

SURVEY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND INTEGRITY IN UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

When the New Constitution was promulgated in 2010, the hope among Kenyans was that it would promote integrity, responsibility and accountability among State and public officers, and especially leaders at all levels. Despite the provisions of the Constitution on leadership, the number of questionable leaders seems to be on the rise. Kenya like many other African states is at a point the citizens are feeling the effects of unethical practices like, corruption at various levels, abuse of office, murder, theft and misuse of public resources among others. It seems as though the moral fabric of society is not only torn but rather nonexistent. At such times we are forced to ask retrogressively though, what is the values of our education system? Education is meant to be transformative in nature. Often, those who engage in unethical practices in society are not the least educated, or uneducated. They are people with the best education, no wonder they employ the best tactics in siphoning and finding sophisticated means to hide the vice. The paper was guided by the following research questions: What is the undergraduate student understanding of leadership, governance and integrity? Does the university leadership impart values in students by their way of operation? Does the student experience at university model them towards being ethical leaders, good governors and persons of integrity? The core mandate of universities is not only to teach, conduct research and community service but also to impart sound social and moral values on the students. It is paramount to note that developing young leaders is an investment for the future. Helping students develop as ethical leaders involves more than just helping them acquire skills. It is a process that involves helping them develop their leadership identity, practice the process of leadership, and advance their intellectual and skill development. Mixed research methods were used. A survey was conducted using digital questionnaire with both open ended and closed ended questions to collect data. Quantitative data collection and analysis was done using the digital google forms application while qualitative data analysis was summarized, themes generated and a narration developed that was integrated in the write up of the paper to enrich the quantitative findings. The findings indicate that majority of respondents have a good understanding of leadership, governance and integrity. Although the findings revealed that for a vast majority of respondents the university experience is modelling them to persons of integrity. A good number of respondents had concerns on leadership and integrity in the University. The researcher recommends that universities to consider anchoring and laying emphasis on key aspects of ethical leadership, good governance and integrity in the curriculum as they train students. They are to uphold and maintain best quality practices in their service delivery. This is because sustainable development is not only anchored on academic excellence but also on ethical values and the society's moral development.

Key words: leadership, governance, integrity, undergraduate students, perceptions

Introduction

Africa is a rich continent; Kenya is an icon country in East Africa. A good number of investors, tourists and students want to come to Kenya to pursue their respective interests. Many universities in Kenya have different value systems. It is important to acknowledge the power in variety and complementarity principle in higher education in Kenya. The Koech Report (Republic of Kenya, 1999) regards university level education as the national “think-tank” in shaping and propelling national growth and development. In one of the objective, university education is to adapt, develop, advance, preserve, disseminate knowledge, desirable values and to stimulate intellectual life. However, Kenya is slowly losing her identity as years move. Our society today is bedeviled by vices untold, things and practices that defeat the very fact that we even stepped into the classroom. To ensure sustainable development a society requires holistic persons. Persons that shall be sensitive to each and every aspect of life, take care of the universal common good, are concern with economic growth of a country, education, good leaders, persons of integrity that shall be able to protect the excessive resource depletion; environmental degradation, degradation of air, water quality, inappropriate disposal of hazardous waste. Universities are to produce and release to the market such graduates.

Aulich, (2011) asserts that leadership and good governance focuses on openness, transparency, accountability, integrity, effective collaboration and is tied directly to the culture of individual institutions. These in learning institutions helps learners improve and change their understanding, attitudes and/or behavior. They enable learners raise levels in many aspects of their nations, countries even the world such as values, habits, attitudes, knowledge and do well for the succession of generations. Gibbs, Jamesons and Elwicks (2019) point out that higher education, and especially universities, is undergoing tremendous change. Many directly affect the lives of the academics and student whose presence defines the university. While universities across the world exist for purposes of effective teaching, research and community engagement; society expects that values are at the core of higher education whether they be those embedded in religious doctrine, professional practice or common decency. The Kenya 2010 Constitution has put emphasis on leadership, governance and integrity. Chapter six of the Constitution underlines guiding principles of leadership and integrity namely: selection on the basis of personal integrity, competence and suitability, or election in free and fair elections; objectivity and impartiality in decision making, and in ensuring that decisions are not influenced by nepotism, favouritism, other improper motives or corrupt practices; selfless service based solely on the public interest, demonstrated by honesty in the execution of public duties; and the declaration of any personal interest that may conflict with public duties. To move towards sustainability development change is inevitable from all sectors. Learning occurs through observation and actual training. The question is What are students observing and learning from the university as far as leadership, governance and integrity is concerned.

