution to recruit the appropriate candidates will impact employee motivation, citizenship, institutional harmony, justice, and eventually, productivity. Such impacts can cause productive employees to leave their jobs over time and to make negative comments about the institution to its customers, stakeholders, colleagues, and people around them, which can harm the operations and image of the institution (Arasli & Tumer, 2008).

According to Froschheiser (2008), putting the wrong person in the wrong position to fill a vacancy can have dire consequences for the organisation in terms of poor employee morale, low productivity, and loss of opportunities. Perhaps, this is why Sarkar and Kumar (2007) contend that organisational performance hinges on organisations' approach to recruiting and selecting their employees.

Favouritism in Higher Education Institutions

All employees, regardless of their skills and experience, are entitled to equal treatment, yet, favouritism is thriving in modern-day workplaces, especially in HEIs. According to Abun (2014), favouritism in HE refers to a practice where a person or group of persons are treated differently than others, not necessarily because of their qualifications regarding job requirements but sometimes other aspects unrelated to job performance.

It is a fact that in every HEI, favouritism is found, and such preferential groups do exist. These groups are called the “circle of influence” or “the untouchable” because elements in the group are treated as special and considered close to the top management and can also influence management’s decisions and other people’s behaviour. The closeness of such individuals and groups to top management and their influence on management decisions brand them with such names. Most of the time, the unfavourable need to be extremely careful when dealing with such a favoured group of people because it can cost them their employment.

Favouritism is one of the most harmful informal practices in HEIs that affect the success and growth of institutions, especially in the last few decades. However, as destructive as favouritism is, most institutional managers seem to perpetuate its practice either because its negative effects are not well appreciated by the leaders or the leaders themselves have never been unfavourable of the favouritism act.

Goode's work (2017) mentions the negative consequences of favouritism when he writes that training students to develop work experience and employable skills is lacking in Ghana’s HE system. Goode (2017) further reports that the interviews and focus group participants stated that Ghana’s HEIs still need to build a culture for students to develop work experience and career skills due to a lack of technical and professional staff who can mount programmes that are market driven. In this regard, Sinha and Thaly (2013) spoke of a holistic recruitment model. They emphasised the importance of the whole recruitment process and the independence of its parts to avoid favouritism.

The presence of favouritism in the HEIs in Ghana was also echoed by the National Council for Tertiary Education when they reported, after the Council's 2019 audit exercise, that some teaching staff are teaching courses in which they have no expertise. Therefore, the report recommended the realignment of some teaching staff. The Council's report also recommended that some non-teaching staff pursue programmes leading to acquiring some competencies that will enable them to meet the job demands of their current positions or departments.

Implementing the NCTE recommendations will involve training and recruitment costs for the affected universities. Therefore, without any reservations, favouritism in HE is counterproductive and, in some cases, unethical and illegal (Abun, 2014). When management assigns responsibilities or promotes employees based on favouritism, the institution cannot attract the most qualified person. It discourages excellent performance and encourages mediocrity. Hard work is not recognised, but laziness is. Promotion is not based on merit, but on certain favours, Abun (2014) opines.

Favouritism in HE can be very demotivating for the employees who are at the unwanted end; it can result in one person being unfairly promoted faster than the others, being paid more to do the same job as others, and being more tolerated. The result is that they appear to be treated better than others for no valid administrative reason (Muzellec, 2006). Favouritism is one of the most critical sources of stress, personal preferences of decision-makers, loss of motivation and productivity, and a poison to employee morale.

A typical example is the case where a staff member of Professor Nir' Mbor' Oyelli Institute of Technology working on the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission's (GTEC) annual institutional data was denied the opportunity to attend a workshop organised by the Commission. The opportunity was given to a staff member of the same institution who had never heard of GTEC's annual institutional data. Conspicuously speaking, this kind of favouritism creates terrible feelings in employees towards the management and the favoured employees.

