



INFLUENCE OF STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION ON GROWTH OF STUDENTS' POPULATION IN SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

Stakeholder participation in decision making provides various benefits at all levels of the institution. The study sought to investigate the influence of stakeholders' participation on the growth of students' population in selected private universities in Kenya. The study was guided by distributed leadership theory. Descriptive research design was used in the study. The study used random sampling technique to select research participants. The study targeted private universities in North Rift, South Rift and Nyanza region of Kenya. The unit of observations was staff and students in various departments and faculties existing in the institutions. The study used purposive sampling to select research respondents. Questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS version 23.0 and presented using frequency distribution tables. The findings of the study indicated that stakeholder participation is increased by a unit, there will be increase in growth of student population by a margin of 0.656. The study concludes that stakeholder's involvement plays a critical role in growing students' population. Top management of the private universities will get insight on various strategic issues with regard to student population through the recommendations of the study.

Keywords: Stakeholder participation, private universities, growth of student population, decision making, stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

According to Onsongo (2007) private universities play an important role in university education by bridging the gap that exists in public universities. Most private universities have invested heavily on resources such as infrastructure development and human resource development. Missionaries established schools and colleges for their converts. The first private institutions of higher learning were the St Paul's United Theological College (1955). On the 18th of March 1993, the National Council of Churches of Kenya, (NCCK) in its corporate identity was admitted by the Governing Council as the fifth Participating Partner in the ownership of the College. On September 14, 2007, the University was awarded a Charter to become St. Paul's University (Onsongo, 2007).

The enrolment rate in university education in Sub-Saharan Africa is very slow (UNESCO, 2004). The demand and supply of the same education is of great significance in provision of the required highly skilled manpower. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for university education for example, South Africa is 15%, Egypt is 30% and Mauritius 15.3% is highest of the top countries (Otieno, 2005). In Poland, as in many other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, the rapid reforms and the global transformations in higher education have intensified the discussion about private higher education. The rapid rise of new private institutions soon invited questions about quality and legitimacy. And despite the fact that, unlike the existing public institutions, these new private colleges and universities are untainted by the communist past and are part of the broader transformation process from a planned state economy to a market oriented one, they still continue to grapple with social acceptability (Levy, 2005).

A mass private higher education sector in Brazil, Japan and Romania has emerged in response to an increase in demand for higher education and the inability of public higher education to accommodate this demand. Levy suggests that in this category the private providers are usually very specialized, vocationally oriented and usually non-elite institutions. The public institutions that co-exist with these privates will often be restricted in size and often selective in their admission policies (Reisz, 2015).

Strategic planning process involves analyzing the organization's internal and external environment followed by careful and logical planning of the execution process and making useful choices. To achieve their performance targets, institutions such as universities ought to build synergy between strategy planning and execution for effective integration of their plans towards advancing the missions of their institutions. One of the most important strategies is strategic intent, which refers to the relentless pursuit to realize an aspiring strategic objective and anticipated business situation through cautiously intertwining and harmonizing of the organization's vision, mission and strategic objectives (Bowlby, 2011).

In order for institutions such as universities to be successful in the exploitation of their resources and at the same time drive their competitive advantage, they need to employ a holistic approach towards the formulation and execution of their strategic intent, which affect performance. Ordinarily, the core of providing direction, or strategic intent, lies with the organizational executives and the chief executive officers (CEOs) of universities (which are typical institutions) are so apprehensive about strategy execution that they regard it as the most difficult issue in management (Fourie & Westhuizen, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

The demand for higher education, has led to development of various universities offering variety of courses in Kenya. The move has tremendously led to advancement of education in the country. The growth of universities in the country has led to rapid growth in the number of student enrolment. Most of the private universities are well-equipped with resources that facilitate learning but due to low enrollment rate, the facilities are underutilized. Little is known why the population is low despite of many resources at their disposal. With the growing need to increase higher education provision in Kenya, it has become increasingly impossible for the public universities in Kenya to cater for all those who qualify for university admission. This has presented a gap that private universities have not fully utilized their potentials. Few studies have been carried out to investigate the role of stakeholders' participation on the growth of student's population with majority of these studies being undertaken in Western Countries. Most of the studies have concentrated on other aspects not related to stakeholder's participation. This presented a research gap that the study sought to fill by investigating the influence of stakeholder's participation on growth of student population in selected private universities in Kenya.