Statement of the Problem

The society is ailing; our society is deeply sick. Many people have philosophized and generated theories to try and explain to us what might have gone wrong. The rise of corruption cases and the names being mentioned, the abuse of power by various state officers, the political waves that are not grounded on the truth, the rampant loss of life, power interplay where some people want to be felt by all means as they bring down others among many other vices. At a glance even the non-educated Kenyan will quickly point out that the Chapter Six of the 2010 constitution is at stake. A university has been expected to provide an environment for study where knowledge creation can be undertaken and students morally prepared to help them to flourish in the society. Truth is, and has been at the heart of what universities do. However, what Kenya and Africa in witnessing currently raises lot of questions about graduates that universities release to the job market. While the values acquired by students ought to sustain an institution worthy of public trust through manifestation in the graduates' interaction with their society, the opposite has been witness. We here absurd statements such as “alternative facts, truth is challengeable,” When we begin to hear such statements, we need to look at our ethical fabric and ask ourselves have universities internalized the aspect of instilling sound moral values to students that shall make them add value to society? What is the undergraduate university students take on good leadership, governance and integrity?

Literature Review

Leaders of higher educational institutions hold highly responsible and complex positions. Luthans, Norman and Hughes (2006) stated that effective leaders are to be aware of how their actions are perceived and recognize that, by demonstrating positive behaviors, their people will be motivated to follow. Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, and Liu (2008) add that the ability to inspire loyalty cultivates an environment of innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit, observing that implicit in such an environment is leadership that understands and respects that followers sometimes fail and that failure often leads to learning and innovation.

Preston, (2019) however, observes that one of the greatest limitations of the ability of universities to promote leadership development is the lack of a coherent framework to demonstrate how this can be accomplished. Peck and Preston (2018) suggest that universities are to align leadership development with professional development across the student career. Preston, (2019) opines that for universities to help students advance their leadership skills a good place to begin would be deciding on what competencies they want to focus on at an early stage of the student university life.

Kezar (2004) defines governance as the process of policymaking and decision making within higher education. Therefore, good educational governance is to benefit learners, organizations and wider society (Coward, 2010). According to Trakman (2008), good university governance does not simply happen. It is usually the product of painstaking effort to arrive at suitable governance structures, protocols and processes. Good governance recognizes that the leadership of organizations cannot exclude the stakeholders in issues that need engagement before decisions are undertaken. Therefore, students like any other stakeholder in the university should be able to know and understand the university governance structure. It is also important to note that given that good governance system provides an emphasis towards achieving integrity, its practice in universities is apparently crucial at any stage in enhancing accountability (Said, Alam & Khalid, 2016). As Aulich, (2011) asserts in an environment of well-developed integrity systems, the elements that underpin good governance and encourage ethical and effective endeavor towards political purposes are spread all the way through social, economic, cultural, legal and political organizations of a country. Therefore, good governance principles are essential to improve citizens' trust and legitimacy of politico-administrative system (Christensen & Skaerbaek, 2007; Salminen & Ikola-Norrbacka, 2010).

Jones and Jayawarna (2010) stated that any organization or institution that has developed a culture of integrity attracts high quality revenue for business, but for education it attracts quality services thus promoting ethical practices. This type of organization or institution also brings individuals with integrity to build a consensus around shared values. This culture later influences interpersonal association inside the organization and generates a highly valued work and learning environment. As such universities grounded in good leadership, governance and integrity have staff and student who are motivated and innovative, students feel proud of their studies and learning environment and enjoy the company of their colleagues. When such graduates are released to the market, the society is transformed because of the values that they have.

Methodology of the Study

Mixed research methods were used. According to Crosswell (2014) this is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms. The researcher carried out a survey. Orodho (2009) states that survey is the most frequently used method for collecting information about people's attitudes, opinions and habits, among other social issues. Singh & Nath (2007) state that the major purpose of survey method in research is to tell 'what is', the researcher was interested in using the method to collect information of 'what exists', 'what is wanted' and 'how to get there'. It involves random selection of research subjects, getting their views and generalizing the findings to the entire population.

Kombo & Tromp (2006) defined a target population as a group of individual of the same characteristics from which a sample is selected for measurement or on which a researcher does the research to generalize the study. The researcher targeted all undergraduate students in universities in Kenya. All universities were given equal chances of being selected. A total number of twenty-three (23) universities were randomly sampled. Ten (10) students were randomly selected among third and fourth years from each university during data.

