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## **INFLUENCE OF TRANSPARENCY ON QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA**

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### **Abstract**

*The study made a comparative analysis of the influence of transparency on quality of education in institutions of higher learning in Kenya, focusing on two public and two private universities. It adopted an explanatory survey research design with 380 respondents formed of senior management academic staff, academic staff without administrative responsibilities, universities' management board and student leaders. Questionnaire and interview schedule were used to collect data. Analysis was done using SPSS and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Hypothesis was tested using GLM method of multiple regression. Findings revealed that public universities have a better transparency framework than their private counterparts and that in private universities transparency has no significant influence on quality of education as opposed to public universities where it has a significant influence on quality of education with **p-value** = 0.387 > 0.05 and **p-value** = 0.019 < 0.05 respectively. The study concludes that transparency is not an essential ingredient for realization of quality university education in private universities but is a key requirement in the achievement of quality education in public universities in Kenya. Public universities in Kenya should therefore endeavor to invest in creating transparent systems that effectively support their operations and processes.*

**Keywords:** *Transparency, institutions of higher learning, quality university education, public university, private university*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Transparency is among the major principals of corporate governance and form a common basis for all internationally accepted corporate governance guidelines and codes (Cadbury Report, 1992; Africa Development Bank, 2007; ASX Corporate Governance Council, 2007). This principle correspond to best corporate governance practice globally. According to Transparency International (2011), transparency involves clear and public disclosure of information, rules, plans, processes and actions by governments, companies, organizations and individuals. It is operating in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are performed by an individual or institution (Schnackenberg, Andrew & Edward, 2014). Florini (2007) has observed that transparency is one of the practical

measures taken to curtail corruption, acting as a deterrent against corrupt behaviour by promoting citizens' vigilance, thus deterring public and corporate officials from misusing public and corporate service to attain private gain. It can be used as a strategy to avert unethical practices and fix the problems of poor performance in institutions (O'Neill, 2006).

Higher education is globally regarded as the most effective tool for socioeconomic transformation of any society. This is because it stimulates scientific research that results in modernization (Ogom, 2007) and generates significant and multiple direct, indirect and catalytic economic impacts which result in well-established benefits pertaining to both individuals and wider economies (British Council, 2012). Quality and sustainable higher education is therefore of great importance to the global community.

Over the years, the world has experienced unprecedented expansion in higher education both in terms of student enrolment and number of emerging institutions of higher learning. Currently, there are approximately 1,730 universities in the United States of America and Britain alone (Webometrics, 2017; Universities UK, 2015). India whose education sector is ranked among the fastest growing globally has about 819 Universities offering various degree programmes (Universities Grant Commission, 2015). There are about 200 million university students in the world today up from approximately 90 million in the year 2000 (World Bank, 2017). This expansion has equally occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa where "massification" of university education has taken root partly due to increased demand for university education among the region's youth (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010; Nyangau, 2014; World Bank, 2017). Kenya has particularly recorded a 19% increase in the number of universities between the years 2012 and 2017 (CUE, 2017).

Questions have however been raised in the recent past about the quality of transparency practiced in these institutions of higher learning in both global and local spheres (Fielden, 2008; Varghese, 2013). A significant proportion of the challenges facing universities in Kenya today including unchecked expansion of university education, gender inequality, low research capability, poor living conditions for students, the spread of HIV/AIDS, crumbled infrastructure, poorly equipped laboratories and libraries, frequent student unrest and shortage of quality faculty have been can be attributed to questionable transparency systems in the institutions (Mwiria, 2007; Mwiria & Ngethe, 2007; Sifuna, 2010; Mulili, 2011; Nyangau, 2014; Okeyo, 2017). These challenges have significantly undermined the quality of education offered in Kenyan institutions of higher learning (Inter-University Council of East Africa, 2014; British High Commission, 2015; Gateru & Kiguru, 2015; British Council, 2015; CUE, 2017).

Recognition of the need for good corporate governance which partly entail transparency in higher education globally has risen over the years as a result of the emerging trends and challenges that impact directly or indirectly on the quality of training offered by the sector. According to Fielden (2008), internalization and rapid expansion of the sector are major challenges that have attracted the attention of governments to put in place corporate governance frameworks that would entrench transparency and ensure quality education in both public and private universities. Waswa & Swaleh (2012) observe that the fusion between internationalization of higher education, globalization and increased demand for democratization has fueled a growing demand for transparency in in the management of universities, since this guarantees institutional stability in the long run.

