



Retaliatory grading: Academic retaliation, abuse of power, teacher ethics, and silent psychological violence in higher education in Bangladesh

Ashikujaman Syed

Researcher, Bioinformatics Research Lab, Center for Research Innovation and Development (CRID) Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract

Higher education institutions in Bangladesh have long been regarded as centers of intellectual growth, ethical development, and social progress. However, concerns have increasingly emerged regarding allegations of academic retaliation, abuse of authority, favoritism, and institutional injustice within certain colleges and universities. Reports from students, media discussions, and public discourse suggest that some students who raise complaints against faculty members or institutional authorities may subsequently face academic or administrative disadvantages. These may include unfair grading, hostile viva examinations, delays in thesis approval, denial of recommendations, exclusion from academic opportunities, or other forms of institutional pressure.

This article examines the phenomenon of academic retaliation within the context of Bangladesh's higher education system. It explores the structural and cultural conditions that may enable such practices, the psychological and social consequences for students, and the broader implications for justice, accountability, academic freedom, and institutional integrity. The paper also discusses the importance of teacher training, professional ethics, moral accountability, and the responsibilities of educators in maintaining a fair and humane academic environment. Finally, the article proposes institutional reforms aimed at strengthening transparency, protecting student rights, and improving accountability mechanisms in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Academic retaliation, higher education, bangladesh, teacher ethics, abuse of power, student rights, psychological violence, university governance, academic integrity

Introduction

Higher education is not merely a process of acquiring knowledge; it is also a platform for intellectual freedom, ethical development, critical thinking, and democratic engagement. Universities and colleges are expected to foster environments where students can express concerns, challenge ideas, and seek justice without fear of retaliation or discrimination.

However, allegations from students in some Bangladeshi higher education institutions present a troubling reality. In certain cases, students claim that after filing complaints against faculty members, departmental authorities, or institutional practices, they experienced academic disadvantages, psychological intimidation, or administrative pressure. Although not every allegation can be independently verified, the recurring nature of such concerns raises important questions regarding institutional governance and accountability.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the majority of educators in Bangladesh continue to serve with professionalism, dedication, and integrity. Nevertheless, allegations involving favoritism, misuse of authority, political influence, corruption, and retaliatory academic behavior in certain institutions continue to generate public concern and weaken trust in higher education systems.

Academic retaliation represents a form of silent institutional violence that often remains invisible in official records yet can have devastating long-term consequences for students' academic careers, mental well-being, and professional futures. It reflects the misuse of institutional authority in environments where significant power imbalances exist between educators and students.

Understanding Academic Retaliation

Academic retaliation refers to punitive or discriminatory actions taken against students because they voiced complaints, expressed dissent, reported misconduct, or challenged authority within an educational institution.

Such retaliation may manifest in several forms, including:

- Unfairly low grades or inconsistent evaluation
- Hostile treatment during viva voce or oral examinations
- Delays in thesis approval or research supervision
- Refusal to provide recommendation letters
- Public humiliation or psychological intimidation
- Exclusion from academic opportunities
- Administrative harassment or disciplinary threats

One of the major challenges in addressing academic retaliation is that academic evaluation often involves subjective judgment. This makes it difficult to determine whether poor grading or academic barriers are genuinely merit-based or influenced by personal bias or retaliation.

As a result, many students may remain silent out of fear that pursuing justice could further damage their academic standing or future career opportunities.

Structural Challenges in Bangladesh's Higher Education System

The structure of higher education in Bangladesh is often highly hierarchical, where faculty members possess substantial influence over students' academic outcomes and professional futures. Students frequently depend on teachers for grades, research opportunities, scholarships, recommendations, and career references.

In environments where accountability mechanisms are weak, this imbalance of power may create opportunities for

abuse or favoritism. Several structural factors may contribute to the risk of academic retaliation, including:

- Politicization within educational institutions
- Administrative opacity
- Weak grievance mechanisms
- Lack of independent oversight
- Institutional favoritism
- Fear of reputational damage
- Limited legal awareness among students

Over the years, allegations related to academic retaliation and unethical academic practices have surfaced in both public and private universities in Bangladesh. In some reported cases, students who raised concerns regarding harassment, discrimination, corruption, or administrative misconduct claimed they later faced academic or institutional pressure.

Although not all allegations are legally proven, the persistence of such narratives contributes to a culture of fear and silence within educational environments.

Psychological and Social Consequences

Academic retaliation extends beyond academic harm; it can significantly affect students' psychological health and social well-being.