Data was collected from primary sources using structured digital questionnaire. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), a questionnaire is a set of carefully designed questions given in exactly the same form to a group of individuals usually, the sample in order to collect information about the subject matter in which the researcher is interested. A digital questionnaire containing both open and closed ended questions was used to collect data. The questionnaire was designed with some questions in a three point Likert scale format where 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=neutral while other questions had the options of yes or no for the answer. Open ended questions were used in the questionnaire to collect non-quantitative data to assist in explanations. The open ended section had alternative questions for the respondents to articulate their own views for illustrating their perceptions regarding leadership, governance and integrity in the university. The digital questionnaire was developed using google forms application. The applications provide for instant data analysis as the respondents submit the filled questionnaire.

The study adopted cross sectional design in which data was collected at a particular point in time in the months of September to November 2019. One research assistant (University undergraduate student) was trained and used in the

actual data collection. The objectives of the study were shared with the respondents via a phone call while assuring them of the confidentiality of the data collected. Some of the respondents took longer than expected to respond to the questionnaires. Although there were a number of follow up reminders other respondents did not completely respond to the questionnaire. Data analysis was done using google form application, the findings have been presented descriptively using narratives, frequency tables and percentages.

Findings of the Study and Discussion

At the end of data collection, a total of 167 respondents had participated in the study, giving a response rate of 72.6%. Demographic analysis indicates that 93 (55.7%) of the respondents were male while 74 (44.7%) were female showing that most respondents were male. Analysis by category of the University indicates that majority 120 (71.9%) of the respondents were from Public University, a few 40 (24%) were from Private Universities and a very small number of 4 (2.4%) from Public Constituent Colleges and 3 (1.8%) Private Constituent Colleges. This also reveals that although 10 respondents had been sampled from each institution not all filled the questionnaire. Further analysis done by level of study indicates that 97 (58.1%) respondents were in fourth year while 70 (41.9%) were in third year. This was a good representation of respondents in terms of years of study. The findings also revealed that 95 (56.9%) of the respondents had leadership experience in the university while 72 (43.1%) did not have leadership experience in the university.

The main objective of the study was to establish student perception of leadership, governance and integrity under the following questions: What is undergraduate student understanding of leadership, governance and integrity? Does the university leadership impart values in students by their way of operation? Does the student experience at university model them towards being ethical leaders, good governors and persons of integrity? A number of questions were asked and the results were as follows:

Student Understanding of Leadership, Governance and Integrity

According to Alari (2019) leaders enjoy power and influence when they give direction to an organization or institution. Respondents understand leadership as: service, a God given talent that ought to be handled with utmost respect, ability to guide and direct followers towards targeted goals in order to bring change that is beneficial and just to everyone, this is answering the call of your subjects, putting the interests of others first, speaking for the weak, sense of providing clear guidance and vision to the students, community and the society at large, the ability to foretell and provide strong standings and bold decisions making. It was good to note that respondents acknowledged that leadership requires creativity because it acts as instrument of transformation in order to realize set communal and individual goals. It was also revealed that leadership helps in building one's confidence and improves his or her personality traits. Leadership was also referred to as the structure of governance with a hierarchy of responsibility which are geared towards achieving a common goal. The governance of an institution by the people in authority. These were synonymous to the respondents understanding of governance as: having authority, control, providing leadership, role played by the leaders to ensure successful functioning of the university, the way the university power is spread, structures and processes designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity, inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation, a system developed in which students and staff can articulate their ideas, this is mainly held by the administration and encompasses the use of the policies, set rules and regulations that are continuously monitored to ensure smooth running of the university. Respondent described integrity as: honesty, being truthful, having strong moral principles, adherence to strict moral or ethical code, transparency, due respect and rightness, being loyal and corruption free, doing things in a manner that leaves your conscience clear, impartiality, value of being trustworthy, unbiased service to people, justice, value to uphold dignity, responsible and accountable.

The following were some of the unique responses: Leadership is influencing people and luring them to do something that you want, leadership is fake and with no future, nowadays leadership has become an income earning tool. Governance is oppression, total supreme powers and legitimacy. Nothing looks like governance in the university and that there was nothing like integrity. Everyone should govern themselves and follow the Constitution,

This indicates that what is portrayed by some universities as far as leadership, governance and integrity is concerned is negative not worth emulation. Learning is a continuous process. Learners tend to emulate those they take as their role models. The big challenge here is when a role model is one who does not show values to be emulated.

Leadership, Governance Integrity and University Operations

At the University governance is about who has power, who makes decisions, how other staff members and students make their voice heard and how account is rendered. According to Mbiti (2007) a leader is needed in order to keep an

institution focused on meeting specific goals. Allio (2013) defines leadership as good management. Therefore, an understanding of what leaders do, how they do it, why they do it and the implications this has on the organization is crucial. It was necessary to find out what the respondents had to say about the leadership providing opportunity to student and staff members to bring forth their ideas, viewpoints and opinions before making important university decisions; a majority 124 (74.3%) agreed, 27 (16.2%) disagreed and 16 (9.6%) were neutral. It is good to observe that universities leadership have embraces stakeholders' engagement.