Certainly, such emotional conditions affect the performance of unfavourable employees. Thus, favouritism does not benefit any organisation, but it destroys almost all its administrative structures (Abun, 2014). Employees might be professionals, qualified, and experienced, but they are still humans and susceptible to emotions better left outside the workplace. Jealousy, anger, fear, sullenness, and worry can occur at any time in a work or institutional environment, but these negative emotions are exacerbated when favouritism occurs. Therefore, management should be careful when playing favouritism. Before indulging in workplace favouritism, management and supervisors should consider how their actions might affect other workers.

Types of Favouritism in Higher Education Institutions

There are several types of favouritism in HE; however, our paper will only discuss those that bother much in the HEI landscape: cronyism, patronage, and nepotism.

Nepotism: The term nepotism, derived from the Latin word "nepos," meaning nephew, is defined by Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Merriam Webster, 2011) as the appointment of nephews or other kin to duties based on relationship rather than qualification. It is an individual's attainment, recruitment, promotion, selection, or provision of more favourable working conditions and similar gains irrespective of their knowledge, abilities, skills, educational level, and experience, but owing to their kinship ties (Ozsemerci, 2003).

One major effect of nepotism on recruitment and placement practices is that candidates are considered for employment based on their friendships and bold ties rather than their

professional merits. Nepotism negatively affects employee work satisfaction and the smooth operation of profit-motived organisations.

Cronyism: is a broad social phenomenon in today's business world. Cronyism is a compound word of "crony," which seems to have originated as slang among undergraduates at the University of Cambridge in the 17th century, meaning close friend. Crony comes from the Greek word *khronios,* meaning "long-standing" (Duckett, 2003).

The concept can be defined as a general tendency to favour one person or group over others (Loewe et al., 2007). Cronyism is hiring people because of friendship but not on professional grounds. Cronyism is a type of organisational politics (Khatri et al., 2003), and it creates a feeling of entitlement on the part of the cronies and causes insubordination and disrespect for management members who are not in the circle of the cronies. Friends of managers may feel they deserve promotions and appointments to headship positions ahead of more qualified employees (Root, 2004). Cronyism affects the performance of the unfavourable employees as well as the performance of the institution because people are treated based on cronyism and not on their talents, skills, abilities, competencies, and experience.

Patronage: the support, encouragement, privilege, or financial aid that an organisation or individual bestows on another (Wikipedia, 2021). Patronage can be called "favouritism" based on attributes unrelated to merit or performance. Globally, patronage practices vary enormously, and they are highly entrenched with "godfathers", Professors and Administrators acting as gatekeepers into an academic career. Avenues for patronage abound, for example, in the allocation of offices. Whoever decides which person gets which office can use this power to dispense favours, giving the largest or most attractive offices to favourites. Every little thing in HE can be involved in patronage. It could be assessing a grant application, referring to an article, fixing a computer, fixing an air conditioner, and many more (Brain, 2009).

For example, the easiest way to get rid of the unfavourable is to make life unpleasant for them so that they leave the institution in a way that looks voluntary. Potential techniques include preventing them from getting desirable and lucrative administrative offices, giving them no recognition for achievements, denying them access to systems relevant to their work, and denying them tenure.

Patronage in HE has four dimensions. The first type is making decisions favouring insiders (compatriots), such as making appointments and awarding grants. Such actions are fairly obvious and, as such, may be susceptible to challenge in an equal-opportunity environment. The second type of patronage is biasing the process through which decisions are made, for example, by appointing favourites to selected committees or, more subtly, by establishing a process that will make appointing such people to a particular committee more likely. The third type of patronage is assisting preferred individuals in developing their knowledge or skills.

