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Vote Buying in General Elections among Students: A Case Study of the Faculty of Social Sciences in Knust

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the phenomenon of vote buying during general elections among students of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). The study employed a mixed-method approach and a case study research design. A total of 150 participants provided responses through structured questionnaires, whereas additional information was sought through qualitative means to enhance the interpretations. The results showed that a significant number of the participants (67%) felt that their economic status does not affect their voting behavior, but a few others stated that there is some effect. It was also found that, despite the majority of respondents denying being bribed in monetary form by politicians, they accepted receiving gifts like food, T-shirts, and transport services. In addition, 37% of the respondents revealed that the inducements did affect their voting behavior. It was further found out that the majority of the respondents were politically conscious and had a fair knowledge of the political party manifestos. This means that the students who took part in this research have quite a good understanding of political issues. The findings show that vote buying exists amongst students, but its form is largely indirect and not directly monetary. The study concluded that rational decision-making is largely prevalent, but material inducements influence a considerable number of voters. The study recommends strengthening electoral regulations, intensifying civic and voter education, and promoting issue-based political campaigns to reduce the influence of vote buying and enhance democratic integrity among students.

INTRODUCTION

Elections are considered one of the most fundamental institutions in democratic governance. Elections give citizens the privilege to delegate political power, keep their leaders accountable, and express their interests collectively (Skaaning and Svensson, 2026; Dahl, 1971; Schedler, 2002). The democratic ideology holds that for an election to fulfill its purpose, the voting process should mirror the true and authentic preference of voters without any form of manipulation or coercion (Schedler, 2002). However, in several emerging democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and certain Asian countries, this essential principle has repeatedly been compromised in the phenomenon called vote buying (Gyasi and Torsu, 2024; Nwagwu *et al.*, 2022; Kramon, 2016). Vote buying refers to the act of offering money or any material goods or services by political parties or candidates in exchange for votes (Vicente, 2014; Stokes, 2005). In addition, vote buying has not only been seen as an isolated incident but rather as part of the dynamics of politics itself that have influenced candidate campaigning and voter attitudes toward the political system (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Schaffer, 2007).

Ghana occupies a paradoxical position in this landscape. Ghana has established itself as a model for other nations in the region following its transition to a democratic government after the restoration of a multi-party system in 1992 (Resnick, 2017). In fact, the country has been widely lauded for having conducted relatively smooth elections without extended violence and with relatively good governance on the part of the government (Kumah-Abiwu, 2025; Gyimah-Boadi, 2007). However, beneath the positive assessment of its democratic processes lies the fact that money and material rewards have been used as key tools of luring electorates during the elections (Paalo and Van Gyampo, 2019; Baidoo *et al.*, 2018). This phenomenon can be understood through Bayart's concept of "the politics of the belly" (Bayart, 2009). Bayart used this concept to describe the phenomenon wherein political power is sought through the distribution of tangible goods, rather than through the presentation of ideological programs. In this instance, the ability to provide is synonymous with the ability to govern (Zenenga, 2015). In such a situation, as van de Walle (2002) notes, the conditions that encourage vote buying are self-perpetuating because politicians who have bought an election campaign will be under pressure to reimburse themselves after they are in power.

Two types of vote buying – direct and indirect – have been identified in the literature. In direct vote buying, money and goods such as consumer products or alcohol are transferred to voters for a particular voting promise made (Stokes *et al.*, 2023; Schaffer, 2007). In contrast, indirect vote buying occurs through wider patronage practices whereby a political party or candidate distributes public goods to the community or creates conditions that induce reciprocal obligations that lead voters to vote in their favour in return (Nichter, 2008; Finan & Schechter, 2012). The two forms depend on an inherent characteristic of electoral politics, in that the

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secret ballot makes it impossible for candidates to check whether voters have followed their promises (Stokes, 2005). However, this does not explain why vote buying continues in practice, although its existence is attributed to norm enforcement, local monitoring by political parties, and selective targeting of voters based on their tendencies toward reciprocity (Stokes *et al.*, 2013; Finan and Schechter, 2012).

The implications of electoral vote buying are far-reaching and go beyond simply undermining the fairness of any given election contest. On a systemic level, such practice distorts the competitive field by tilting it in favor of the rich candidate and the resourceful party; thus, effectively rendering the least resourced candidates and political parties, whose only appeal lies in competence and programmatic merits, less relevant (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007). Vote buying transforms the campaign process from one based on policy discussion into an economic transaction, thereby undermining the informational basis of democracy and citizenry (Schaffer, 2007; Lindberg, 2003). Moreover, by establishing a tradition of commoditizing politics, vote buying undermines the civic ethos of democratic citizenship and teaches voters to regard elections as opportunities for profit rather than political self-governance (Bob-Milliar, 2012). Such implications become even more profound when considering young people, whose attitudes towards politics can shape the future course of Ghana's democracy.