The leadership hold a pivotal role in the running of all the activities on the university. Leadership is everything; leaders chart uncharted courses; and if leadership is the cause, then all others are effects. As holders of a public offices and in the light of Chapter six of the Kenya 2010 Constitution respondents were asked whether the leadership had set high standards for moral and ethical conduct in the university; a very good number 104 (62.3%) agreed, while 21 (12.6%) disagreed and 42 (25.1%) were neutral. This is an indication that the experience of the undergraduate students in the university continuously exposes them to learning opportunities.

The respondents were asked whether the governance structure of the university is clear. A majority 117 (70.1%) of the responded agreed, 20 (12%) disagreed while 30 (18%) were neutral. When asked if protocol is very important in their university; a vast majority 140 (83.8%) of the respondents agreed, very few 8 (4.8%) disagreed while 19 (11.4%) were neutral. Concerning the respondents' perception on whether the place and role of the students is clear in the university governance structure; a good number 115 (68.9%) agreed, 23 (13.8%) disagreed while 29 (17.4%) were neutral. Leadership is something that can be added to organizations to improve social and operational effectiveness as such Spendlove (2007) asserts that effective leadership and management of universities is a crucial issue for policy makers, leaders themselves, university staff and for students. Asked if the university has structured leadership and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation of every student and staff member. A good number 110 (65.9%) of the respondents agreed, 28 (16.8%) disagreed while 29 (17.4%) were neutral.

Said, Alam and Khalid, (2016) assert that integrity is an essential characteristic of human beings. In an institution, integrity or ethical behavior not only refers to being corrupted or fraudulent, but it also lies in the quality or characteristic of individual or organizational behavior that represents the manner of acting in accordance to moral values, standards and rules accepted by the members of an organization and the society (Kolthoff et al., 2010; Bauman, 2013). Ethical leadership, good governance and integrity can be measured in a manner various operations are carried out.

Table 1: University Operations

| Statement | Agree X (Y) | Rating Disagree X (Y) | Neutral X (Y) |
|---|-------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. The leadership of the university has established a working atmosphere that promotes transparency, openness, accountability and democracy | 91 (54.5%) | 44 (26.3%) | 32 (19.2%) |
| 2. The University administration carries out their various responsibilities efficiently and honestly. | 68 (40.7%) | 41 (24.6%) | 58 (34.7%) |
| 3. The University maintains high standards of performance and levels of professionalism | 110 (65.9%) | 16 (9.6%) | 41 (24.6%) |
| 4. The University Management is transparent and accountable | 67 (40.1%) | 40 (24%) | 60 (35.9%) |
| 5. The University Management carry out their duties in a manner that maintains public confidence on the integrity of the office that they hold. | 103 (61.7%) | 28 (16.8%) | 36 (21.6%) |
| 6. The University Management is truthful in all matters of the university in which they represent. | 73 (43.7%) | 37 (22.2%) | 57 (34.1%) |
| 7. The University Management do not receive bribes or loans to compromise their work. | 63 (37.7%) | 47 (28.1%) | 57 (34.1%) |
| 8. Other university staff do not receive bribes or loans to compromise their work. | 73 (43.7%) | 46 (27.5%) | 48 (28.7%) |

Table 1 Key: X – number of respondents; Y – percentage of respondents

At a glance Table 1 would indicate that everything is well in the universities. Further interrogation of the findings in Table 1 reveal an interesting scenario. The responses on statement 2 & 4 reveal that for a majority of undergraduate students the universities have glaring areas of weakness in their operations as far as transparency, accountability, efficiency and honesty are concerned. This is very crucial considering that the leadership has an important role in shaping the integrity of an institution (Kaptein, 2003). Although responses for statements 1, 3 and 5 bring out strong positive rating in universities in terms of levels of professionalism and maintaining public confidence in their operations, statements 6, 7, and 8 clearly indicate that universities have integrity related concerns that students can easily identify and point out. It is therefore important for universities to be awake to this reality to be able to improve in areas that they are not doing well.

Universities are expected through the production and dissemination of knowledge, imparting of values to enable their graduates to learn to critically assess, analyze and interpret the world around them in order to add value while addressing societal needs to ensure sustainable development. However, if students are exposed to non-conformity to ethical and value based operations that reflect integrity the society shall continue to suffer many vices as currently experienced in Kenya. Corruption is escalating day in and day out. Will the country and Africa ever enjoy the fruits of sustainable development in such a scenario?

