

## **Psychosocial challenges facing university student leaders at universities in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to establish the psychosocial challenges facing university student leaders at universities in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design with a sample size of seventy six (76) student leaders from various public and private universities in Kenya. Questionnaires were used in collection of data. Findings revealed that the major psychosocial challenges facing student leaders were: conflict involving the need for academic pursuit and the pursuit for leadership; lack of teamwork and support from students, inadequacy in students understanding of university policies and statutes and lack of support from university management. Through correlation analysis, psychosocial challenges had a significant prediction of student leadership. Further, the regression weight for psychosocial challenges was significant. The study concluded that psychosocial challenges had a significant influence on student leadership. The study recommended that the management of Kenyan universities should proactively identify and solve the psychosocial challenges facing university students. This is crucial for enhancement of a mutually harmonious atmosphere in universities in Kenya

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*Key words: Psychosocial challenges, Student leadership*

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## Introduction

For a long time in the lifetime of universities, the formal powers of decision making has been vested on the university board of trustees. On the other hand, students through the students' leaders had restricted control over the management of university affairs (Sart, 2014). As such, the welfare of university students was at the mercy and beckoning of university management. The only exception was students in Latin America who had noteworthy positions that gave them powers to participate in decision making (Luescher & Mamachela, 2013). The situation of change in student leadership was occasioned by the 1960-1970s global wave of student democratization that ushered representation of student leaders in issues dealing with the welfare of the students. This had been preceded by waves of students' protests and insurrections in agitation for reforms in university governance and need for recognition of student representation in university management.

In practice, students' leadership reflects the practice that offer leadership positions for students representation in decision making on matters regarding the well-being of students. In the African context, participation of students in the affair of university governance started in the 1970s (Sart, 2014). This was precipitated by similar changes and reforms in universities in other parts of the world and specifically in the industrialized countries of North America, Asia and Europe (Sifuna, 2012). The African chapter of student leadership was characterized by prolonged periods of students' protests against policies such as the ending of free higher education resulting from structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank. This was closely followed by periods of cost-sharing, tuition fees and privatization of various services in the universities such as accommodation, catering and support services. Increase in population and increased demands for increased enrolment in higher education also led to reduction in funding of higher education (Oanda, 2016).

In Kenya, the management of student affairs at the public universities is increasingly becoming complex. This is due to the emergence of critical issues such as globalization and democratization of higher education and which are exerting a lot of pressure on the management of student affairs (Sart, 2014). With the ever-increasing student population, universities have been absorbing extra pressure especially on infrastructures that were originally built for a small number of students. Congestion in critical infrastructures such as libraries, classrooms and laboratories is further exerting pressure on university management and especially so on student leaders who have to deal with intensive student pressure to seek for solutions to such challenges (Murage, Njoka & Gachathi, 2019).

Bosire, Chemnjor and Ngware (2008) stated that the responsibility of dealing with the challenges experienced in public universities are the student leaders and university managers who have to adjust their expectations according to the prevailing conditions. On the other hand, student leaders are expected to be considerate and influence students to contend with the situation as it may be. The state of affair makes student leaders to fear repercussions from students as well as intimidation from university management. The confusion results in poor services delivery and unfulfilled dreams about university education. Student leaders have to bear the pressure from both students and university management.

The accruing pressure and conflicts is a source of psychosocial crises especially on student leaders who have to balance their academic duties and the never-ending demands and expectations of students (Oanda, 2016). With minimal support and resources from the students and the university, student leaders have to bear the burden of performing the role of enhancing harmony between the student body and the university management (Murage, Njoka & Gachathi, 2019). Emergence of technological changes such as the social media means that students are usurping the mandate of the student leader by communicating through these platforms and diluting the authority of the student leaders.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As cited by Tonga (1997) in Oni and Adetoro (2015), globally, the governance of universities has not been smooth since their inception. As such, student leadership is a critical organ in the management of education institutions and especially in universities. In Kenya, the University Act 2012 and the amended Act of 2014 outlines the responsibilities of student leaders. The student leaders are expected to conscientiously serve their electorate and at the same time adhering to the mission and goals of the university (Murage, Njoka & Gachathi, 2019). On numerous occasions, and while performing their noble duties, student leaders are in psychosocial dilemma and confrontations with either the students or the university management. The psychosocial dilemmas are occasioned from a number of internal and external dimensions of the student leadership.