In light of this larger picture, it becomes necessary to consider the situation of university students. University students constitute an important, politically organized and mobilized constituency whose importance does not escape national-level politicians, as they recognize the voting power of this group of citizens as well as their role as potential future leaders of political parties (Bob-Milliar, 2012). Furthermore, since many students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and have ties in communities where patron-client relations are entrenched, they are vulnerable to the same inducements that influence other segments of society. In the case of universities in Ghana, such as the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), it has been reported that politicians and agents of political parties use the tactic of vote buying to target university students during general elections, utilizing monetary incentives and gifts to secure their loyalty. The independence of the voting decisions of university students is thus undermined at the very period when democratic attitudes and values should be cultivated.

Despite many empirical analyses done on electoral malpractices and vote buying in Ghana (Takyi and Kyere, 2025; Gyasi and Torsu, 2024; Agyepong *et al.*, 2021; Paalo & Gyampo, 2019; Baidoo *et al.*, 2018; Bob-Milliar, 2012; Gyimah-Boadi, 2007), few studies have focused on how such a phenomenon affects university students' electoral activities. This paper is designed to fill this void. The current study tries to investigate why such students may be susceptible to electoral malpractices, the impact of these acts on their behavior as voters, and whether any institutionally and legally available means can protect students from engaging in vote buying. Overall, it attempts to contribute to the discussion on the quality of electoral democracy in Ghana as well as its potential preconditions for the development of a more civic-oriented attitude towards politics among the next generation of Ghanaian citizens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Vote Buying

Vote buying consists of a transaction between political actors and their constituents wherein the former gives some tangible rewards (money, goods, or services) to the latter in exchange for votes (Schaffer, 2007). As such, vote buying differs from other types of electoral clientelism in that it consists of a highly focused deal, made individually, that occurs just before or during an election period. The notion of vote buying has been explored from different angles by social scientists. According to Stokes (2005), vote buying falls into the category of contingent exchanges in which a reward is conditional on one's vote. The difficulty with enforcing such a condition, owing to secret balloting procedures, has sparked academic debates over whether vote buying alters voting behavior or merely mobilizes supporters. The difference between "vote buying" and "turnout buying" has been emphasized by Nichter (2008), who argues that politicians buy out voters not because they want to alter their preferences but merely to mobilize supporters who would remain inactive otherwise. This nuance is particularly relevant in analyzing student populations, among which political apathy runs deep.

Vote buying, moreover, has not escaped conceptual disagreements. Some researchers have differentiated between vote buying at the individual level – involving either money or material gifts – and other methods of electoral manipulation, such as the construction of public projects or investments by communities, which are timed to coincide with elections and may be referred to as "pork barrel politics" (Stokes *et al.*, 2013). Still others have defined the practice to include abstention purchase – paying members of the opposition to refrain from voting – thus adding another layer of complexity to the definition. However, all agree that vote buying erodes the deliberative underpinnings of democracy.

The practice of vote buying in Africa, and especially in Ghana, transcends monetary transactions. In this scenario, several types of gifts and rituals could be given or performed, and while this may involve political parties, student organizations are now joining in on the action. The subject of discussion will include topics such as poverty, democracy, civic engagement, and other areas where relevant questions could be asked about the meaning of democracy, particularly how the system is able to bring out accountability within an environment characterized by material politics. However, through the acceptance of

monetary compensation for the act of voting, not only do these educated individuals lose their independence, but they also relinquish the process of holding elected officials accountable, thus proving to the politicians that the educated person also sells his/her vote.

Theoretical Framework

This study is conducted within the frameworks of rational choice theory and clientelism theory.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) is one of the important theories used in political science. The theory assumes that human action results from rational decision-making processes (Scott, 2000). Individuals are assumed to act by weighing up the potential gains and losses that may be obtained through the different alternatives presented before them and selecting the one with the most benefit (Scott, 2000). Rational Choice Theory is mostly popularized by the works of Anthony Downs, especially in the book titled An Economic Theory of Democracy (1957). The core assumption of Rational Choice Theory is that people are likely to choose rationally in the voting process based on who can meet their own selfish needs or maximize their benefits (Herfeld, 2020).

The Rational Choice Theory is especially applicable in this study about vote buying among students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at KNUST because it addresses issues that lead to the acceptance of bribes, presents, or material compensation by students during the period of general elections. Through the RCT, this study postulates that a student's decision to support a candidate when participating in voting is not based on ideology, competence, or politics of the candidates, but on the basis of self-interest. Students may accept vote buying as a means of dealing with the material or financial challenges they experience. In other words, students may be influenced by the materials and monetary incentives provided by politicians since it gives them some short-term material support. The RCT therefore helps explain why and how voting buying may occur among students during elections.

Although RCT is a useful tool, there are certain limitations associated with this theory. It has been pointed out that the theory significantly emphasizes the self-interest of people and rationality in their behavior, although not all political actions are driven by material interest (Hudik, 2019). Other aspects like emotions, ideology, religion, social pressure, political socialization, and culture can have a great impact on the decisions made in politics (Touseef *et al.*, 2023; Çiçek, 2023). Another problem with RCT is the assumption made about individuals having complete and correct information and being capable of making completely rational decisions (Frank, 2019). In actuality, people do sometimes behave irrationally and base their decisions on inadequate information. Notwithstanding these criticisms, the RCT provides a suitable framework for exploring voter behavior and electoral decisions, especially in studies involving vote buying and political incentives.