Undergraduate Student Experience at the University

The findings reveal that the respondents have basic and general understanding of leadership, governance and integrity. However, regarding having learned some ethical leadership and good governance skills as well as growing towards being persons of integrity it was indicated that for one to be a leader they need good preparation. A majority 111 (66.4%) of respondents indicated that they had learned the following critical skills: responsibility, exercise of power, integrity, transparency, accountability, openness, diplomacy, critical thinking and wise decision making, following the chain of command when handling issues or presenting grievances, democratic governance, delegation of duty, division of power, equality, monitoring and controlling, planning and organizing, management and supervision, to be a role model, respect of seniors and juniors, service and having a listening ear to others, communication skills, team work, dialogue, commitment, honesty, truthfulness, hardworking, tolerance, humility, patience, being firm and fair, self-awareness, courage, complying with the rule of law and regulations, time management, discipline, proactivity, skills of leadership, faithfulness and being self-less, management of scarce resources, justice, assertiveness. A small number 27 (16.2%) disagreed while giving the following responses: being corrupted and to have not learned anything of value because of the a non-support environment that one finds her/himself while 29 (17.4%) were neutral and did not give a response to that question.

Education is meant to be transformative in nature. If anyone goes through an education system and comes out the same, either the person has a problem or the system or the mode/process of content delivery is faulty. Besides higher education is fundamental to the overall success of any nation as far as sustainable development is concerned. This is because the success of each society is mainly based on its educated workforce that aims to contribute to economic growth and social prosperity.

Conclusions

The study' findings show that a vast majority of undergraduate students in the universities have a good positive understanding of leadership, governance and integrity. Good leadership, governance and integrity are intertwined, therefore one is to be fully prepared in all aspects before taking up leadership posts and governance responsibilities. Ethical leadership benefits are two ways; to the society – the vulnerable are taken care of and common resources are protected leading to economic growth. To the individual- leadership helps in building one's confidence and also improving his or her personality traits. While governance not only refers to the structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, but also is the establishment of policies, and continuous monitoring of their proper implementation for the smooth running of the university. Integrity is a matter of concern in the universities. Principles of efficiency, honesty, transparency and accountability are wanting. How does a university maintain public confidence when there are weak levels of transparency and accountability? It is also clear that unethical practices such as giving and receiving bribes (corruption) to receive services are going on in universities.

The study also revealed a negative understanding of leadership and governance by undergraduate students. Here governance is understood as being corrupt while leadership as something fake, with no future, a tool for earning income. Generally, undergraduate students experience in the university is both enriching and discouraging. On one hand some student acquires both hard and soft skill that enable them to positively contribute towards sustainable

development while on the other hand some students have almost nothing valuable to show other than their certificate. These group of students have been exposed to harsh leadership, poor governance and lack of integrity. This therefore means that universities are releasing to the market a mixture of good and bad. The interplay of good and bad habits and their manifestation therefore depends on who is strong. This explains why the moral fabric of society is torn. A reason perhaps why as a country the fight against corruption is not yielding much fruits, thus a treat to sustainable development. Sustainable development cannot happen from the borderline. Education is transformative and transformation goes hand in hand with sustainable development.

This study was done against some limitations namely: only one instrument, a digital questionnaire was used to collect data; a small number of undergraduate students were sampled from large university populations; no postgraduate's students and members of staff were involved in the study. This could have enriched the results through the varied experiences. However, these limitations notwithstanding, the findings, conclusion, and recommendations of the study are valid.

Recommendations

The study recommends that: Universities have to establish strong value systems and ground their students in them; they are not only to introduce principles of ethical leadership, good governance and integrity in all undergraduate academic programmes but also strongly anchor all their operations and service provision to reflect best practice in leadership, governance and integrity at all levels. This is because it is necessary to impart skills of leadership, good governance and values of integrity to students early in their university education. However, their introduction should be done in a manner that is relevant and adds value to a student's academic interest and university experience. Universities should put up internal mechanisms to ensure that all in position of leadership, staff members and student uphold the highest level of integrity needed. They are also to be on the fore front to condemn the vices in society so that their graduates are released in a society that promotes ethical values. They are also to embed aspects of good leadership, governance and integrity in their community outreach programs to support the society and also act as a constant reminder of what ought to be done. The study recommends that further research of the same topic be done focusing on both academic and non-academic staff members of universities in Kenya. Future studies may also adopt phenomenological philosophy and use qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to facilitate establishment of qualitative and social aspects of the issues surrounding leadership, governance and integrity.

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