

Introduction

Background to the Study

The production, accumulation, transfer and application of knowledge is the major factor in socio-economic development. This has pushed virtually all world countries to put these processes at the core of national development strategies for gaining competitive advantage in the global knowledge (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri and Arnal 2008; World Bank 2002; World Bank 2009). Among the major players in delivering the knowledge requirements for development are higher education institutions, including universities (Cloete, Bailey, Pillay, Bunting and Maassen 2011). Current research available, for example, suggests the existence of a strong association between higher education participation rates and levels of development (Cloete *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, high levels of education in general, and of higher education in particular, have been proven to be essential for the design and productive use of new technologies and to provide the foundation for a nation's innovative capacity and to contribute more than any other social institution to the development of civil society (Carnoy, Castells, Cohen, and Cardoso 1993; Serageldin 2000). Most recently, studies such as Bloom, Canning and Chan (2006), Kamara and Nyende (2007) and the World Bank (2009) have empirically demonstrated a relationship between investment in higher education and gross domestic product in Africa. Given such evidence, many countries are putting knowledge and innovation policies, as well as higher education, at the core of their development strategies

In the light of the above, the importance of higher education in societal socio-economic development is not a moot issue. The sector is expected to serve the primary function of nation-building and development (Kauffeldt 2009; Moshia 1986; World Bank 2009). Universities are expected to make a sustained contribution to development by equipping human resource with relevant knowledge, skills and value systems through their diversified academic

programmes and through the generation and dissemination of relevant knowledge (Bailey, Cloete and Pillay 2013). Higher education should enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential; serve the needs of an adaptive, sustainable and knowledge-based economy and play a major role in the shaping of a democratic, civilized and inclusive society (Okioga, Onsongo and Nyaboga 2012). The sector should produce graduates that are able to compete in a global economy with those that are products of the well-established Western higher education systems (Kauffeldt 2009; Santiago *et al.* 2008; World Bank 2002, 2009).

On the African continent, following independence, universities were expected to play a central role in social, cultural, political and economic development in the continent by contributing significantly to the human resource needs and through knowledge creation and dissemination (Okioga, Onsongo and Nyaboga 2012). With a particular focus on the development of human resources for the civil service and the public professions, universities were supposed to address the acute shortages of human capital resulting from the gross underdevelopment of universities under colonialism, and the departure of colonial administrators and professionals following independence (Cloete *et al.* 2011). The importance of the university in newly-independent African countries was underscored by the 'Accra declaration' that all universities must be 'development universities' (Yesufu 1973). Those who participated in the workshop leading to the declaration concurred that the role of universities in development was such an important task that, rather than leave the university to academics alone, governments should be responsible for steering universities in the development direction. Subsequently, the central role of the university in the continent's development was to be captured by Sherman (1989: 4) in the following quote:

The emergent African university must, henceforth, be much more than an institution for teaching, research and dissemination of higher learning. It must be accountable to, and serve, the vast majority of people who live in rural areas. The African university must be committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization, and the training and upgrading of the total human resources, not just of a small elite.

Despite the above recognition of higher education as a key driver of socio-economic development in Africa, initially, governments did little to promote the development role of universities, partly because many of them had not developed a coherent development model and also because many had become increasingly embroiled in internal power struggles, and the external politics of the Cold War and funding agencies such as the World Bank (Cloete *et al.* 2011). It was not until the 1990s and early 2000s that some influential voices started calling for the revitalization of the African university and for linking higher education to development (Sawyer 2004). The World Bank (2000), for example, inspired

by Castells' (1991) path-breaking paper, 'The University System: Engine of development in the new world economy', started recognizing the role of higher education in the knowledge economy and in development in the developing world. This was subsequently strengthened by the findings of other empirical studies (e.g., Bloom *et al.* 2006; Kamara and Nyende 2007; World Bank 2009) that associated higher education with gross domestic product in Africa. The resurgence of support for the university as an avenue for development in Africa was best captured by Kofi Annan, the then Secretary general of the United Nations, when he stated that:

The university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars (quoted in Bloom *et al.* 2006: 2).

Annan's sentiments were endorsed by a group of African ministers of education at a preparatory meeting for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Conference on Higher Education in 2009 who demonstrated support for the role of higher education in development by calling for improved financing of universities and a support fund to strengthen training and research in key areas (MacGregor, 2009). Born of the resurgence of higher education as a key factor in socio-economic development in Africa is the recognition of the twenty-first century 'as a knowledge era' (Damte and Altbach 2004: 21). This has given the sector added impetus on the continent.