Clientelism Theory

While rational choice theory emphasizes the personal dimension of electoral politics, clientelism theory examines vote buying as an interaction pattern that exists within a long-lasting framework of political exchange (Lemarchand and Legg, 2017). Clientelism Theory is an explanation of the interaction between political figures and citizens, in which material rewards are exchanged for political support (Guerrero-Sierra *et al.*, 2024). This theory assumes that politicians, political parties, or individuals who have influence give their political supporters goods, money, favors, employment opportunities, or other material things in return for their political support (Lemarchand and Legg, 2017). Consequently, clientelism involves an exchange between patrons, who are the source of power, and the clients, who provide political support in return for material incentives. Many scholars like Susan Stokes and Herbert Kitschelt have analyzed the role of clientelism in political interactions (Stokes, 2021; Yıldırım and Kitschelt, 2017). Clientelism Theory is based on the idea that political support can be won through material and personal exchanges instead of ideological reasons, effective policies, or democracy (Stoke, 2021; Yıldırım and Kitschelt, 2017).

The Clientelism Theory is applicable in this study since it gives insights into the ways in which political aspirants can offer money, presents, food, transportation, or any other form of incentive to the clients during the general election period. As per the theory, students in this case can become clients in a political transaction in which they offer electoral support in exchange for some monetary or material gains from the politician or political agent. The Clientelism Theory, therefore, explains why vote buying takes place among political actors during an election. In addition, the theory provides an explanation of how economic hardship among students can make them vulnerable to such activities during elections.

Clientelism Theory has, however, received some criticism for being too preoccupied with material exchanges as the primary cause of political actions (Lemarchand and Legg, 2017). It can be argued that voters sometimes do not necessarily choose candidates based on incentives or rewards but rather as a result of other considerations, including ideological considerations and even ethnic or religious affiliations (Lemarchand and Legg, 2017). Furthermore, there have been claims that Clientelism Theory depicts the voters as passive victims of political favoritism rather than active political agents (Bobonis *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, according to some researchers, clientelism itself is not easy to assess, mainly because vote buying is often carried out in secrecy (Bobonis *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, Clientelism Theory provides a valuable tool for studying vote buying and patronage politics.

Empirical Review

Ghanaian literature on vote-buying has seen tremendous expansion in the last ten years. This reflects both the prevalence of the act and the complexity with which it has evolved. Despite differences in terms of the scope and methods used in the various studies, the body of literature under consideration shows that vote buying is not only prevalent but well-entrenched within Ghanaian society. The study by Paalo and van Gyampo (2019) provides a landmark contribution that extends the theory of clientelism on vote buying to examine not only general elections but, even more importantly, the practice during intra-party primaries. Their argument – that student politics in Ghana serves as a laboratory for teaching future politicians how to participate in such activities – is intellectually stimulating. The paper also dispels a popular perception that voter bribery is an issue that affects mainly illiterate and uneducated citizens living in rural areas. By providing empirical evidence on how this practice is actually being taught in university campuses, they reveal the dark side of the education system that will produce Ghana's future political elite. The implication of these findings for this current study is that students at the Faculty of Social Science of KNUST may be more than passive participants in this political process; they could well be the actors responsible for reproducing the political culture. Even though van Gyampo's study provides a significant contribution to the discussion of voter buying among university students, it remains more oriented toward macro-analysis rather than micro-analysis. The work explores the politics of the university's intraparty process, as well as the prevailing political culture, but fails to explore the particular political experiences, motivations, and decisions of individual voters. In this respect, the present study will be able to fill that particular gap.

Baidoo *et al.* (2018), focusing on the Shama District within the Western Region, took their analysis further by concentrating on the process and physical goods involved in vote-buying transactions. The study observed a wide array of goods used as incentives during election periods, including silver basins, gas cylinders, laptops, Wellington boots, outboard engines, and branded party goods, apart from cash. This is important because it challenges the popular belief that vote buying is only done through money, whereas in reality, it is a strategic approach that takes into account the exact requirements and desires of the targeted community. In addition, no formal conditions accompany these incentives, but the act takes place based on social trust and implicit reciprocity. The critical issue here is that since Baidoo *et al.* conducted their study in a largely rural fisher community, the applicability of their results to any other urbanized and literate population would be quite questionable. For instance, it seems unlikely that the wants and weaknesses that will cause the voters in Shama to be swayed by a gas cylinder or an outboard engine could apply in the same way to the students at a university. One of the most critical contributions of the empirical literature in Ghana can be traced back to the work of Agyepong *et al.* (2021), which identified the economic standing of individuals as having no significant bearing on their vulnerability to vote buying. The study used the Pearson Chi-Square test to check for significant relationships between variables and established that there is a statistically significant relationship between vote buying and voting behavior, regardless of the income bracket of the electorate. This represents a substantial empirical contribution since it contradicts the poverty hypothesis: a widely accepted premise that vote buying operates due to the inability of poor people to turn down offers made to them during elections (Justes and Manzetti, 2023; Pradhanawati *et al.*, 2019). In light of the current research that focuses specifically on university students, who, though certainly not all wealthy, have a unique socioeconomic and educational identity, this outcome opens up possibilities in an extremely liberating sense. It nullifies any basis for automatically thinking that university students will be inherently immune to vote buying because of the kind of education they have received or their relative status among other members of society. Rather, vote buying works under certain circumstances that are structural as well as cultural, which cannot exclude universities in any way. Nonetheless, the disadvantage of this study is based on the fact that it is quantitative; hence, it lacks explanatory power regarding why educated or relatively wealthy people also succumb to material inducements.

