Influence of Shared Leadership on Student Leaders' Effectiveness in Public Universities in Kenya

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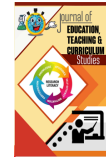
Abstract

Leadership style is one of the determinants of effective leadership. However, the majority of student leaders lean on traditional leadership which is ineffective, and this has made most of them not to be re-elected for another term. The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of shared leadership on student leaders' effectiveness in public universities in Kenya. The objectives of the study were to evaluate the leadership styles used by student leaders; determine the level of student leaders' awareness of shared leadership and examine the extent of student leaders' application of shared leadership style. A descriptive research design was adopted. The target population consisted of public universities in Kenya. Simple random sampling was used to select a sample of 10 public universities using 30% of the total population. A sample of 70 student governing councils who were the respondents from 10 public universities was used. Data was collected using a questionnaire and descriptive statistics was used to analyse data. Data was presented using percentages and frequency tables. The result revealed that 67.1% of student leaders were not aware of shared leadership while 32.9% were aware. On the extent of application of shared leadership, 78.5% did not apply shared leadership while 21.5% applied. The study concluded that shared leadership was not commonly used by student leaders in public universities. The study recommended training for student leaders on shared leadership to enhance its application when they were discharging their duties.

Introduction

Shared leadership could be tracked back numerous centuries. According to Sally (2002), shared leadership existed in ancient Republican Rome. Primeval Rome had an effective structure of shared leadership that continued for more than four centuries. The effective nature of shared leadership made it practised at all Roman magistracy levels from the bottom to the top (Sally, 2002). Through the Senate, a group of individuals shared power. Despite the early application of shared leadership, numerous types of research have principally centred on traditional leadership and its hierarchical form. Acar (2010) posits that in hierarchical leadership, a particular leader influences, inspires, lures, commands, controls and shapes the attitude and behaviour of followers.

The traditional leadership model has limitations since authority is regularly centralised, and information dispersal is hardly encouraged. Moreover, decision-making is a preference accorded
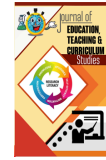
only to the one at the top, and feedback loops are challenging to maintain (Chiu, Owens & Tesluk, 2016). Debatably, the utmost challenge with old-style leadership is that it is inappropriate for endless improvement (Graen, 2013). This is mainly due to the top-down model's restrictions on the team's activities. For instance, adherents must consult a leader who must go to an executive to authorise even minor amendments. This often impedes regular associates of the team's desire to suggest changes, which keeps them stuck doing the same thing repeatedly. Thus, creativity and innovativeness are hindered, and tasks become routine and boring. However, standardised work which follows procedures and is repetitive benefits more from hierarchical leadership. Avolio et al. (2009) argue that shared leadership deviates from the idea that leadership might also be studied as a group phenomenon and an activity involving numerous personalities beyond the officially designated leader.

Shared leadership occurs after two individuals are engrossed in the team's leadership, working to stimulate and control members to maximise the team's effectiveness (Bergman et al., 2012). Avolio et al. (2009) affirm that Conger and Pearce (2003) have given the utmost widely quoted description of shared leadership as an energetic, collaborative, effective progression among group individuals whose goal is to guide one another toward achieving group or organisational objectives. Conger and Pearce (2003) also affirm that the influence process habitually includes companion or parallel impact and, at different times, includes vertically or descending various levelled influences.

Shared leadership is where team members alternate leading one another by dividing up leadership responsibilities. According to Bolden (2011), it has been compared to horizontal, distributed, and collective leadership. Moreover, it is frequently contrasted with more conventional vertical or hierarchical leadership, which primarily resides with an individual rather than a group. Wang et al. (2014) posit that common initiative portrays a bunch of helpfully situated perceptions, perspectives and activities through which colleagues convert part contributions to group yields, recognising it from group authority, group cycles and collaboration.

It is of essence to differentiate between shared and team leadership. Rather than the possibility that a group is driven by a solitary individual, shared initiative alludes to how colleagues impact each other and share liability regarding undertakings. According to Carson, Tesluk and Marrone (2007) shared leadership occurs when a group of individuals lead one another to achieve success. Shared leadership involves a leader delegating decision-making authority to members of the team. Instead of emphasising individual dominance, this leadership style emphasises cooperation and collective decision-making (Hoch, 2013). In this leadership model, leaders share direction, authority and obligations. According to Wu, Cormican and Chen (2020), this structure makes leadership communication more effortless and less stressful. It energises aggregate critical thinking, further develops spirit and establishes a climate where everybody feels engaged to contribute their most innovative thoughts.