As stated by Sart (2014), student leaders are expected to balance their academic duties with the need to serve the students and the university management. They have the duty of ensuring existence of harmony between student representation and endangering their relationship with university management. They also have to check the relationship between the expectations of external players such as politicians who seek student support in electoral duties and harmony with university management. These challenges coupled with minimal financial and moral support from the students and university management lead to the need for precarious balancing act between the student leader and the various stakeholders' expectations.

Murage, Njoka and Gachathi (2019) further report that the continuous reforms in higher education coupled with social and technological changes have modified the roles of student leaders tremendously. The student leader is no longer performing social functions, but is also expected to engage in religious and political duties. This has resulted into psychosocial conflicts between the consciences of the student leader, other students and university management. Some of these conflicts sometimes ladders the student leaders into conflicts that leads to suspension, expulsion or even imprisonment.

Empirical gaps were found in the analysis of the various studies conducted on the psychosocial challenges facing students' leaders in Kenyan universities. Murage, Njoka and Gachathi (2019) study examined the involvement of student leaders in decision making processes on management of students' affairs in selected public universities in Kenya. The conceptual gap in this study was that it was relating involvement of students' leaders in decision making. Okeyo (2017) studied on principles of governance and leadership among student leaders in public universities in Kenya. This study related principles of governance and leadership amongst students' leaders while current study is focusing on psychosocial challenges amongst student leaders. Bosire, Chemnjor and Ngware (2008) conducted a study on student leadership in selected public universities in Kenya. The study was not focusing on psychosocial challenges. This being the situation, it was worthwhile to conduct this study to bridge the existing study gap.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of the study was to establish the psychosocial challenges facing university student leaders at universities in Kenya.

### **Research Hypothesis**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Psychosocial challenges have no statistical significance on student leaders at universities in Kenya.

## **2.0. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Theoretical Review**

#### **2.2.1. The Role Theory**

The proponent of the Role theory was Biddle in 1986. The Role theory posits that the human behaviour is guided by the expectation from the individuals and others within the realm of the individual. The expectations held by an individual correspond to the different roles played by an individual or expected from those within the leadership of the stated individual. For example, the roles of a student leaders as expected from other students or the university management in Kenya are stipulated in University amended Act of 2014. Those roles are not expected to be accomplished by any other individual apart from the student leader.

Biddle (1986) further notes that individuals generally have and manage many roles. For instance, a student leader has to balance the academic duties and service to the students and university management. Roles consist of a set of rules or norms that function as plans or blueprints to guide behavior. Roles specify what goals should be pursued, what tasks must be accomplished, and what performances are required in a given scenario or situation. This is evidenced by the stipulation by the University amended Act of 2014 on the roles of a student leader. Role theory holds that a substantial proportion of observable, day-to-day social behavior is simply persons carrying out their roles, much as a student leader engages with the students and university management. Role theory is, in fact, predictive. It predicts what the activities the student leader has to engage in to be seen to be performing their stipulated duties.

It implies that if one party has information about the role expectations for a specified position (e.g., a student leader), a significant portion of the behavior of the persons occupying that position can be predicted. What's more, role theory also argues that in order to change behavior it is necessary to change roles; roles correspond to behaviors and vice versa. This implies that the student leader has occasionally to shelf their academic duties in order to effectively serve the students and university management. In addition to heavily influencing behavior, roles influence beliefs and attitudes; individuals will change their beliefs and attitudes to correspond with their roles. For instance, students have the belief that the student leader will serve them accordingly.