An example is by granting them undue study leave, holding their headship positions while they are in further studies, and nominating them for undeserved career development programmes that are not due. The fourth type of patronage is personal interaction, for example, how a person is greeted in a private meeting or on a public occasion. Patronage at the interpersonal level is often quite subtle and can be hard to detect, easy to misinterpret, impossible to prove and hence difficult to contest. These dimensions of patronage are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Types of Higher Education Patronage

No	Type of Patronage	Advantage for the Favoured (insiders)	Disadvantage for the unfavoured (outsiders)
1	Decision making	Advantageous decisions	Adverse decisions
2	Processes	Biased procedures; stacked lucrative committees	Biased procedures; stacked committees
3	Assistance	Advice; support; coaching; provide inside knowledge	Absence or inadequacy of assistance
4	Personal interaction	Encouragement; stimulus; bolstering of reputation	Discouragement; ostracism; bullying; undermining.

Source: Adopted from Brain (2009), and Modified

Effects of Favouritism on Higher Education Institutions

Virtually all development players now concur that for any meaningful and sustainable economic growth to be realised and sustained, tertiary education must be centrally placed in the development agenda of nations. Countries worldwide strive to build the sector in their strategic development plans. Indeed, building a tertiary education system is no longer a luxury but a national and continental imperative critical for Africa's development and global competitiveness (Makuku, 2020), and therefore HEIs should operate in a climate devoid of favouritism.

In addition, worldwide research on teaching in HE revealed that most institutional personnel do not have the knowledge and skills for quality assurance because of the practice of favouritism. The situation has been further aggravated by poor to no orientation and the induction of new personnel. It is well known that an institution's reputation is at risk if perceptions of poor-quality result from favouritism. Besides these, the effects of favouritism may include a decline in organisational performance, resentment and demoralisation, organisational conflict, a negative corporate image of the University, and unemployable graduates.

Unemployable Graduates

Graduates trained under the hands of unqualified faculty members are highly unlikely to hone the required competencies and skills to venture into the world of work, thus keeping them in the unemployment bracket. This is why it is no longer a surprise that despite the growing educational attainment of many, several pieces of literature cite a lack of skills and experience as key barriers to graduate work opportunities in various areas of the world (Fox et al., 2016). Some faculty members across the African sub-region gain their current job, maybe not because they merit it but because of favouritism.

Perhaps this is the reason Baah-Boateng (2014) concludes that although educational attainment in Ghana is rising, the quality of education is considered weak and ineffective in building both the motor and cognitive skills necessary to enter the labour force, resulting from the employment of unqualified teaching and non-teaching staff in our universities.

The Decline in Organisational Performance

The performance of any organisation depends, to a large extent, on the level of skills its leaders possess when it comes to implementing strategies. Silva (2014) described the essence of leadership as a conditional relationship between a manager and his followers. Therefore, the performance of an organisation also depends on its employees, who are key customers of the organisation and form the team that works towards achieving the organisation's goal. The cognitive competencies of both leaders and followers are also considered vital for effective

organisational performance. This practice could lower employee and organisational performance if an institution hires employees not on merit.

Resentment and Demoralisation

Transparency is necessary for increasing fairness levels and minimising bias during recruitment and selection because every individual seeking employment has ambition. However, Van den Brink et al. (2010) believe bias is more likely to occur if assessments are based on obscure criteria and the evaluation process is kept confidential. This process of unfairness is likely to ruin an individual's ambition and can also lead to perpetual resentment.

Resentfulness can cause low staff morale and undermine organisational goals. Employee resentment can stem from many sources, including delays in promotion or recognition, unwelcome work assignments, feelings of being overwhelmed, and simple jealousy. Favouritism breeds resentment, destroys employee morale, and creates disincentives for good performance. Once employees see that benefits flow from being on the manager's good side rather than from doing a great job, there is little point in working hard, eventually leading to demoralisation.

Demoralisation describes the negative emotional experiences affecting employees' well-being and quality of work in HEIs. Clarke and Kissane (2002) state that demoralisation is the experience of being unable to "cope, together with associated feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, subject incompetence, and diminished self-esteem." According to this definition, demoralisation is similar to burnout, which describes people's negative emotional experiences towards their jobs (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001).

Since the dominant discourse on employee demoralisation is influenced by psychological perspectives, especially the theory of burnout, most efforts to promote employee well-being rely on psychological approaches. Nevertheless, employee demoralisation is more socially constructed than psychologically constructed.