Gyasi and Torsu (2024) provide one of the most theoretically advanced works in the selected studies, through a qualitative analysis of the case study evidence from Bantama constituency. Their study outlined the entire trajectory of vote buying, from the initial stage of persuasion, through the channeling of incentives via agents, to the delivery of voters to polling stations and the request for proof of their compliance. The value of such an approach to studying the phenomenon is that it provides insight into the complex nature of vote buying, showing it to be a complex chain of events rather than a single occurrence. The depiction of vote-buying offered by Gyasi and Torsu is possibly the most intellectually honest description of the phenomenon. The authors studied the vote buying as a contract between the political elites and voters, benefiting both sides, while collectively turning a blind eye to its long-term effects. This approach avoids seeing the voters as mere pawns being manipulated by the political elites and recognizes that even those who sell their votes have agency. At the same time, the authors do not shy away from the fact that the practice undermines democracy, depriving it of the possibility to choose competent people for public office and promoting corruption. The most significant weakness in the study is that it concentrates on one competitive political constituency, Bantama, known to have a highly organized mobilization process based on political partisanship. This kind of politics might not be the same as that conducted inside a university campus since political party organizations, brokerage relationships, and

coercive practices may manifest themselves through other institutional channels. However, the theoretical model used by Gyasi and Torsu serves as an excellent guide for this study on vote buying in an institutional context.

The work by Takyi and Kyere (2025) completes the empirical circle by studying specifically first-time voters – an identifiable group whose characteristics parallel those of the student body studied herein. The study discovered high levels of acceptance for temporary material inducements. The preponderance of political brokers, such as party agents and assemblymen, and the employment of staged payments as a tool to guarantee compliance after the elections. The latter point is particularly illustrative – the complex system of staged payments indicates that vote buyers have implemented sophisticated informal sanctioning techniques despite having no means of ballot monitoring, thereby negating the theoretical advantage offered by ballot anonymity (Guerra and Justesen, 2022). More worryingly, however, Takyi and Kyere show that voters are being trained right from the beginning to see their political activities in terms of tangible benefits. These normative consequences are immense. If the very first experience of a citizen's political life involves such an exchange, whereby he comes to know that the essence of democracy entails the trading of votes, then the civic lessons learned through higher education are being undermined. This indicates an obvious weakness in political socialization that cannot be easily overcome by universities or democratic structures.

While such literature provides an empirical basis, it also points out contradictions and gaps. The scholars agree that vote-buying is pervasive, institutionalized, and politically significant in terms of the effects it has on the quality of democracy in Ghana. They also agree that the intermediary function played by brokers is fundamental to the operation of the phenomenon. Where the scholarly views differ, on the other hand, is in the susceptibility and motives of those involved in vote-buying. While Agyepong *et al.* reject poverty-related theories about their motivations, Gyasi and Torsu emphasize reciprocal agency, and Takyi and Kyere highlight the socialization of youth. The absence of a detailed investigation into the practice of vote buying among university students through empirical research stands out clearly as a deficiency in all five papers. While Paalo and Gyampo refer to the issue, their treatment of the topic does not move beyond an analysis of campus politics as a system rather than as individual students participating in electoral activities. The relevance of this gap cannot be overstated, since university students, especially social sciences students, form a group of people who stand out as unique subjects in this respect; they possess the conceptual tools to critique vote buying while simultaneously inhabiting the financial constraints, social networks, and political cultures that make them vulnerable to it. Exploring how such a contradiction operates in practice and what influences students' decisions regarding the issue is exactly the goal of the current research

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Approach

The research methodology employed a mixed-method research approach. The mixed method approach entails the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study (Demir and Pismek, 2018). For the quantitative aspect of the study, structured questionnaires were utilized for data collection in numeric form (Srivastava, 2024). On the other hand, in the qualitative study, interviews were conducted to elicit opinions from the students regarding vote buying during general elections (Podgórecki, 2023). The study adopted the convergent-parallels design. The convergent parallel design guides the researcher to gather both quantitative and qualitative data separately and merge them at the analysis stage. This design is deemed to be appropriate since the researcher could triangulate evidence and have a well-rounded perspective on the research problem. As indicated by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2017), mixed methods research involves integrating both the qualitative and quantitative research designs to give a better explanation of a research problem. Quantitative research is used to establish the prevalence and patterns of vote buying among the students. Qualitative research, on the other hand, explained participants' perceptions and motivations.

Population and Sampling

The participants of the study comprised students from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. The research concentrated on second-year, third-year, and final year students since they are believed to be more exposed to political elections than first-year students. Students who formed the pool of study participants included both males and females. One hundred and fifty (150) students constituted the sample size for the quantitative part of the study. Additionally, 12 participants were purposively selected for qualitative data collection through interviews. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation. After interviewing the first ten participants, the researcher observed that no new themes were emerging. Two additional participants were subsequently interviewed to confirm saturation, and their responses did not generate any new themes. Consequently, the researcher concluded that data saturation had been achieved and discontinued further interviews, resulting in a total qualitative sample of 12 participants.