Objective of the Study

The research aimed at investigating the influence of stakeholders' participation on growth of student population in selected private universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical review

Distributed Leadership Theory

Debate on leadership stretch back more than 50 years, and cover a well-trodden spectrum embracing "The Great Man Theory" at one end and travelling through Behavioral, Participative, Situational and Contingency theories into the Transactional and Transformational landscape

where most can be found today, and from where the current development of “distributed leadership” stems. Distributed leadership is considered under the umbrella of Strategic Leadership theories. Strategic leadership integrates transactional, transformational, situational, and functional leadership behaviours (Gronn, 2002).

Research has identified antecedents (absorptive capacity, capacity to change, managerial and outcomes (learning, innovation, competitive advantage, and organizational effectiveness) of strategic leadership in traditional organizations and strategic alliances. As such, it entails leadership that is broadly distributed, such that people within a team and organization lead each other. It has frequently been compared to horizontal and collective leadership and is most contrasted with more traditional "vertical" or "hierarchical" leadership which resides predominantly with an individual instead of a group. According to this theory, leadership needs to be understood in terms of leadership practices and organizational interventions; rather than just personal behavioral style or competence, the focus being on organizational relations, connectedness, interventions in the organizational systems and changing organizational practices and processes (Bennett, 2003).

Pirson & Turnbull (2011) asserts that whereas Hierarchical leadership ‘is dependent upon the wisdom of an individual leader, distributed leadership on the other hand draws from the knowledge of a collective approach to decision making. The theory forms the pillar of the study since it addressed the need of involving relevant stakeholders in decision making processes. Some of these stakeholders include student bloggers, alumni, sponsors, employees and government.

Growth of universities in Kenya

A leading factor specific to the Kenyan context that is responsible for the expansion in university education is the growing segments of the population that demand university education. In particular, the widespread belief that a degree is required to get a good job, or to advance in a job demand has elevated the importance attached to university education, making it a necessity for success. This in turn has increased the need among many Kenyans, especially those in the middle class, to access university education. The expanding demand for university education has been associated with the increase in the number of secondary school leavers meeting the minimum qualifications (average grade of C+) for university admission that was triggered in part by the massive expansion of primary education, accompanied by increased transition rates from primary to secondary school (Onsongo M., 2017).

A second factor explaining the growth of university education within the specific context of Kenya is the flexibility accorded by university institutions. According to Gudo (2011),

individuals who attain lower qualifications are finding universities more flexible than before. Previously, the only way of entering a university was a convincing pass in the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education (KACE) or, since 1987, the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Today though, individuals who scored lower passes are joining universities, sometimes through the longer route of studying for a certificate, followed by a diploma before one can enroll for a degree Program. Such flexibility has been responsible for Module II group of students which thrives in virtually all public universities in the country (Gudo et al. 2011). Private universities in particular, several factors have favored their emergence and expansion in the country. First, as elsewhere in Africa, private university expansion sprang forth largely due to the public system's failure to meet the demand for higher education. With an ever-growing need to increase higher education provision in the country, it became increasingly impossible for the public sector in Kenya to cater for all those who qualify for university admission (Mwebi & Simatwo, 2013).

Despite the phenomenal growth in the number of public universities, these could only absorb a small proportion of secondary school graduates who met the minimum requirements for university entry. The situation was compounded by the financial inability of the government to continue subsidizing an ever-expanding public university system. This was especially so after the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in 1985 as part of the reform initiatives driven by the World Bank and bilateral donors. The Program called for reforms in the education sector, including the reduction of subsidies to university education. The inability of the public sector to meet the demand for a university education created the need to complement government-managed higher institutions of learning (Mwebi and Simatwa 2013) as well as a gap that called for the entry of other non-governmental players to fill such gap. According to the Ministry of Education (2012), the government recognized that, without a working partnership between the public and the private sectors in provision of education, it was going to be hard to address the problems of access, equity and quality. As such, it strongly encouraged private sector partnership as articulated in Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 and in the Kenya Education.