In Kenya, university education is an indispensable element for socio-economic and political and technological development (Republic of Kenya 2005). Access to university education is an important tool for sustainable socio-economic development and for rapid development and improvements in human capital (Ndegwa 2008; Republic of Kenya 2005) and also plays a major role in the alleviation of poverty (Republic of Kenya 2003, 2005). Education in general, and university education in particular, is viewed as the primary means of social mobility but also as a basis for national cohesion and socio-economic development (Kinuthia 2009; Ministry of Education 2012; Nyangau 2014). The government recognizes that the education and training of all Kenyans is a fundamental development. In particular, it sees the country's future as a prosperous and internationally competitive nation to be dependent on the university education system. The sector has the responsibility of creating a knowledge-based society that upholds justice, democracy, accountability and encourages issue-based and results-oriented political engagements. According to the Ministry of Education (2012), the country will rely on the university education system to create a sustainable pool of highly trained human resource capital equipped with the

knowledge (understanding) and skills required for the country to experience socio-economic development, actualize its ambition of becoming a knowledge-based economy and to remain globally competitive in a rapidly changing and more diverse economy. The university sub-sector is also expected to equip citizens with understanding and knowledge that enables them to make informed choices about their lives and to confront the challenges facing the Kenyan society. Among the middle class, university education is seen as guaranteeing lifelong secure careers. That is, it enables individuals to cope with the changing nature of the job market characterized by frequent changes of jobs; university education enhances one's chances for advancement in current employment and creates prospects for future careers (Gudo, Olel and Oanda 2011).

Across the African continent, the growing awareness of the critical role of university education in socio-economic development, coupled with the recognition of the twenty-first century as 'a knowledge era' has pushed governments in virtually all countries to endeavour to improve access to relevant and quality university education by building new universities while, at the same time, increasing enrolment at existing ones (Okioga, Onsongo and Nyaboga 2012; Reisberg 2010). This has resulted in massive expansion both in the number of public and private university institutions as well as in enrolment, with most of the growth occurring since 1990. Building on tiny and initially elitist universities, many African countries have witnessed rapid expansion in higher education since independence. In Kenya, for example, the government has invested heavily in all sectors of education with the view to widening access to education at all levels. Such investments resulted in the country experiencing exponential growth in primary, secondary and tertiary and university education. The growth has been accompanied by the revision of curricula and the upgrading of educational standards or quality. The term 'massification of higher education' has often been used to refer to the dramatic growth in public and private sector universities coupled with astronomical increments in the number of students enrolled (Jowi 2003; Kaburu and Embeywa 2014). By massification of university education we mean growth of enrolment beyond the capacities of universities (Jowi 2003). The meaning of the term though transcends the growth in numbers of institutions and students to include the absence of corresponding increases in budgetary allocation and investments in facilities and staff (Kaburu and Embeywa 2014).

For the higher education system to make a meaningful contribution to national development, it must be effective (Kauffeldt 2009). This calls for a university education system that is focused, efficient and able to deliver accessible, equitable, relevant and quality training and to create and disseminate quality knowledge through research. However, in many African countries the sector faces many daunting challenges that erode its capacity to perform (Reisberg 2010; Ngome 2003; Damtew and Altbach 2004; Sawyerr 2004). These have occasioned a decline

in quality; an attribute that is essential if the sector is to play its expected role in development and if the goal of the twenty-first century being a knowledge era is to be realized. To illustrate: in most universities the rising number of students has outpaced the expansion and improvement of facilities and other important resources, such as finance and qualified human resources (Reisberg 2010). In countries such as Kenya and Uganda, for example, the massification of university education has occasioned the establishment of public and private universities and colleges that lack the infrastructural facilities (such as lecture theatres, laboratories, libraries, and faculty offices) essential for quality learning and training (Ngome 2003; Musisi and Muwanga 2003). In addition, institutions of higher learning in Africa must contend with inadequate and poorly trained (unskilled) faculty coupled with the lack of qualified professors with graduate degrees or research experience (Reisberg 2010). This has mainly been occasioned by the continuing brain drain or the departure of the skilled and experienced scholars and scientists (Seth 2000; Kelly 2001; Effah 2003; Ngome 2003; Wondimu 2003) to Europe, North America and Southern Africa in search of better remuneration. In some countries, the situation is compounded by long-standing economic and social crises and rampant corruption which siphons resources allocated for socio-economic development (Seth 2000; Kelly 2001; Effah 2003; Ngome 2003; Wondimu 2003; Damtew and Altbach 2004; Saint 2004).