Probability and non-probability sampling were used in this study. In order to conduct the quantitative part of the study, stratified sampling was used first to form groups based on the levels of education and gender to represent all respondents fairly. Afterward, for quantitative data collection, the researcher used convenience sampling, in which respondents willing to take part in the study were sampled.

A total of twenty-five (25) male students and twenty-five (25) female students were sampled from each of the levels,

thus totaling fifty (50) respondents per level, bringing the number of respondents to one hundred and fifty (150). These respondents included seventy-five (75) males and seventy-five (75) females. In conducting the qualitative section of the study, purposive sampling was adopted by sampling students who had relevant knowledge of the issue under discussion. Purposeful sampling was the best method since it helped in collecting rich data.

Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire and interview guide were the primary tools used to gather data. The questionnaire comprised of predominantly close-ended questions coupled with a few open-ended questions. The tool was designed in accordance with the objectives and research questions set out for the investigation. The first part involved collecting data about the respondents' demographic characteristics. The other parts included data concerning vote-buying practices and behavior, perceptions, and other variables that would affect students' choice in voting. The use of the questionnaire gave respondents a relatively shorter time to answer questions. This tool further helped the researcher to collect data from many respondents in a short time. The interview guide was also employed as a means of collecting information for the qualitative component of the study. Semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to ask clarifying questions to respondents regarding their experience and perception of vote buying.

Moreover, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held to acquire wider views and opinions of students on the subject of vote buying during general elections. The purpose of conducting focus group discussions was to facilitate participants to freely converse among themselves and discuss their personal experiences, attitudes, and perceptions about vote buying within an election context. The data gathering was done personally by the researcher. Approval was sought from concerned authorities in the faculty before conducting the questionnaires and interview sessions. The researcher directly approached the respondents at accessible areas in the faculty and provided the reason for conducting the research to them. Copies of the questionnaires were handed out to the respondents along with a letter that stated the aims of the study and assured respondents that their privacy was protected throughout the entire research process. The respondents were given sufficient time to fill out the questionnaires, which were subsequently collected by the researcher.

As part of the qualitative research method, interviews were conducted with willing participants. The interviews were held in a manner where the respondents had the freedom to express their opinions about the issue of vote buying during general elections. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted with some selected students from different year levels in the faculty. During the focus group discussions, the participants freely shared their opinions and insights regarding vote buying amongst students.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaires was then cleaned, coded, and arranged in preparation for the analysis process. In the analysis of quantitative data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel were used. Frequency distribution, percentage, tables, charts, and graphs were some of the descriptive statistical measures employed to describe and present the data collected. Analysis of the quantitative data helped reveal trends and patterns that exist concerning vote-buying behavior among students. Tables, pie charts, bar graphs, and frequency distribution were employed in the presentation of the quantitative data findings. Qualitative data collected during interviews and through open-ended questions within the questionnaires were subjected to thematic analysis. Responses collected were grouped into themes that share similar characteristics and relevance to the research objectives.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to during the entire process of data gathering. The subjects were provided with sufficient information on the objectives of the study, the processes, and the option of participating voluntarily. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and their names were

Table 1: Biographic Data of Respondents

Variable	Item	n	Percent (%)
Gender	Male Female	75 75	50 50
Age (years)	18-28 29-39	148 2	99 1
Marital Status	Married Single	2 148	1 99
Religion	Christian Muslim Traditional Others	101 39 3 7	67 26 2 5
Year of Study	Second year Third year Forth year	50 50 50	33.3 33.3 33.3
Total		150	100

not disclosed in the research. Informed consent was sought from all subjects before conducting the survey. The researcher also made sure that the research process did not cause the participants any form of injury or intimidation.

Presentation of Findings

This section presents and interprets data collected from the field. The information obtained from respondents is analyzed and interpreted.

Biographic Data of Respondents

The study gathered data on the demographic characteristics of respondents. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 presents the results of gender, age, marital status, religion, and year of study of students in the Faculty of Social Sciences of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). With gender, the total number of respondents was 150, representing 100%. Out of this, 75 respondents were males, representing 50%, and the other 75 respondents were females, representing 50% of the total number of respondents. This was carefully done to avoid any bias.

With age distribution, the above data gathered showed that out of the 150 respondents, 99% were within the ages of 18 to 28 years out of the total number, 1% were within the ages of 29 to 39 years of the total respondents. From this data, the majority of the respondents were within the ages of 18 to 39 years, which constitutes the youthful group.

Table 1 also shows the marital status of the respondents. Out of the 150 respondents representing 100%, 1% of the respondents are married, and 99% of the respondents are single. The above data shows that the majority of the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences are not married.

With the religious status of respondents, the above data gathered showed that, out of 150 respondents representing 100%, 67% of the respondents are Christians, and only 26% of the respondents are Muslims, 2% are traditionalists, and 5% belong to other religions. From the above data gathered, it can be clearly seen that the majority of the students are Christians, and very few of them are Muslims, and a number of them belong to other religions.