Sector Support Program resulted in the privatization and liberalization of higher education (or the opening up of the sector to private players) and to the provision of incentives to encourage the growth of private sector education. This explains the mushrooming of private universities as a viable alternative for acquiring university education in the country (Ministry of Education 2012).

Private Universities in Kenya are institutions established in accordance with the Universities Act 1985(CAP 210B) and the Universities Rules, 1989 (Establishment of

Universities, Standardization, accreditation and Supervision). Private universities in Kenya operate under a Full Charter or Letter of Interim Authority as they await Full Charter. The private universities offer both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The Commission for University Education (CUE) is mandated with responsibility of ensuring that private universities adhere to the standards of a university. In Kenya currently we have 34 registered private Universities. Kenya is currently leading the East Africa countries of Tanzania and Uganda in the number of private Universities. This is because Kenya was the region's first country to recognize the importance of private universities (Oketch, 2003).

Experienced challenges in growing student population are due to a variety of issues that requires strategic address. Private universities face numerous challenges including: maintaining a steady supply of students who can afford to pay for private university education, stiff competition from their public universities counterpart who have introduced parallel degree courses for full paying students , aggressive competition from foreign universities who have launched an aggressive campaign for recruiting local students, lacking a research focus comparable to public universities and offering specific and narrow programs (Oketch, 2003). Most of the problems experienced in the private universities require strategic decision-making approach in order to provide long lasting solution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design guided the study. The design is important as it allowed the researcher to provide deep insight into a specific subject and focuses on explaining the aspects of the study in a detailed manner. The location of the study was North Rift, South Rift and Nyanza region. The target university in North Rift was University of Eastern Africa (Baraton), South Rift region was Kabarak University and while in Nyanza was the Great Lakes University. The three universities were selected because they are well-equipped and had capacity to accommodate more students than current status. The unit of observations was staff and student leaders in the institutions of higher learning. A sample size of 10% of the target population is viewed as adequate (Kerlinger, 1986). Three private universities were selected out of 34 representing 105 of the total registered private universities in Kenya. However, owing to the small number of student leaders, the researcher used 100% to determine sample size. In this regard, the overall sample size for the study was 110 respondents, 68 university staff and 42 student leaders. Primary data was collected using questionnaire. The data collected was subject to descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive statistics

The respondents were also asked to indicate the level of agreement with the various indicators of stakeholder's participation in the growth of students' population.

Table 1: Government funding of privately sponsored students has increased the enrollment of students in the universities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	45	45.9	45.9
Strongly agree	32	32.7	32.7
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The results indicated that 45.9 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that government funding of privately sponsored students has increased the enrollment of students in the universities, 32.7 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 10.2 percent disagree, and 5.1 percent strongly disagree. The implication of the findings was that government capitation has played important role in growing student population in private universities in the Country. This is partly attributed to the high number of students who qualify for admission in Kenyan universities but public universities do not have capacity to offer admission to all and thus private universities bridge the gap.

Table 2: Government funding to private university is sufficient

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	39	39.8	39.8
Strongly agree	38	38.8	38.8
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Table 2 indicated that 39.8 percent very strongly agree that government funding to private university is sufficient, 38.8 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree while 10.2

percent disagree. These findings show that the government funding was adequate to address the education needs of the students enrolled in private universities.

Table 3: Government grants have influenced the growth of student population in private universities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	49	50.0	50.0
Strongly agree	28	28.6	28.6
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	8	8.2	8.2
Strongly disagree	7	7.1	7.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

From the findings in table 3, 50.0 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that government grants have influenced the growth of student population in private universities, 28.6 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 8.2 disagree and 7.1 percent strongly disagree. The findings imply that government through various mechanisms such as sponsorship and regulatory mechanism influence growth of students' in private institutions.