An often forgotten challenge facing many African universities is the crisis of governance. Governance has been demonstrated to play a pivotal role in the success of institutions of higher learning and is a crucial factor in sustaining and improving quality and performance (Gibbs, Knapper and Picinnin 2009; Osseo-Asare, Longbottom and Murphy 2005; Martin, Trigwell, Prosser and Ramsden 2003). To deal with the governance crisis affecting them and to fulfil their roles, universities must embrace good governance. The existence of good governance in universities is a function of a combination of factors. First, it requires visionary, creative (innovative) and inclusive leadership equipped with good communication skills capable of driving change (Brookes 2006; Craig 2005; Lownsborough and O'Leary 2005; NCSL 2008a). Second, it demands adherence to the key principles of good governance; that is, academic freedom, shared governance, clear rights and responsibilities meritocratic selection, financial stability and accountability (Kauffeldt 2009; Obondo 2000; OECD 2003; Task on University Education and Society 2000). Third, universities can achieve good governance harnessing the following tools and practices effectively: faculty councils (or senates), governing councils (or board of trustees), institutional charters and handbooks, visiting committees and accreditation, budget practices and financial management, data-driven decision making, style of identifying leaders (appointing or electing), faculty appointment and promotion decisions and security of employment (Task on University Education and Society 2000).

This study focuses on the status of governance in universities. In particular, it keys on the shared governance principle of good governance to interrogate the status of students' participation (or involvement) in university governance processes, with the view to understanding the extent to which students, as major stakeholders, have been mainstreamed in the democratization of governance in universities in Kenya. The study is premised on the reality that collaborative governance is essential if universities are to attain their visions, missions and goals. Also, students are the majority of the institutions' community and finance the larger part of the institutions' budgets. As such, they have a right to representation in decision making and policy formulation. For students to effectively participate in the governance of their institution, their leadership should not just be involved in some matters. Instead it should be adequately involved in all major decision and policy issues affecting the university. The university should also provide the student leadership with the resources they require to be adequately involved.

The Research Problem

In Kenya, the vision for the university sub-sector is to provide globally competitive quality education, training and research for sustainable development (Ministry of Education 2012). Its mission is to produce graduates who respond to the needs of the society, to upgrade the skills of the existing workforce, to develop the community and business leaders of tomorrow, as well as the ability to start new businesses to employ Kenyans and contribute to the country's economic well-being. To realize its vision and mission, the sub-sector has the objectives to promote socio-economic development in line with the country's development agenda; achieve manpower development and skills acquisition; promote the discovery, storage and dissemination of knowledge; encourage research, innovation and application of innovation to development and; contribute to Community Service (Ministry of Education 2012). From the perspective of these objectives, it is very clear that the government's goal is to have a sustainable, quality and relevant university education for national development.

Like elsewhere in the world, for the Kenyan university sector to meet its goals, it must meet high quality standards and its contents must remain relevant to the needs of the economy and society. One of the factors that infringes on the sector's capacity to deliver a quality and relevant education is the way the sector is governed. The existing evidence suggests that consistent with the practice in other African countries, Kenya's university education sector suffers from the violation of the core principles of good governance, including that of shared governance. As a result, poor governance prevails across most universities in the country (Klemenčič 2014; Leuscher-Mamashela 2013; Mutula 2002). This calls for renewed efforts to democratize governance in Kenyan universities by making decision making and policy formulation truly participatory. However, doing so can be an uphill

task without the support and active involvement of students. Student leadership and student voice must be integrated into the governance of institutions of higher learning not just in principle (or as an act of tokenism) but also in practice. This demands the input of the total student body through the officials of student government and other organized students' groups (e.g. associations and clubs). Given that students are the majority members of the university community, administrators at all levels of management of universities must be seen to forge a strong collaborative partnership with student leadership. Such partnership must exist from the department as the lowest administrative unit, to the office of the vice-chancellor, who is the chief executive of the institution. For the partnership to be functional it should be truly consultative and characterized by shared decision making by both parties, with students having co-decision rights.

Unfortunately, existing evidence tends to suggest that the relationship between university management and the student body has been characterized by frustration and mistrust that in extreme cases has resulted in student riots (Luescher-Mamashela, Kiiru, Mattes, Mwollo-ntallima, Ng'ethe, and Romo 2011; Otieno 2004). As such, there is a need for studies that not only assess the extent to which student leadership has been mainstreamed into the governance of universities but also spotlight the quality of student leadership in our universities, its capacity to serve effectively as well as identify the factors that stand in the way of strong and effective student leadership. It is in this spirit that this study has been designed. In addition, although the existing literature shows that the subject of student leadership in general in Kenyan universities has been the locus of previous studies (see e.g., Klemenčič 2014; Luescher-Mamashela *et al.* 2011; Obondo 2000; Mwiria 1992), not much investigation has been conducted focusing on the mainstreaming of student leadership into the governance of universities and how the quality of student leadership infringes on that process in a comprehensive fashion. Furthermore, no studies that we are aware of have been conducted in Kenya systematically focusing on the public and private contexts of student involvement in university governance. This study is designed with the broad purpose to address the above gaps.