The study focused on 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-year students at the Faculty of Social Sciences at KNUST. The table above (Table 4.1) shows the respondents' years of study. Out of a total number of 150 respondents, 50 were in the 2nd year, representing 33.3%, another 50 were in the 3rd year, representing 33.3%, and the other 50 were in the 4th year, representing 33.3%. A careful study of the above data shows that the total number of respondents was evenly distributed among the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years without any form of bias or discrimination.

Table 2: Summary of Economic Status and Material Inducement Indicators (n = 150)

Statement / Figure	Agreed (n)	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (n)	Disagreed (%)
Financial status affects voting decision	49	33%	101	67%
Politicians offer money to influence voting	32	21%	118	79%
Free transport provided during elections	63	42%	87	58%
Received gifts influenced voting decision	55	37%	95	63%

Economic Status and Material Inducement in Voting Behavior

This section presents the findings on the first objective of the study, which was to examine the economic status and material inducement in voting behavior. The findings are presented below.

Table 2 shows how financial status affects the way respondents vote in an election. From the figure above, out of 150 respondents representing 100%, 49 of the respondents representing 33% agreed to financial status influencing the way they vote in an election and 101 respondents representing 67% disagreed to financial status affecting how they vote in a particular elections.

The table also how some politicians buy the votes of respondents using money. The data shows that, out of 150 respondents representing 100%, 32 respondents representing 21% support the view that some politicians offer them money in order to secure their votes in general elections and 118 respondents representing 79% were of the view that politicians do not give out money to influence their voting choices in general elections.

Further, respondents were questioned on whether some politicians offer them free transport to their places of residence to enable them cast their votes during elections. Out of a total of 150 respondents representing 100%, 63 respondents representing 42% said some politicians offer them free transportation to their places of residence to cast their votes during electioneering periods. 87 respondents representing 58% also disagreed to politicians offering them free transportation to their places of residence to enable them cast their votes during elections.

Also, out of 150 respondents representing 100%, 55 of the respondents, representing 37% indicated that the acceptance of the above gifts influenced the way they voted during general elections. 95 respondents

Table 3: Acceptance of Gifts During Electioneering Campaign

Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Vehicle	3	2
Laptop	1	0.7
Phone	1	0.7
Food	17	11.3
T-shirt	18	12
Others	17	11.3
None	93	62
Total	150	100

Source: Field data, 2018

representing 63% thinks the acceptance the above gifts did not influence their voting choices during general elections.

Acceptance of Gifts During Campaigns

Table 4 presents the findings on the types of gifts received by participants from politicians and political parties.

Table 4 shows gifts accepted by respondents during electioneering campaigns. Out of 150 respondents representing 100%, 3 of the respondents representing 2% received vehicle as a gift, 1 respondent representing 0.7% received laptop as a gift, 1 respondent representing 0.7% received phone as a gift, 17 respondents representing 11.3% accepted food as a gift, 18 respondents representing 12% received T-shirt as a gift, 17 respondents representing 11.3% also accepted other items as gifts which the one way or the other influenced their voting pattern. 93 respondents representing 62% accepted none of the above items.

Qualitative Findings

Financial Status

The qualitative data yielded more candid admissions of financial influence than the survey figures suggest. Interview participants frequently acknowledged the role of material conditions in shaping their electoral choices, often couched in relational rather than transactional language:

"*I would not say I voted because of money. But when they gave us food and T-shirts during the campaign, it did make you feel like this party actually cares about us." [Participant 1, Male, Level 200*

"Most of us pretend we vote on principle, but honestly, if someone comes to your hostel room and gives you cedis the night before the election, it is not easy to just ignore that." [Participant 5, Male, Level 400].

These narratives reveal a critical pattern: students rationalise material inducements as expressions of political care rather than transactional exchange — a framing that makes the incentive more socially acceptable and less cognitively dissonant for educated voters.

Money for Votes

Several interviewees confirmed the existence of cash transfers but described their disguised nature, employing a sophisticated lexicon of euphemism:

"*They do not just walk up to you and say 'here is money for your vote.' It is done through party representatives — they call it 'mobilisation money' or 'transport allowance,' but everyone knows what it is." [Participant 1, Male, Level 200]*

"*During the last election, some students received mobile money from people they had never met before. Nobody called it vote buying, but the timing was obvious." [Participant 4, Male, Level 300]*

These testimonies illuminate how the structural sophistication of vote-buying operations — their use of intermediaries, euphemistic framing, and digital financial platforms — effectively shields the transaction from formal classification while preserving its functional reality.

Free Transport

Interviewees elaborated on how transport provision operates within the campus context and the social obligations it creates:

"*Before the 2016 election, we were told that buses would be arranged to take students home to vote. You do not have to pay. But of course, these buses were party buses, and they knew where your voting region was." [Participant 2, Female, Level 400]*

"*The transport thing is smart because it makes you feel obligated. They spend money on you, you get home safely — and you feel like you owe them something when you enter the voting booth." [Participant 3, Female, Level 300]*

This last account is particularly instructive: transport provision functions simultaneously as a material gift, a logistical service, and a mechanism of informal social debt creation. The electoral obligation it generates is non-coercive yet psychologically powerful.