Many role theorists see Role theory as one of the most compelling theories bridging individual behavior and social structure. However, critics of the Role theory argue that it fails to convincingly inform on the internal challenges that the role player has to endure in order to perform and accomplish the role allocated. This spells out to the fact that the role player has to face challenges such as psychosocial ones in the endeavour to dutifully perform the allocated roles. The theory is therefore relevant in this study as it anchors the psychosocial challenges facing university student leaders at universities in Kenya.

#### **2.2. Empirical Review**

Murage, Njoka and Gachathi (2019) study examined the involvement of student leaders in decision making processes on management of students' affairs in selected public universities in Kenya. Descriptive research design was employed with the sample size of 76 student leaders selected through stratified sampling technique. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires. The findings established a strong and statistically significant relationship between the challenges faced by student leaders and effective decision making process. The findings revealed that majority of the student leaders experienced challenges while performing their duties. The challenges encountered included conflicts involving academic pursuits and leadership roles, lack of team work amongst student leaders and ignorance of university policies and statutes by students. The conclusion was that challenges experienced by student leaders may create an impediment in

effective decision making at the universities. The conceptual gap in this study is that it was relating involvement of students' leaders in decision making whereas the current study focused on psychosocial challenges facing student leaders.

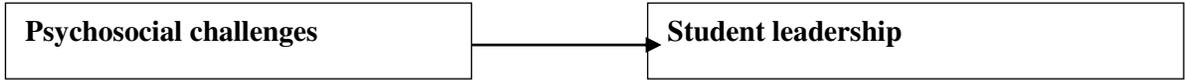
Okeyo (2017) studied on principles of governance and leadership among student leaders in public universities in Kenya. The philosophical orientation of the study was based on positivist research philosophy with adoption of cross-sectional research design. The targeted population was the 35 public universities in Kenya. Structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data from a sample size of 70 student leaders and their deputies. Descriptive and regression analysis were used in data analysis. Findings revealed that student leaders showed both performance and accountability involving student leadership and governance principles of legitimacy and voice. There was no significant relationship between student leadership and governance principles of legitimacy and voice; direction and fairness. The conclusion of the study was that responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and information flow were the guiding principles when student leaders are articulating other students issues. Methodological and conceptual gaps are established in this study. First, cross-sectional research design was employed with current study adopting descriptive design. Secondly, this study related principles of governance and leadership amongst students' leaders while current study is focusing on psychosocial challenges amongst student leaders.

Oni, and Adetoro (2015) examined the effectiveness of students involvement in decision making and university leadership in twelve (12) universities in South-West Nigeria. Specifically, the study aimed at analyzing students' involvement in decision making and its impact on leadership effectiveness in universities in Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used among 124 students and staff of 12 public and private universities. Findings revealed that that a positive significant relationship existed between students' involvement in decision making and leadership effectiveness. Findings established that significant differences existed between decision making with students involvement and decision making without students' involvement. However, there was no significant difference in effectiveness of leadership involving decision making in public and private universities. Finally, a significant relationship was established between management of student relationship and teaching effectiveness in both the public and private universities. Whereas this student was on student leadership, a contextual and conceptual gap exist since, first it is based in Nigeria and secondly, it has not focused on psychosocial challenges facing student leaders.

Bosire, Chemnjor and Ngware (2008) conducted a study on student leadership in selected public universities in Kenya. Specifically, the study was premised on the challenges student leaders encounter and the transformative role they play in the management of students' affairs and overall university management. Exploratory research design was used with self-administered questionnaires used for data collection. The sample size comprised of 34 student leaders. Findings established that most student leaders were first-borns in their families with parents in low to middle level occupational category in the public sector. The findings revealed that majority of the student leaders resided or originated in major urban centres such as Nairobi, Kisumu, Eldoret, Nakuru and Nyeri. Factors such as past leadership experience in secondary school prompted students to join university leadership positions. Finally, the findings revealed that challenges faced by student leaders included; institutional rigidity, high students expectations and skepticism and low participation in leadership positions by female students. Though the study was on student leaders-based challenges at universities, a methodological and conceptual gap is established. First, the study has employed exploratory design while current study used descriptive research design. Secondly, the study has not focused on psychosocial challenges.