Organisational Conflict

According to Coser (1967), conflict is a struggle over values and claims to secure status, power, and resources in which the opponents aim to neutralise, injure, or eliminate the rivals. From a communication perspective, it is also defined as "an expressed struggle between, at least, two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from other parties in achieving their goals" (Hocker and Wimont, 1985). There are subtle conflicts, including rivalries, jealousies, personality clashes, role definitions and struggles for power and favour.

Root (2014) posits that when employees perceive widespread favouritism, such a situation may lead to organisational conflict. He laments that it would be a conflict between the unfavourable and favourable employees and between the management and employees. He claims that the working environment becomes less conducive to productive work if such things happen.

Negative Corporate Image

The term "corporate image" refers to how positively or negatively an institution is perceived by its key stakeholders, such as employees, customers, media members, investors, governmental and non-governmental agencies, suppliers, etc. A strong corporate image helps win the war for talent and fosters employee retention (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002).

Organisations have long understood the importance of their images, but in the HE sectors, the topic is yet to gain more attention. Organisational image can be understood as a synonym for organisational brand. Universities are competing for the best applicants nationally and internationally; hence, they need to understand better how their stakeholders perceive them. Thus, universities today act more like commercial businesses, and assessing their corporate brands and images has become urgent (Curtis et al., 2009). A negative corporate image, usually given birth by internal conflict resulting from favouritism, can lower profits and eventually send an organisation out of business. In other words, a positive corporate image will suggest that an organisation has little or no favouritism, all other factors being equal. This will eventually translate to an attractive corporate brand and then higher profits. We proposed, below, a model summarising the causes and the overall effect of favouritism on the performance of HEIs.