Campaign Gifts

The social normalization of campaign gifting emerged as a dominant theme in qualitative data:

"*If you go to a campaign rally on campus, you expect something. T-shirts, food, maybe some money for transport. It has become part of what a campaign rally means." [Participant 8, Female, Level 200]*

"I *did not think of it as buying my vote. It felt more like they were showing appreciation. But looking back, yes — it probably influenced how I felt about the party." [Participant 11, Female, 200]*

The retrospective reframing in the second account is particularly significant: the effectiveness of soft inducements often lies precisely in their ability to feel like something other than a transaction, allowing voters to maintain a self-image of civic agency while remaining

Table 4: Summary of Political Awareness Indicators (n = 150)

Statement	Agreed (n)	Agreed (%)	Disagreed (n)	Disagreed (%)
Understands political party manifestoes	102	68%	48	32%
Politicians' campaign messages make sense	97	65%	53	35%
Politicians deserve respondents' vote	96	64%	54	36%

susceptible to material influence.

Political Awareness and Information in Voting Behavior

This objective was to examine the political awareness of respondents and their voting behavior during elections. The findings are shown in Table 5

Table 5 presents the results of the level of understanding of political party manifestoes during electioneering campaigns. Out 150 respondents representing 100%, 102 respondents representing 68% answered in the affirmative that they really understand the manifestoes of political parties during electioneering campaigns. 48 respondents representing 32% attested to the fact that they do not really understand the manifestoes of political parties during electioneering campaigns.

Table 5 presents results of politicians making sense to respondents whenever they campaign for their votes during general elections. Out of 150 respondents representing 100%, 97 respondents representing 65% agrees to politicians making sense to them whenever they are campaigning for their votes during election. 53 respondents representing 35% said politicians never made sense to them whenever they campaigned for their votes.

The results of respondents show whether politicians really deserve their vote during general elections. Out of 150 respondents representing 100%, 96 respondents representing 64% said politicians really deserve their votes during general elections. 54 respondents representing 36% also think politicians do not deserve their votes during general elections.

Qualitative Findings: Political Awareness and Disenchantment

The qualitative data revealed a crucial and counterintuitive dynamic: political awareness and knowledge of democratic processes did not reliably translate into resistance to vote buying. Instead, for many respondents, awareness of political manipulation intensified a cynical rationality in which material inducements became the more reliable currency:

"*When you look at what politicians promise and what they deliver, you lose faith. If someone gives you something real — money, food, a T-shirt — at least that is something you can actually hold. The manifesto is just paper." [Participant 5, Male, Level 400]*

"I understand the manifestoes. I have studied political science. But I also know they will not implement half of what they say. So if they are giving out something now, why not take it? At least this is guaranteed." [Participant 7, Female, Level 300]

The second quotation is of particular analytical significance: a student with explicit knowledge of governance and electoral processes articulates a transactional logic grounded precisely in that knowledge. Political literacy, in this context, produces not civic resistance but sophisticated transactional reasoning — a finding with profound implications for how interventions against vote buying are designed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Economic Status, Material Inducements, and Rational Choice Theory

The findings under Objective One offer a complex and internally layered portrait of how material inducements operate within a student electorate. While most respondents formally denied a direct relationship between their financial status and voting decisions, the substantial minority who acknowledged receiving gifts (38%), the 42% who confirmed exposure to free transport provision, and the 37% who admitted that received gifts influenced their votes collectively paint a considerably more troubling picture than the surface-level denial implies. The gap between official denial and behavioural reality is itself a theoretically significant finding.

Rational choice theory, as elaborated by Downs (1957) and Blais (2000), provides a compelling framework for understanding this gap. From a rational actor standpoint, a student who accepts a T-shirt, a meal, or transport assistance during an election campaign is making a perfectly logical calculation: the immediate, tangible benefit of the gift is concrete and guaranteed, whereas the policy benefits of voting for the ostensibly correct candidate are diffuse, uncertain, and contingent on a chain of governance outcomes largely outside the individual voter's control. The near-zero probability that any single student's vote will determine an election outcome further weakens the rational case for principled resistance. What Downs termed the paradox of voting — the fact that the costs of informed, principled voting routinely exceed its expected individual benefit — is resolved, in this context, by attaching direct material value to electoral participation. Vote buying, from this angle, is not ignorance but calculation.

This finding resonates strongly with Agyepong *et al.*'s (2021) empirical demonstration that economic status does not determine susceptibility to vote buying. Students at the Faculty of Social Sciences are not Ghana's most economically marginalised population; yet over a third received campaign gifts and a comparable proportion acknowledged material influence on their decisions. This

corroborates the argument that vote buying's effectiveness operates through rational calculi available to voters across economic positions, not merely through the desperation of the poor. Where the present study extends this insight is in contextualising it within an academic environment: students who possess analytical knowledge of electoral manipulation still engage with it on rational grounds, demonstrating that civic education alone is insufficient as a corrective strategy. Knowledge of the mechanism does not dismantle it; in some cases, as the qualitative evidence reveals, it reinforces a sophisticated form of transactional reasoning.