Objectives of the Study

The broad purpose of this project is to investigate issues surrounding student leadership as it relates to the democratic governance of universities in Kenya. This endeavour is premised on the reality that collaborative governance is essential if universities are to attain their visions, missions and goals. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the extent to which official university policy documents as well as governance structures and practices in Kenya accommodate (or mainstream) student participation in governance and decision making processes.

2. Assess the level of importance students in Kenyan universities attach to their involvement in governance and decision making processes.
3. Establish the extent, adequacy of and level of satisfaction with student participation in governance and decision making processes in Kenyan universities.
4. Document existing structural and material (rewards) incentives used by universities in Kenya to nurture and entrench student involvement in university governance and decision making processes.
5. Gauge the extent of national political influence on student governance processes in Kenyan universities today.
6. Identify the impediments to effective student involvement in University governance, from the perspective of different stakeholders.

Justification of the Study

This study is important for its theoretical value and applied utility. At the theoretical realm, the study is expected to contribute invaluable knowledge On student leadership as it relates to the democratic governance of universities in Kenya. It is hoped that, through the study, the level of understanding of the subject matter of governance in Kenyan universities in general and of student involvement in the governance process in particular has been expanded considerably. The study generates data that help unlock our understanding of this subject matter by focusing on the important elements such as the following: the democratization of governance in universities; the extent to which official university policy documents as well as governance structures and practices mainstream student participation in governance and decision making; the importance students in Kenyan universities attach to their involvement in governance; the extent of political meddling with the governance processes in universities; and, the impediments to effective student involvement in university governance, among others.

Whereas empirical studies exist focusing on universities in Kenya, many of them have tended to concentrate on effects of the massification of the sector with particular emphasis on the challenges facing university education and how these have undermined the quality of the education provided by these institutions (e.g., Gudo, Olet and Oanda 2011; Kaburu and Embeywa 2014; Kinuthia 2009; Munene 2016; Mutula 2002; Nganga 2014; Nyangau 2014; Odhiambo 2011; Okioga, Onsongo and Nyaboga 2014). The governance element, for the most part, remains under-researched. In particular, to our knowledge, no comprehensive analysis of student involvement in university governance has been undertaken by any single study; where as a systematic public-private universities comparison is lacking in the existing empirical literature. This despite the fact that governance is one of the umbrella challenges facing institutions of higher education in Kenya today; universities in the

country continue to be dogged by poor governance. Poor governance is not only detrimental to the quality of education offered – and, hence, the quality of graduates produced by universities – poor governance also intensifies the effects of other challenges such as inadequate funding, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, lack of transparency and accountability, and, rising academic fraud.

At the applied realm, the study has generated data that should inform the efficient development of democratic (participatory/inclusive) governance in universities, as well as inform capacity building programmes and activities for university student leaders in the country. Concerning the latter, the findings of this study point out specific training needs for student leaders based on the knowledge, attitudes and skill gaps that exist and form the basis for the development of relevant training manuals. Capacity building in leadership skills and knowledge for students should create a leadership that enjoys legitimacy and trust of, and has a positive relationship with, fellow students; enable them to gain key skills and to develop competences that enhance their participation in the governance process of universities; whilst providing a more effective link with the management on issues that directly affect the student body as a whole. This should strengthen governance systems of higher education institutions that are in most instances, faced with cases of failed dialogue between the two sides (Luescher-Mamashela *et al.* 2011; Otieno 2004) and reduce the frustration and mistrust that has tended to punctuate the relationship between university management and the student body.

The Structuring of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter One, as introduction, gives an overview of the study subject and presents the research problem, its objectives and its justification. Chapter Two presents the historical development of higher education in Kenya. This includes the profiling of the historical growth of both public and private universities and their attendant student enrolments in the country as well as some of the major challenges facing the sector. The third chapter presents a comprehensive review on the governance of the university education sector. The chapter commences with the definition of the concept of governance. Here the relationship between governance and leadership is also explored before delving into the concept of good governance. The chapter analyzes subject of university governance including the principles of good university governance and some of the tools and practices that universities can employ to achieve good governance. This is followed by a descriptive profiling of students' involvement in university governance, including its historical origins; the forms it takes; and its benefits for society, the student and the university. The final four sections of the chapter focus on the relationship between students and university leadership, the governance of universities in Kenya, the research issues emanating from the review, and the theoretical framework anchoring the study, respectively.

Chapter Four deals with the research methodology, including the research design, sample selection techniques, data collection methods and the techniques of data analysis as well as a presentation of the study sites. Also presented in the chapter are ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. The study's results are presented in Chapter Five, commencing with a socio-demographic profiling of the study respondents. This is followed by the systematic presentation of the core results anchored on the objectives of the study. The final chapter (six) concludes the study. It presents a systematic summary and discussion (interpretation) of the major findings of the study guided by its specific objectives. In addition, the chapter presents data-driven conclusions and policy recommendations for action, again anchored on the specific objectives of the study.