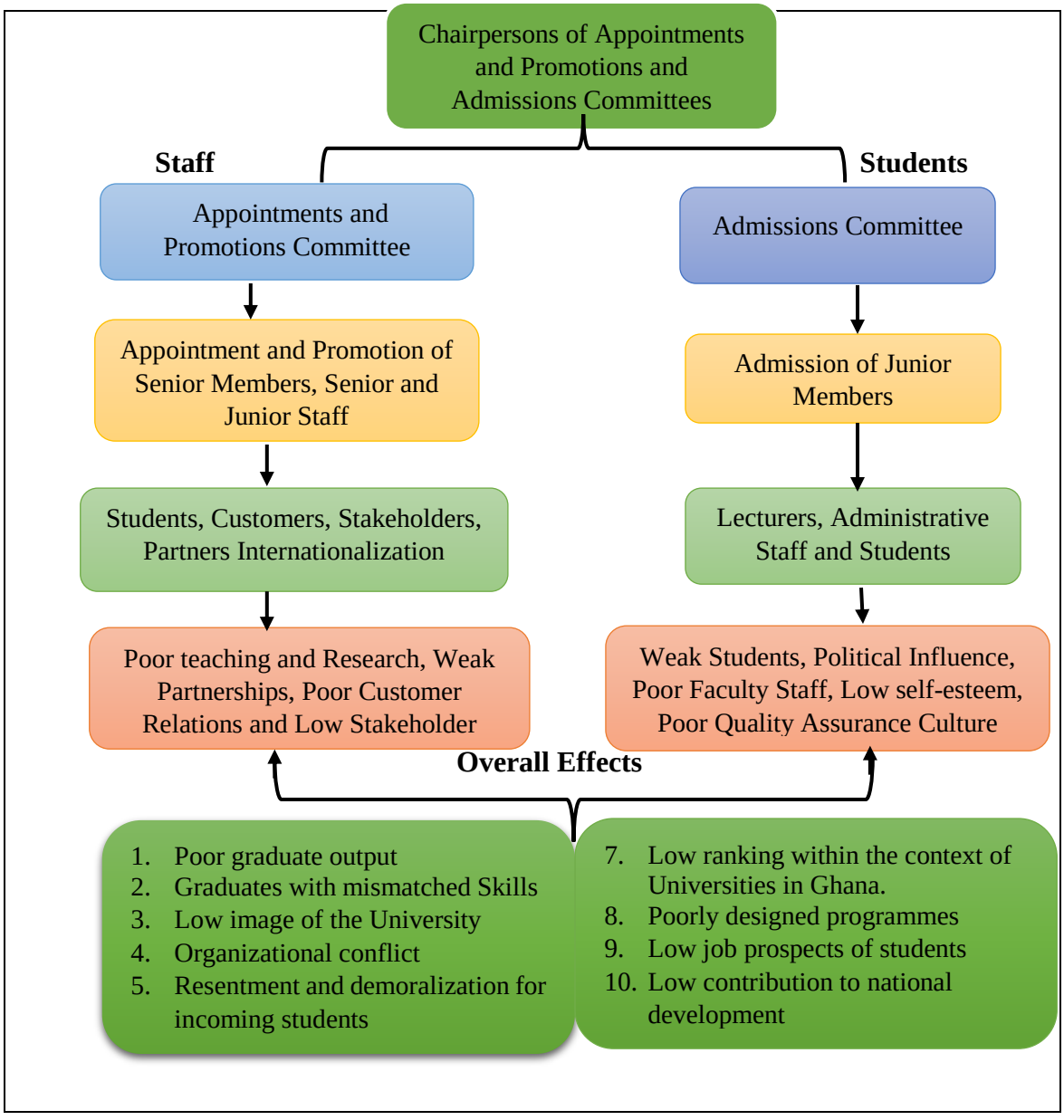

Figure 2: A Proposed Model of the Implications of Favouritism on the Operations HEIs

Source: Authors' Construct, 2023

Curbing Favouritism in Higher Education Institutions

In the globalised world, equality, transparency, accountability, rights, and fairness are often pronounced in every aspect of life. Managers and administrators who do not consider these concepts in their applications have been at the centre of the criticism. Institutional managers who believe the concepts mentioned above while carrying out their management activities are mostly appreciated, whereas those who do not consider these concepts in their work have been criticised for favouritism (Meric & Erdem, 2013; p. 468).

Creating a conducive atmosphere for good interaction with employees could be an influencing factor in favouritism. For this reason, some institutional managers try to keep communication with their employees to a reasonable level in order not to engender the practice of favouritism.

Several practices have been recommended to managers of institutions to curb favouritism in the enterprise space. They include fostering professionalism, instituting a favouritism policy, providing equal and better standards for promotion, and rewarding employees.

At its core, favouritism is unprofessional and unethical behaviour; therefore, the first step to avoiding it is fostering professionalism in the institution. It is said that the best offence is a good defence; hence, managers should defend their organisations from potential favouritism by creating a professional environment that actively discourages unfair treatment (Root, 2014).

Organisations and institutions should establish anti-favouritism policies to ensure that favouritism does not influence the hiring, promotion, or disciplining of a close relative or crony. Such a policy will reduce the perception of favouritism by requiring all employees to disclose relevant conflicts, such as a close personal or business relationship with a prospective employee and by restricting that employee's involvement with employment decisions relating to his relative. An effective favouritism policy typically prevents these issues by prohibiting married couples or close relatives from working directly with each other. Transferring one of the employees to a different department can help ease problems in the working environment (Abun, 2014; p.13). A successful favouritism policy, therefore, has the potential to make a significant improvement in the overall morale of the organisation.

Everett (2019) recommends that administrators praise their employees where it is due and ensure that such activities are done timely and, just as importantly, are genuine. Managers ought to "give praise only when employees have done a good job, and they know it." Another important consideration is clarifying why an individual deserves praise; otherwise, it will go poorly with others. If the manager explains why and links that to corporate strategy and values, it feels less like favouritism and more about a fair meritocracy. According to Everett (2019), the idea is to create a culture of appreciation based on nurturing and supporting the weakest and strongest performers and playing to employees' strengths.