The pronounced role of transport provision — the most widely acknowledged form of inducement at 42% — also merits careful attention. As the qualitative data make clear, transport does not function merely as a logistical convenience; it creates a social obligation that operates as an informal enforcement mechanism, generating a sense of reciprocal debt without the moral weight of a direct cash bribe. This is consistent with the sophisticated, multi-stage vote-buying process documented by Gyasi and Torsu (2024), who traced the full procedural arc of electoral inducement from initial persuasion through to voter conveying. The present study finds an analogous structure operating at the campus level, with transport serving simultaneously as a gift, a mobilisation tool, and a mechanism of social debt creation — a triply effective instrument of electoral manipulation.

Political Awareness, Institutional Trust, and Clientelism Theory

The findings under Objective Two challenge a foundational assumption that underlies much of the case for civic education as a primary solution to vote buying: the assumption that political awareness and resistance to material inducements travel together. In this study, they demonstrably do not. Approximately two-thirds of respondents demonstrated political literacy — understanding manifestoes, finding campaign messages coherent, and viewing candidates as broadly worthy of their votes — yet this awareness coexisted comfortably with transactional electoral behaviour in a substantial number of cases. Students who could articulate what a manifesto is, and who had studied governance and democracy in formal academic settings, simultaneously reasoned that material inducements represented the more rational electoral investment given politicians' consistent failure to honour campaign commitments.

Clientelism theory, as elaborated by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), provides the appropriate theoretical register for understanding this dynamic. Clientelism thrives not primarily in conditions of ignorance but in conditions of institutional distrust — where voters have accumulated experiential evidence that programmatic political promises are unreliable. When the state and its political representatives have persistently failed to translate electoral mandates into policy delivery, the rational response is not to invest faith in the next cycle of promises but to extract maximum immediate value from the transaction while it is available. Political awareness, in this institutional environment, does not automatically produce civic virtue; it may instead produce a more sophisticated form of transactional reasoning, in which the student voter knowingly exploits the clientelistic system rather than being passively victimised by it.

This dynamic resonates strongly with Gyasi and Torsu's (2024) characterisation of vote buying as a mutually beneficial contract — a framing that the qualitative evidence in the present study substantially corroborates. The student who accepts transport, takes a campaign meal, and votes as they intended to anyway is not a straightforward victim of manipulation; they are a participant in a negotiated exchange who has made a rational calculation about where reliable value lies. The democratic harm lies not in the individual transaction but in its systemic aggregate: when this logic is widely shared, it removes competitive pressure on politicians to develop and deliver on policy, entrenches the clientelistic system across electoral cycles, and progressively degrades the quality of democratic representation.

Paalo and Gyampo's (2019) argument that campus politics serves as a training ground for national-level vote buying also finds clear support in the present findings. Students at KNUST who experience, witness, and participate in vote-buying transactions during general elections are simultaneously being socialised into the transactional logic that will shape their political behaviour — and for some, their political practice — for decades to come. The near-matter-of-fact tone with which many interviewees described vote buying indicated a normalisation that exceeded surprise or moral discomfort, suggesting that the conditioning Takyi and Kyere (2025) documented among first-time voters in the Effutu Municipality is similarly operative on KNUST's campus. That this normalisation is occurring within one of Ghana's most prestigious universities, among students of social science who are academically equipped to critique the very institutions being subverted, is among the most disturbing conclusions of this study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined vote buying among students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at KNUST, focusing on the influence of economic status, material inducements, political awareness, and access to political information on voting behaviour. The findings show that vote buying is a common feature of the student electoral environment, with free transportation (42%), campaign gifts (38%), and other material incentives frequently used to influence voters. Although many students claimed not to be personally influenced by such inducements, qualitative evidence suggested that gifts, cash, and transportation often create subtle social and political obligations that can shape voting decisions. The study also found that political awareness does not necessarily protect students from vote buying. While approximately two-thirds of respondents

demonstrated political literacy and understood candidates' manifestos and campaign messages, many remained willing to accept material inducements. This was partly attributed to distrust in political actors and repeated experiences of unfulfilled campaign promises, which encouraged students to prioritise immediate and certain material benefits over uncertain future policy outcomes.

The findings support the relevance of Rational Choice Theory and Clientelism Theory in explaining vote buying among educated youth. From a rational choice perspective, students may view accepting inducements as a reasonable response to the immediate benefits offered by politicians. Clientelism theory further explains how these individual decisions are embedded in broader networks of patronage, political brokerage, and institutional distrust. The study contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that vote buying remains relevant even within highly educated populations and that university campuses can serve as important spaces for the normalisation of transactional politics. It suggests that civic and political awareness alone may not be sufficient to address vote buying. Instead, broader structural problems, including institutional distrust, weak governance, unfulfilled political promises, and the persistence of clientelistic political practices, must also be addressed.

The study therefore recommends coordinated interventions by the Electoral Commission, universities, political parties, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. These should include targeted voter education, anonymous reporting mechanisms, stronger regulation of electoral inducements, institutional codes of conduct, and sustained efforts by political parties to build public trust through accountable governance. Ultimately, reducing vote buying requires creating a political environment in which principled electoral participation becomes more valuable and credible than immediate material inducements.

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