In Kenya, the practice of corporate governance in institutions of higher learning remain largely a subject of debate (Mwiria, 2007; Sifuna, 2010; Mulili, 2011; Nyangau, 2014; Marwa, 2014; Monyoncho, 2015; Okeyo, 2017; CUE, 2017). Despite the enactment of the Universities Act, 2012 and the development and launch of 'Mwongozo' as code of governance for State Corporations in Kenya including universities, levels of transparency which form critical components of both the Act and the code prominently remain low and questionable in both private and public universities in Kenya. This being the case, the study, therefore, sought to carry out a comparative analysis of the influence of transparency on quality of education in public and private universities in Kenya based on four aspects of transparency namely; information disclosure, stakeholder participation, communication and access to information and other official materials.

### **1.1 The Concept of Quality in Higher Education:**

While quality in general is a difficult concept in itself to understand (Mbirihi, 2013), there exist various models and criteria that have attempted to provide contextual explanations as to how quality in a product or service may be ascertained. Learning facilities provided to support educational programmes for example are important measurements of quality learning in university education according to Schneider (2004) and Abend, Ornstein, Baltas, de la Garza, Watson, Lange & Von Ahlefeld (2006). Adequacy assessments of such facility are important indicators in that respect. Questions as to whether the facilities adequately enables the development of learning environments that support students and teachers in achieving their goals, are therefore important indicators of quality in a learning facility (Schneider, 2004; Abend, et al., (2006).

Yurko (2005) identified space as useful quality function and argues that space of an educational facility is an important measure of quality of such a facility. Examples of space qualities are; a learning facility having adequately sized classrooms, availability of natural lighting and a welcoming atmosphere. Other aspects such as level of comfort, cleanliness and maintenance are also important measures of quality facility (Cash, 1993). When referring to an education building, it needs to have learning spaces that support the learning process, is secure, comfortable and provides an inspirational setting for learning (Abend et al., 2006). Inadequate provision of such facilities as textbooks, online library services are quality issues and such resources are "not fit for the purpose" because they are unable to meet the needs of students' learning (Abend et al., 2006). According to Ndethiu (2007), lack of adequate reading resources like current and relevant books, inadequate use of internet and general lack of reading space manifested in inadequate lecture rooms posed a challenge to the promotion of students' reading habits, teaching and learning in public universities. Gudo et al., (2011) observed that lack of appropriate sitting spaces during lectures caused some students to attend lectures as they sat outside the lecture rooms resulting in lack of concentration and student attention to the lecturer who delivers a lesson and encouraging rote learning as students heavily relied on lecture notes.

Adequate adoption and use of Information technology in higher learning is equally important in investigating quality of university education since it has a bearing on access (Manyasi, 2010). Some studies have identified access to be a critical indicator of quality education. Quality of teaching and learning is therefore compromised where institutions have only a few computers which are used by lecturers to access internet services (Manyasi, 2010). Inadequate and poorly trained academic staff compounded with low pay as well as increasing academic fraud, indiscipline among students and

frequent unrests, poor examination systems that are susceptible to manipulation through acts of irregularities, tribalism, nepotism, cheating, plagiarism and favoritism, poor students welfare, poor administration are among the factors that that have significantly affected overall commitment to providing quality education in institutions of higher learning in Kenya thus compromising the quality of graduates (Wanzala, 2013; Nyangau, 2014).

This study therefore conceived quality university education based on five aspects including; adequacy of qualified academic staff, learning and support facilities, relevance of academic programmes, efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and examination and student disciplinary systems for quality university education.

## **2.0 Review of Empirical Literature**

Plentiful studies have been carried out to assess the influence of transparency on performance in different sectors including education and therefore a considerable volume of literature exist in this area. It is noteworthy to point out, however, that much of that literature relating to the education sector have been largely in reference to basic education, thereby significantly limiting a comprehensive review in the area of higher education. Some of that literature is presented in the following paragraphs.

Hastings & Weinstein (2008) evaluated an intervention that disclosed test scores and admission rates for public schools through which low-income parents could choose on which schools to register their children in the United States of America. Results showed that parents were significantly more likely to select high-performing schools against low-performing ones, and that their children's test scores increased as a result. In Indonesia, Pradhan *et al.*, (2011) found that a linkage intervention that facilitated collaboration between school committees and village councils had significant and substantial effects on learning thereby increasing test scores by between 0.17 and 0.22 standard deviations whereas interventions that did not facilitate such collaboration on the other hand made no difference in learning outcomes.