Table 4: All stakeholders are involved in decision making

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	8	8.2	8.2
Strongly agree	7	7.1	7.1
Moderately agree	13	13.3	13.3
Disagree	33	33.7	33.7
Strongly disagree	37	37.8	37.8
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The results of the study indicated that 37.8 percent of the respondents strongly disagree that all stakeholders are involved in decision making, 33.7 percent disagree, 13.3 percent moderately agree, 7.1 percent strongly agree and 8.2 percent very strongly agree. This means that private universities do not involve the stakeholders' participation in running the affairs of the institution. The findings further showed that majority of the respondents strongly disagree that before any critical decision is made, relevant stakeholders are consulted.

Table 5: Before any critical decision is made, relevant stakeholders are consulted

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	47	48.0	48.0
Strongly agree	30	30.6	30.6
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings in table 5 indicated that 48.0 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that before any critical decision is made, relevant stakeholders are consulted, 30.6 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 10.2 percent disagree and 5.1 percent strongly disagree. The implication of the findings was that involvement of relevant stakeholders in decision making process was important.

Table 6: You are encouraged to develop creative and innovative ideas

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	52	53.1	53.1
Strongly agree	25	25.5	25.5
Moderately agree	4	4.1	4.1
Disagree	12	12.2	12.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

As indicated in table 6, 53.1 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that they are encouraged to develop creativity and innovative ideas in the institution that may help in growing student population, 25.5 percent strongly agree, 4.1 percent moderately agree, 12.2 percent disagree, 5.1 percent strongly disagree. The findings conclude that creativity and innovation form the basis of decision making in private universities. This may be attributed to the stiff competition from the public universities as well as other private universities. Akinboye, 2003 said that without creativity, a person is not to access the fullness of information and resources available but is locked up in old habits, structures, patterns, concepts and perceptions. As the society becomes more complex, there is a gradual increase in the awareness that yesterday's methods do not effectively solve contemporary problems of the society (Akinboye, 1955 in

Olatoye etc 2010) and this is why innovation and creativity are needed in nearly all the facets of the society.

Table 7: Stakeholders have input in the development of institution's strategic plan

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	42	42.9	42.9
Strongly agree	31	31.6	31.6
Moderately agree	10	10.2	10.2
Disagree	12	12.2	12.2
Strongly disagree	3	3.1	3.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

It was also revealed by the findings that 42.9 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that stakeholders have input in the development of institution's strategic plan, 31.6 percent strongly agree, 10.2 moderately agree, 12.2 percent disagree and 3.1 percent strongly disagree. The implication of these finding is that stakeholders input plays a critical role in decision making process in the institution of higher learning especially in matters affecting growth of student population. Engaging stakeholders in the planning process itself helps build ownership within the organization. For those not directly involved in the process, however, it is important to make them know what the plan is, where they fit in it and how they contribute to university goals. The findings support is supported by the argument by Lynch (2012) who reported that it is imperative to involve stakeholders in the development of a strategic plan in order to include their point of view and the intent of their involvement to result in change or a new direction, and especially the implementation of strategy.

Table 8: Heads of department makes the decisions that affect department through consultation with members of the department

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	48	49.0	49.0
Strongly agree	28	28.6	28.6
Moderately agree	7	7.1	7.1
Disagree	6	6.1	6.1
Strongly disagree	9	9.2	9.2
Total	98	100.0	100.0

As shown in table 8, 49.0 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that heads of department make the decisions that affect department through consultation with members of the department, 28.6 percent strongly agree, 7.1 percent moderately agree, 6.1 percent disagree and 9.2 percent strongly disagree. The findings revealed that decision made by departmental heads are done in consultation with other members of the departments.

Table 9: Contributions made by relevant stakeholders are critical in growing students' population

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	37	37.8	37.8
Strongly agree	35	35.7	35.7
Moderately agree	11	11.2	11.2
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

As indicated in table 9, 37.8 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that contributions made by relevant stakeholders are critical in growing students' population, 35.7 percent strongly agree, 11.2 percent moderately agree, 10.2 percent disagree and 5.1 percent strongly disagree. The implications of the results were that contributions of relevant stakeholders were critical in growing students' population.