### 2.3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on the relationship between psychosocial challenges and student leadership in universities in Kenya. Therefore, the relationship between psychosocial challenges and student leadership is indicated.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

### 3.0. Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative approach was utilized aiming at quantifying the hypothesized association between variables. The descriptive design focused on gathering information about the psychosocial challenges facing student leaders in universities in Kenya. This design was used because the target population consisted of student leaders and their deputies in public and private universities in Kenya. The target population comprised of student leaders from public and private universities in Kenya. In total twenty (28) public and ten (10) public and private universities were targeted respectively. From each university, one male and one female student leaders were randomly selected. The final sample size of 76 student leaders was selected for this study.

The first step in sampling involved the use of stratified random sampling, followed by proportionate stratified sampling to select two strata of public and private universities and student leaders (one male and one female student leaders). Further, to constitute the sample size, the researcher used simple random sampling technique. The overall sample size comprised of 76 respondents. The study used a questionnaire administered to each member of the sample population. Pilot study was carried out among participants who were later excluded in the main study. Data analysis used descriptive and inferential statistical methods using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and results presented through percentages, means, standard deviations and frequencies.

Regression model used was as follows;

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon_0 \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Y = Student leadership

$\alpha$  = Constant

$\beta_{ij}$  = regression coefficients

$X_1$  = Psychosocial challenges

## 4.0. Results and Discussion

### 4.1.1. Bi-variate Linear Relationship between Study Variables

Before running regression analysis, the researcher tested correlational matrix to establish whether association existed between psychosocial challenges and student leadership as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Linear relationships of variables**

		Psychosocial challenges	Student leadership
Psychosocial challenges	Pearson Correlation	1	.533**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Student leadership	Pearson Correlation	-.498**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	76	76

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

The study results revealed that psychosocial challenges were negatively and significantly associated with student leadership. ( $r = 0.533$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The correlations were significant at the level of significance of 0.05. The results implied that decreasing psychosocial challenges would lead to increase in student leadership.

## 4.2. Diagnostic Tests

### 4.2.1. Multicollinearity

This study carried out a test for multicollinearity by computing the variance inflation factors (VIF) and its reciprocal, tolerance. Multicollinearity was performed on the data by examining VIF (variance inflation factor) and assessing the tolerance (1/VIF). Independent variables are considered collinear if the value of VIF exceeds 3. Table 2 presents VIF values that was 1.781 implying that multicollinearity was not a problem in the data.

**Table 2: Multicollinearity**

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		
	Psychosocial challenges	.582	1.718

a. Dependent Variable: Student leadership

### 4.3. Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was carried out before analysis of the results to describe variability among the observed and check for any correlation with the aim of reducing data that was found redundant.

#### 4.3.1. Factor Analysis on Psychosocial Challenges

Exploratory factor analysis was used to refine the constructs. The results showed that Kaiser Meyer-Olin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) KMO Measures of Sampling Adequacy of manifest variables was 0.920 which was above the threshold of 0.6 and p-values for Bartlett's test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2=2654.753$ ,  $p=0.00$ ) was significant (below 0.05). This implies that data was adequate to run factor analysis and correlation patterns were close thus factor analysis would yield reliable and stable results. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Factor analysis**

Statistic		Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.920
	Approx. Chi-Square	2654.753
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	325
	Sig.	.000

#### 4.3.2. Homoscedastic Test

The study used Breusch-Pagan and Koenker test to estimate heteroscedasticity. The results present significant values more than 0.05 indicating that heteroscedasticity was not a problem as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Test of Homogeneity of Variances**

	LM	Sig
BP	.738	.390
Koenker	.774	.379

Null hypothesis: heteroscedasticity not present (homoscedasticity)

If sig-value less than 0.05, reject the null hypothesis

#### 4.3.3. Normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Skewness and kurtosis are used to measure normality test as presented in Table 6. Normality of the variable is assumed if its skewness and kurtosis have values between the range of -1.0 and + 1.0. All the items in the study measured values of skewness and kurtosis between 1 and -1. Thus, normality was realized.