A study by Park & Blenkinsopp (2011) in South Korea in which entire public works construction processes were subjected to real-time citizen monitoring and direct interaction with works officers and private contractors through observation via web cameras installed in construction sites and internet revealed that transparency and trust played substantial roles as moderator and mediator respectively, in curtailing corruption and enhancing citizen satisfaction with public services. In the transparency system, citizens participated in the projects as supervisors and provided their opinions on the progress of the projects. Process and customer transparency were also found by Ryan, Buell, & Tsay (2014) to result in perceived greater employee effort and service value among customers in the United Kingdom and made employees feel that their work was more appreciated and impactful leading to higher satisfaction level and willingness to exert more effort in service provision. They also established that transparency, by visually revealing operating processes to consumers and beneficiaries to producers, generates a positive feedback loop through which value is created for both parties.

Andrabi *et al.*, (2017) evaluated the impact of transparency on school performance in Punjab, Pakistan in which school performance report cards were distributed in randomly selected villages from which parents were able to choose on the basis of performance, among competing public and private schools where they preferred registering their children. The study reported an improvement

in learning of 0.11 standard deviations in public and private schools and school fees in private schools decreased by 17% while primary enrollment increased by 4.5%.

In Ghana, Samayoa (2016) reported that although transparency actions and public disclosure of revenues from the country's extractive sector through an Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) had been adopted by many firms in the extraction industry, there was no real way of measuring how much of those revenues was actually distributed and allocated towards programmes that would benefit and impact positively on the economic and social wellbeing of the country's population. In Zimbabwean municipalities, Chigwende, Mukuze & Musasa (2014) reported a positive correlation between transparency and service with a Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.517. The study revealed that lack of transparency among other factors was perceived as contributing to the reasons why citizens were not knowledgeable of what was happening in their municipalities and why certain decisions were made by municipality officials, resulting in increased resistance in paying their taxes and bills.

Another study by Sabas & Mokaya (2016) in Tanzania on the influence of transparency on students' performance in public secondary schools reported a strong positive correlation of  $r(97) = 0.760$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) between participatory leadership in decision making and academic performance in the schools. Thus, participatory governance and transparency were found to significantly contribute to student's academic performance. In a study on strategies to improve service delivery in local authorities in Kenya, Makanyeza, Kwandayi & Ikobe (2013) found that lack of transparency and inadequate citizen participation were among the major causes of poor service delivery in Kajiado County Council in Kenya. Muriu (2014) however found that the impact of citizen participation on decentralized service delivery in Kenya under the Local Authorities Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) was minimal leading to negligible influence on service delivery. Nonetheless, the author concluded that despite the dismal performance of citizen participation, LASDAP had played a key role towards institutionalizing citizen participation that future structures would build on.

Another study on the effects of e-government strategy on service delivery in government ministries in Kenya by Mugambi (2013) revealed that even though the implementation of e-government as an information sharing and access strategy was not effective in all ministries, its use enabled database sharing, lowered government service delivery costs, reduced time taken to process transactions and improved staff productivity in ministries where implementation was successful. Additionally, Abdala, Kiragu, Waswa, Ono, Kariuki & Ikua (2015) reported that Huduma centres as public information sharing and access platforms in Kenya had increased citizen satisfaction with government services and that transparency in public service delivery had equally increased as a result of its implementation.

The above studies provide a good foundation for understanding the influence of transparency on learning quality notwithstanding being predominantly in reference to basic education. A comparison of public and private schools in however missing and it is important to bring on board this perspective in the context of higher learning institutions for detailed understanding and laying a basis for further analyses into the concept of transparency in relation to higher education not only in Kenya but also beyond.

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to carry out a comparative analysis of the influence of transparency on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya.