Potential consequences include:

- Anxiety and chronic stress
- Depression and emotional distress
- Loss of self-confidence
- Social isolation
- Academic disengagement
- Fear of institutional authority
- Suicidal thoughts in severe cases

When students begin to believe that speaking against injustice may lead to punishment, trust in educational institutions deteriorates. This creates a "culture of silence" in which students prioritize survival over truth, discouraging transparency and accountability.

Such an environment undermines the core purpose of higher education, which should encourage intellectual freedom, ethical inquiry, independent thought, and constructive criticism.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teachers are among the most influential figures within any educational system. In higher education, educators are not only responsible for delivering academic knowledge but also for shaping ethical values, intellectual independence, and social responsibility among students.

Therefore, discussions surrounding academic retaliation cannot be separated from conversations about teacher training, professional ethics, and institutional culture.

Many faculty members possess advanced academic qualifications but may not receive sufficient institutional training in:

- Student psychology
- Conflict resolution
- Emotional intelligence
- Ethical academic conduct
- Anti-harassment policies
- Fair assessment methods
- Diversity and inclusion awareness
- Communication and mentoring skills

Without adequate professional training, personal bias, emotional reactions, political influence, or misuse of authority may negatively affect teacher-student relationships and institutional fairness.

Higher education institutions should therefore establish regular faculty development programs focusing on:

- Ethical use of authority
- Professional behavior in classrooms
- Transparent grading systems
- Prevention of retaliation and discrimination
- Responsible supervision practices
- Student mental health awareness

Such initiatives should not be viewed as criticism of teachers, but rather as essential professional development necessary for maintaining educational excellence and institutional trust.

Duties and Responsibilities of Teachers

Teaching is not merely a profession; it is a moral and social responsibility. Educators hold significant influence over students' intellectual and emotional development and therefore must exercise their authority with fairness, wisdom, professionalism, and accountability.

The core responsibilities of teachers include:

- Ensuring fair and unbiased evaluation
- Maintaining academic integrity
- Creating a safe and respectful learning environment
- Encouraging critical thinking and open dialogue
- Supporting students' academic and personal growth
- Preventing discrimination and harassment
- Respecting students' dignity and differing opinions
- Acting as mentors rather than authoritarian figures

Disagreement or criticism from students should not automatically be interpreted as disrespect or rebellion. In democratic academic environments, questioning and debate are essential components of intellectual progress and healthy education.

When institutional authority is used to silence students through fear, humiliation, or academic punishment, education loses its ethical purpose.

Characteristics of an Ideal Teacher

An ideal teacher is not defined solely by academic credentials or institutional position. Rather, a truly respected educator demonstrates integrity, empathy, patience, fairness, and commitment to justice.

The qualities of an ideal teacher include:

- Fairness and impartiality
- Emotional maturity and self-control
- Respect for diverse opinions
- Transparency in grading and evaluation
- Commitment to truth and academic honesty
- Ability to inspire curiosity and confidence
- Willingness to acknowledge mistakes and improve
- Equal treatment of students regardless of social, political, or personal background

An ideal educator understands that students are not individuals to be controlled through fear, but minds to be guided through knowledge, encouragement, and ethical leadership.

Historically, the most respected teachers are remembered not for exercising power, but for nurturing intellectual growth, protecting student dignity, and inspiring future generations.

Moral, Religious, and Legal Accountability

Teaching has historically been regarded as one of the most honorable professions in society. In many moral and religious traditions, educators are entrusted not only with the responsibility of imparting knowledge but also with protecting justice, fairness, honesty, and human dignity.

From an ethical perspective, the misuse of academic authority for personal revenge, favoritism, humiliation, discrimination, or retaliation represents a serious violation of professional and moral responsibility. Such behavior can damage students' futures, mental health, and trust in educational institutions.

Religious and moral teachings across societies consistently emphasize accountability, justice, compassion, and honesty. Abuse of power against vulnerable individuals, including students, is widely condemned in ethical and spiritual traditions. Educational authority should therefore be treated as a trust rather than a tool for intimidation or personal control.

At the same time, accountability for academic misconduct should be addressed through lawful and institutional mechanisms rather than emotional hostility or public harassment. Governments and higher education authorities therefore have an important responsibility to ensure that educational institutions remain transparent, ethical, and accountable.