**Table 6: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality**

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Psychosocial challenges	76	.734	.198	.622	.394
Student leadership	76	.455	.198	-.128	.394

#### 4.4. Influence of Psychosocial challenges on Student leadership

The study conducted univariate regression analysis to test the relationship between psychosocial challenges and student leadership when other factors are held constant.

##### 4.4.1. $H_{a1}$ : Psychosocial challenges has no statistical significance on student leadership

###### a) Psychosocial Challenges on Student Leadership

The findings of the model summary indicated that,  $R^2$  realized 0.753 indicating existence of strong association of psychosocial challenges and student leadership. The findings demonstrated that psychosocial challenges share a variation of 75% of student leadership. These results are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8: Model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.866 <sup>a</sup>	.753	.743	.41325

a. Predictors: (Constant), Psychosocial challenges

###### b) Psychosocial Challenges on Student Leadership ANOVA

The findings of ANOVA showed F-value=108.568 and p-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  which indicated that the model used to link psychosocial challenges and student leadership had a goodness of fit. Therefore psychosocial challenges significantly predicted student leadership. The results are shown in Table 9.

**Table 9: ANOVA of psychosocial Challenges**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	70.064	4	17.511	101.558	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	14.763	145	.171		
	Total	84.827	149			

a. Dependent Variable: Student leadership

b. Predictors: (Constant), Psychosocial challenges

###### c) Regression Coefficients of Psychosocial Challenges

The findings show the regression coefficient weight for psychosocial challenges was negative and significant ( $\beta = -0.273$ ,  $t = 4.118$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected at  $p < 0.05$  level of significance implying that psychosocial challenges has a significant influence on student leadership. The regression estimate for psychosocial challenges was 0.273; this indicates that a unit decrease in psychosocial challenges would result in 27% increase in student leadership. These results are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Regression coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.217	.029		7.531	.000
Psychosocial challenges	-.284	.069	-.273	4.118	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Student leadership

#### 4.5. Hypotheses Testing

The testing was done based on the findings of multiple regression analysis and was tested at the level of significance of 0.05.

**H<sub>A1</sub>: Psychosocial challenges have no statistical significance influence on the student leadership.**

The study sought to test the research hypothesis that psychosocial challenges have no significant influence on the student leadership. The regression analysis showed that psychosocial challenges had a beta coefficient of -0.273 with a corresponding p-value of 0.000; meaning psychosocial challenges had a negative and significant determination on student leadership. Based on these finding the study rejected H<sub>A1</sub>: psychosocial challenges have no statistical significance influence on the student leadership. This finding agrees with Keet and Nel (2016) who revealed that student leadership has a bearing on the strengths and variations of the psychosocial challenges facing the student leaders.

#### 5.0 Conclusions

The study aimed at identifying the influence of psychosocial challenges on the student leadership. Through correlation analysis, psychosocial challenges had a significant prediction of student leadership. Further, the regression weight for psychosocial challenges was significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected at  $p < 0.05$  level of significance. The study concluded that psychosocial challenges have a significant influence on student leadership at universities in Kenya.

#### 6.0 Recommendations

The study established that psychosocial challenges had significant association with student leadership in universities in Kenya. This is an indicator that systematic reduction of the psychosocial challenges is an impetus to improve the performance role of student leaders to indulge in the leadership duties for the betterment of the university. Therefore, the study recommended that the management of the Kenyan universities should proactively identify and solve the psychosocial challenges facing university students. This is crucial for enhancement of a mutually harmonious atmosphere in universities in Kenya.

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