### **4. Research Hypothesis**

The following null hypothesis was developed and tested in the course of this study to find answers to the problem under investigation;

*Ho: Transparency has no significant influence on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya.*

### **5. Methodology**

The study adopted a pragmatic paradigm with a focus on four purposively selected universities, two public; The university of Nairobi and Rongo University and another two private; University of Eastern Africa, Baraton and KCA University. It adopted an explanatory survey research design with a sample of 380 respondents drawn from a target population of 2564 formed of senior management academic staff, academic staff with no administrative or management responsibilities, universities management board members and student leaders. Stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were used in determining the sample size of the study. Structured questionnaires with a reliability index of 0.823 and interview schedule were used to collect data which was then subjected to analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) for quantitative data to generate correlation statistics and coding to generate themes for qualitative data. Questionnaires were used to collect data from academic staff and student leaders while the interview schedule was used to collect data from universities management board members as key informants. Results were presented in tables and explanatory notes in prose. Study hypothesis was tested using Generalized Linear Models (GLM) method of multiple regression.

Transparency was measured based on the respondents' opinion, experiences and level of agreement or disagreement about four aspects which included information disclosure, stakeholder participation, communication and access to information and other official materials while quality university education was measured based on adequacy of qualified academic staff, learning and support facilities, relevance of academic programmes, efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and examination and student disciplinary systems in a six-point likert scale running from 1=strongly disagreed, 2=disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=slightly agree, 5=agree and 6=strongly agree.

### **6. Results and Discussions**

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of transparency on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya. The study sought to comparatively analyze the influence of transparency on quality of education in public and private universities in Kenya. To achieve this, the respondents' knowledge, experience, opinion, perception and level of agreement or disagreement on whether their universities practiced various aspects of transparency were explored.

#### **6.1 Correlation Results**

The study sought to establish whether a relationship existed between transparency and quality university education as independent and dependent variables under study respectively. Results are presented in tables 6.1 and 6.2 for private and public universities respectively.

**Table 6.1: Correlation Matrix of Variables for Private Universities**

	[1]	[2]
[1] Transparency	1	
[2] Quality university education	.457**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
 \* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data (2018)

**Table 6.2: Correlation Matrix of Variables for Public Universities**

	[1]	[2]
[1] Transparency	1	
[2] Quality university education	.789**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data (2018)

Correlation results in tables 6.1 and 6.2 indicate that in both private and public universities, transparency is positively and significantly correlated to quality university education. The findings corroborate observations by Monyoncho (2015) that lack of accountability and transparency in Kenyan universities created fertile grounds for corrupt and unethical tendencies and inefficiencies in the appointment and selection of university leaders and delivery of academic programmes, thereby compromising the quality of higher education.

Poor disclosure of information and student engagement were also cited by Marwa (2014) as largely contributing to student unrest in universities in Kenya. Such unrest frequently disrupted academic calendars of universities and in some cases led to wanton destruction of physical facilities and even loss of lives (Okeyo, 2017). Majority of university students do not have knowledge of the contents of major university policy guidelines and in general students are excluded from major decision making areas of the universities. This affects their effective and fruitful participation in the governance of the universities (Marwa, 2014). According to Ibijola (2010), the rationale for students' participation in governance of institutions of higher learning is desirable since it leads to enhanced students' commitment and performance in their academic work and reduced cases of students' unrest as has been observed in Nigeria where the committee system of management has been embraced. Student participation in decision making therefore need to be improved especially in quality assurance and time table setting (Asesa-Aluoch, Wanzare & Sika, 2016).

Waswa, & Swaleh, (2012) observed that marginalization of academic faculty in universities in key decision making processes that directly affected them caused a lacked of sense of belonging in the institutions and as such worked for survival's sake and not out of passion and personal commitment thereby undermining quality service delivery. In order to achieve quality in higher education, partnership and participation should be the hallmarks of governance and not autocratic leaderships that have been prevalent in most of the Kenyan public universities for decades (Sifuna, 2012). According to Munene (2016), there has been lack of transparency in the budgeting process in Kenyan universities since independence in 1963 where budgets have remained a fairly closed book for staff and students, only open to managers and the national treasury. In this closed culture, universities have

never developed internal policies that allow for financial transparency and accountability, leading to financial misappropriation, disruption of academic calendars and deep tensions within the institutions that have significantly compromised the quality of higher learning in Kenya.

## 6.2 Test of hypothesis

The study tested the hypothesis which stated that *transparency has no significant influence on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya*. To achieve this, data on transparency was regressed against data on the dependent variable; quality university education using the analysis model stated as;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon \dots \dots \dots [1]$$

Where;

Y - is the Dependent Variable - Quality University Education

X<sub>1</sub> – Transparency

β<sub>0</sub> – The intercept term (y intercept or value of Y when X<sub>i</sub>'s are zero)

β<sub>i</sub>' : - is regression coefficient

ε – is random error term

Results are presented in tables 6.3 and 6.4 for private and public universities respectively.