In all well-meaning HEIs, it is important to reward high-performing employees to motivate and retain talented and high performers and attract potential employees. However, HE institutions must be extremely cautious when allocating monetary and other rewards to avoid playing favourites in the selection process. The institution's rewards structure should adhere to a transparent framework that managers practice and employees understand. Without this structure, favouritism can take root in the institution, negatively impacting its culture and bottom line. It is, therefore, essential to ensure that employee rewards are tied to performance; otherwise, any reward given out of merit on a case-by-case basis should be the same standards set for all employees.

From all the recommendations mentioned above, the take-home message is for the management of HEIs to ensure that they establish universal systems to assess employees and leave personal preferences aside. Administrators should dedicate equal time and attention to all employees, whether in a meeting or having lunch together. Root (2014) posits that administrators should keep track of employees' performance using objective criteria to monitor their performance. He also contends that administrators should encourage open communication at the workplace so that employees can feel comfortable sharing their opinions whilst focusing on creating a professional environment where everyone has equal chances of success. When employees are promoted based on a certain criterion, the process should be made clear to all employees.

2.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Our paper aims to provide a detailed discourse on favouritism and offer practical recommendations to the leadership of HEIs, in particular, on how to manage favouritism and all its mutations to engender a positive work climate in a university setting. Our paper revealed that favouritism exists in appointing teaching and non-teaching staff in HEIs in Ghana. It was also evident that institutional managers favour their relatives, friends, fellow compatriots, and those who share their political views regardless of their educational/professional qualifications and competencies.

In the course of this study, we also noticed that the principle of fairness in the selection of employees is directly related to the level of public trust in the institution's ability to serve the public and has deeper organisational implications that determine the ethos in the HE domain. A lack of merit-based recruitment is one of the factors that can significantly contribute to the spread of unrest in the HEIs space.

The paper equally disclosed that the most important factor for recruitment and selection based on favouritism is to become obedient towards the superior, not the individual employees' skills and qualifications. Such occurrences lead to mediocre quality appointments. In such institutions, the governance standards are replaced by complicated social-exchange mechanisms based on personal favours. The principles of merit, transparency and accountability are substituted by murky human resource practices that tolerate corruption, favouritism, and ultimately deteriorating organisational performance.

Recommendations

Human resources lie at the heart of HEIs and constitute their main asset. Therefore, for HEIs to function effectively, they need quality and highly motivated staff. The existence of merit-based recruitment and promotion systems is a precondition for ensuring the impartiality and quality of service delivery. The establishment of merit-based recruitment and selection processes would provide equal access and opportunities to all interested applicants, value the skills and knowledge of the individuals, and appreciate attitudes and behaviour. The recruitment processes should be transparent and built to allow the best candidate for each position to be selected.

Given the frequently large gap between the formal rules for appointments and promotions of employees in HEIs and the actual favouritism practices, the role of the leadership is crucial for enhancing the impartiality of recruitment procedures. Providing a moral model of behaviour, installing and enforcing merit-based recruitment practices, and imposing sanctions for non-compliance can lead to proper institutional reengineering to uplift the institution's corporate image.

Higher education institutions should also establish a policy that guarantees that any real, perceived, or potential conflict of interest in the recruitment procedures will be avoided. Such a policy should ensure no staff will be involved in selecting and recruiting any candidate with whom they may be deemed in any relationship that may create a conflict of interest.

Higher education institutions in Ghana should minimise using friends and family to publicise their vacant positions. It should also use campus or graduate recruitment and unsolicited applications, together with recommendations, as its main mode of employing its employees. Though a good idea, employee referrals (recommendations) should be reduced to cater for a certain number of people rather than a whole-scale opportunity. That gives room to favouritism and, at times, the employment of individuals who might not contribute meaningfully to organisational output.

Higher education institutions should establish a sound employee reward system as the utmost tool to underpin employee trust and the fight against all forms of favouritism. A reward system that will be fair and transparent enough to be trusted by all. Promotion and appointments to headship positions should follow a fairly designed criterion acceptable to all and approved by an institution's governing council.

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