Possible legal and administrative consequences for proven academic misconduct may include:

- Formal investigations
- Disciplinary action
- Suspension from academic responsibilities
- Administrative penalties
- Removal from leadership positions
- Institutional monitoring and review

Strong accountability systems are necessary not only to protect students but also to preserve the dignity and credibility of the teaching profession itself.

Ultimately, ethical education requires both moral responsibility and institutional justice. A healthy educational system can only function when authority is balanced by accountability, and when educators uphold the values of integrity, fairness, humanity, and respect.

Ethics, Human Rights, and Institutional Responsibility

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right. A just educational system must ensure fairness, transparency, and protection against discrimination or retaliation.

Internationally, many universities have implemented measures such as:

- Independent ombudsman offices
- Anonymous complaint systems
- Grade review committees
- Anti-retaliation policies
- Mental health and counseling support

In Bangladesh, the need for transparent and independent grievance mechanisms is increasingly important. Institutions

that fail to ensure accountability risk damaging their credibility, weakening public trust, and discouraging academic excellence.

Fair academic evaluation is essential not only for student welfare but also for preserving institutional integrity and international reputation.

Recommendations for Reform

1. Independent Grievance Mechanisms

Universities should establish independent grievance committees capable of investigating complaints without departmental or political interference.

2. Anonymous Reporting Systems

Students should have access to secure and confidential platforms for reporting misconduct without fear of retaliation.

3. Transparent Evaluation Processes

Institutions may introduce:

- Double-checking systems for grading
- Digital evaluation audits
- Recorded viva examinations
- External moderation procedures

These measures could improve transparency and reduce opportunities for abuse.

4. Faculty Ethics and Training Programs

Mandatory professional ethics and teacher training programs should be introduced across universities and colleges.

5. Mental Health Support

Universities should provide counseling and psychological support services for students experiencing academic harassment or emotional distress.

6. Anti-Retaliation Policies

Clear institutional policies prohibiting retaliation against complainants should be formally adopted and strictly enforced.

7. External Oversight and Accountability

Independent monitoring bodies and regular institutional audits could help strengthen accountability and reduce the misuse of authority.

Conclusion

The majority of educators in Bangladesh continue to perform their responsibilities with professionalism, dedication, and integrity. However, allegations involving academic retaliation, favoritism, misuse of authority, and institutional injustice in certain higher education institutions remain a matter of serious concern.

Academic retaliation represents a silent crisis within higher education. Unlike visible forms of violence, it often operates quietly through grading systems, institutional processes, administrative pressure, and psychological intimidation. Yet its effects can be deeply destructive for students' academic futures and mental well-being.

A truly progressive and ethical educational system must ensure that students can raise concerns without fear of punishment or discrimination. Universities fulfill their

mission only when justice is valued more than authority, transparency more than silence, and ethical leadership more than institutional power.

At the same time, protecting the dignity of education requires investment in ethical teacher training, transparent governance, independent accountability systems, and a culture of mutual respect between educators and students. The true purpose of teaching is not to control through fear, but to inspire through fairness, knowledge, integrity, and humanity.

Acknowledgement

The author expresses deep and serious concern regarding all forms of academic injustice, including retaliatory grading, abuse of authority, favoritism, humiliation, and unethical treatment that may undermine students' merit, dignity, mental well-being, and long-term educational development. This work is driven by the firm belief that education must be grounded in fairness, integrity, humanity, accountability, and respect for students' rights, rather than fear, discrimination, or the misuse of institutional power.

The author strongly condemns any form of academic misconduct or abuse of authority that distorts merit-based evaluation, suppresses students' voices, or erodes trust within educational institutions. Academic power must never be exercised as a tool for personal bias, intimidation, retaliation, or psychological pressure against students who seek fairness or raise legitimate concerns.

At the same time, the author acknowledges and sincerely respects the large number of honest, dedicated, ethical, and professional educators in Bangladesh who continue to serve students and society with integrity, responsibility, and commitment despite various institutional and systemic challenges.

However, it is also necessary to recognize that even a small number of unethical practices or biased actions within academic systems can have devastating consequences on students' lives, academic trajectories, and psychological well-being. Such realities demand urgent attention, stronger institutional accountability, transparent evaluation systems, and enforceable ethical standards in education.

This work is intended to encourage constructive academic discussion, ethical reflection, institutional reform, teacher professionalism, transparent governance, and the protection of students' rights within higher education environments. The ultimate objective of this article is not to undermine the teaching profession, but to advocate for a more just, humane, transparent, and truly merit-based educational system for future generations.

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