**Table 6.3: Regression Mode 1 for Private Universities**

Dependent Variable: Quality University Education				
Method: Generalized Linear Model				
Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Transparency	-0.138	0.157	-0.875	0.387
Constant	0.138	0.701	0.197	0.845

Source: Field Data (2018)

**Table 6.4: Regression Mode 1 for Public Universities**

Dependent Variable: Quality University Education				
Method: Generalized Linear Model				
Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Transparency	0.323	0.136	2.377	0.019
Constant	-0.284	0.348	-0.815	0.417

Source: Field Data (2018)

From the results in table 6.3 and 6.4, transparency had β = -0.138, p-value = 0.387 > 0.05 and β = 0.323, p-value = 0.019 < 0.05 for private and public universities respectively. The null hypothesis that

transparency has no significant influence on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya was therefore accepted for private universities and rejected for public universities. Transparency therefore has no significant influence on the quality of education in private universities but has a significant influence on quality of education in public universities. The level of significance is however greater in public than private universities. This implies that transparency constitutes an important principle of corporate governance in achieving quality higher education in public but not in private universities in Kenya.

Results are mixed, with that of private universities revealing inconsistency with available literature in the area of study, while that of public universities remain largely consistent with the findings of related previous studies. Monyoncho (2015) for example observed that lack of transparency in Kenyan universities had created fertile grounds for corrupt and unethical tendencies and inefficiencies in the appointment and selection of university leaders and delivery of academic programmes which in turn negatively impacted on quality of service delivery in general. An intervention that disclosed test scores and admission rates for public schools through which low-income parents could choose on which schools to register their children in the United States of America was found by Hastings & Weinstein (2008) to cause parents to be significantly more likely to select high-performing schools against low-performing ones, which in turn increased their children's test scores.

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Process and customer transparency were also found by Ryan, Buell & Tsay (2014) to result in perceived greater employee effort and service value among customers in the United Kingdom and made employees feel that their work was more appreciated and impactful leading to higher satisfaction level and willingness to exert more effort in service provision. They also established that transparency, by visually revealing operating processes to consumers and beneficiaries to producers, generates a positive feedback loop through which value is created for both parties. Makanyeza, Kwandayi & Ikobe (2013) found in their study that lack of transparency and inadequate citizen participation were among the major causes of poor service delivery in Kajiado County Council in Kenya. Muriu (2014) however found that the impact of citizen participation on decentralized service delivery in Kenya under the Local Authorities Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) was minimal leading to negligible influence on service delivery. Nonetheless, the author concluded that despite the dismal performance of citizen participation, LASDAP had played a key role towards institutionalizing citizen participation that future structures would build on.

Another study by Mugambi (2013) on the effects of e-government strategy on service delivery in government ministries in Kenya revealed that even though the implementation of e-government as an information sharing and access strategy was not effective in all ministries, its use enabled database sharing, lowered government service delivery costs, reduced time taken to process transactions and improved staff productivity in ministries where implementation was successful. Additionally, Abdala, Kiragu, Waswa, Ono, Kariuki & Ikua (2015) reported that Huduma centres as public information sharing and access platforms in Kenya had increased citizen satisfaction with government services and that transparency in public service delivery had equally increased as a result of its implementation.

## 7.0 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that in both public and private universities in Kenya, there exist various systems of transparency that are aimed at safeguarding quality of learning, although public universities still perform better in implementation of transparency initiatives. Further, the study concludes that transparency has a significant influence on quality of university education in public universities and therefore is an indispensable aspect of corporate governance for realization of quality education in public universities but it is not in private universities in Kenya.

## 8.0 Recommendations

Drawing from the results of this study, the following recommendations are made for policy and enhanced accountability for quality education in institutions of higher learning in Kenya:

First, private universities should endeavor to benchmark with public universities in order to borrow best practices that can improve their corporate governance systems. Secondly, The Commission for University Education (CUE) should conduct regular audits on compliance with the Universities Act, 2012 by all accredited universities in Kenya in order to enhance the practice of transparency in their operations particularly in the case of public universities. Lastly, the study recommends that public university managers in Kenya should endeavor to invest in transparent systems that support their efforts towards providing quality higher education.

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