Table 10: Stakeholder participation in decision making influence the growth of students' population

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	49	50.0	50.0
Strongly agree	28	28.6	28.6
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	12	12.2	12.2
Strongly disagree	3	3.1	3.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings show that 50.0 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that stakeholder participation in decision making influence the growth of students' population, 28.6 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 12.2 percent disagree and 3.1 percent strongly

disagree. The findings imply that stakeholders' participation in decision making influenced growth of students' population in private universities.

Correlations Analysis

The study sought to examine the linear relationship between stakeholder participation and growth of students' population in private universities in Kenya. Table 11 shows the summary of correlation results. The study sought to examine the relationship between stakeholders' participation and growth of students' population of the private universities in Kenya. The outcome of study showed that there was a positive correlation between Stakeholders participation and the growth of students in private universities in Kenya, $r(98) = 0.799$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$. This shows there is statistically significant relationship between stakeholders' participation and growth of students' population of the private universities in Kenya." was adopted.

Table 11: Correlations Analysis Results

	Growth of students' population
Stakeholder participation	.799**

Note ** $p < 0.0$ level (2-tailed) * $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed); $N=98$

Dependent variable: growth of students' population

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholder participation and growth of student population

Findings revealed that 45.9 percent of the respondents strongly agree that government funding of privately sponsored students has increased the enrollment of students in the universities which may be attributed to the fact that students can be admitted to the private university of their choice without considering the cost. The findings also revealed that 39.8 percent of the respondents agree that government funding to private university is sufficient and therefore private universities provide strategic direction of utilization of their resources. It was also noted that 50.0 percent of the respondents strongly agree that government grants have influenced the growth of student population in private universities. The results of the study indicated that 36.7 percent of the respondents disagree that all stakeholders are involved in decision making and this has an implication that the private universities use all-inclusive approach in leaderships.

The findings further found out that 48.0 percent of the respondents before any critical decision is made, relevant stakeholders are consulted. The practical implication of the findings is that some of the opinions and ideas from stakeholders are vital in decisions that affect growth

of student population in private universities. This was further clarified by the findings that majority of the respondent's 53.1 percent very strongly agree that they are encouraged to develop creative and innovative ideas and this create a sense of independence and importance. It was also revealed by the findings that 42.9 percent of the respondents strongly agree that stakeholders have input in the development of institution's strategic plan. The findings show that 49.0 percent of the respondents strongly agree that heads of department makes the decisions that affect department through consultation with members of the department. Furthermore, 38.8 percent of the respondents strongly agree that contributions made by relevant stakeholders are critical in growing students' population. Finally, the findings revealed that 50.0 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that stakeholder participation in decision making influence the growth of student's population. These findings imply that there are several benefits accrued by the institution when stakeholders participate in decision making. Quality input from stakeholders leads to quality decision-making and helps to challenge traditional thinking, and sparks creativity in problem-solving; greater stakeholder satisfaction with the final planning product comes from their involvements in shaping it; the chances of successful implementation increases as more stakeholders feel committed to the plan or institution's goals and take ownership of the plan's design and good governance; and transparency and open communication are served when the institution communicate and receive feedback from stakeholders instead of being guided by personal agenda. Further the findings are supported by Hayward and Ncayiyana (2003) who suggested that student participation is important for the success of the university's strategic planning. In some cases, the students' representatives are elected leaders of the student body.

Conclusions

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that stakeholder's involvement in all aspect of the university plays a critical role in growing students' population. The study concluded that not all stakeholders' opinions have not been implemented by private universities. The findings of the study found out that by involving relevant stakeholders in decision making the institution will achieve high implementation rates in policy development because everyone will be part and parcel of decision-making process. It was further concluded that stakeholders had a significant influence on the growth of students' population through participation in decision making process.

Recommendations of the Study

The study recommended that private universities should consider bringing to board all stakeholders including students when setting goals of the institution in order to facilitate

implementation from all corners. It is further recommended that private universities should encourage the stakeholders to provide their inputs for the purpose of decision making processes.

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