The feat of any organisation rests on several key factors, and leadership is one of them. A leader can pilot an organisation to progress, decline or stagnation depending on the leadership style he/she uses. One aspect of practical headship is correctly applying a shared leadership style (Singh, Del Giudice, Tarba & De Bernardi, 2019). Nonetheless, the more significant part of leaders rests on conventional administration, which is ineffectual and has made leaders keep being voted out or changed occasionally. In the traditional leadership style, there is a tendency for leaders to become dictatorial; hence, they are thrown out after a short period. The outcry for changes of leaders after one year may be associated with ineffective headship.

A leader's effectiveness may depend on several factors like vision, goals, leadership skills and so on (Elizabeth et al., 2023). An effective leader maximises an organisation's potential, implements powerful strategies, and issues directives that can be carried out and result in action. However, the opposite is true: ineffective leaders can collapse or deteriorate an organisation. This may lead to loss of credibility, loss of capital and general demotivation of followers (Ernie et al., 2023). Dynamic leadership is needed today, where a leader is expected to establish and uphold a system of collaborative leadership, demonstrate competence, and collaborate effectively with others. Leaders are likewise likely to articulate their vision of the association's requirements through an internal compass. A leader should convey optimistic, promising, and positive aspects of the organisation's future. When the above-anticipated primacies are not fulfilled, the leader becomes unpopular to the followers.

Shared leadership is grounded on the fundamental notion that a leader's chief responsibility is to direct a team in accomplishing a mutual goal rather than being a boss and giving commands from the top. Hierarchy is more informal in shared leadership. The leader is expected to be part of a team, not a superior whose consent is required for even minor tasks. A leader driven by shared leadership principles discharges information and aims to provide transparency to the team for enhanced collaboration (Scott-Young, Georgy & Grisinger, 2019). Delegating responsibility throughout the organisation is the mainstay of shared leadership principles. Delegating leadership provides several persons with the capacity to implement decisions, to an extent, without the approval of a superior. Because of this, a skilled and stirred team can discharge a significant amount of work in a shorter time when they are flexible and are not restricted by too much red tape bureaucracy.

The success of shared leadership in higher learning institutions depends on the leading players involved in student leadership and how they understand their missions. Sharing leadership also affects how student leaders interrelate, whether they possess relationships that strengthen one another or make them feel disconnected from the organisation (Elizabeth et al., 2023). Students' achievement is positively correlated with shared leadership, enabling student leaders to share leadership knowledge and skills (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Student leaders are motivated, and this eventually enhances their capacity and performance. Over time, the development of school-shared leadership indirectly affects students' academic achievements and mutually reinforces teachers' and students' academic capacity (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). Group leadership promotes student leaders' experiences and exposure to several leadership experiences (Camburn & Han, 2009).

According to Hulpia and Devos (2010), student leaders' commitments to the organisation are positively reinforced by leadership practices like sharing leadership roles, social interaction, teamwork, and inclusive decision-making. Thus, planned approaches to group leadership are positively associated with student leaders' effectiveness, trust, and organisational citizenship. Natural leaders emerge within teams when a shared leadership approach is used. As a result, it stands to reason that more capable leaders naturally emerge rather than are chosen.

Complex work that involves more than one party, such as research and development, benefits more from shared leadership (Robert & You, 2018). Student leadership is a complex assignment that involves diverse leaders undertaking different assignments. Therefore, shared leadership is appropriate because it enables collaboration, knowledge transfer and innovative thinking, enhancing team performance. A shared leadership model's synergy and expertise may be the most frequently mentioned advantage. However, the adage that two heads are better than one appears

suitable. Leaders can use their singular assets, and associations can profit from various thought directions (Miles & Watkins, 2007). O'Toole et al. (2002) noticed that at least two heads are superior to one when the difficulties establishments are confronting and mind-boggling to the point that they require a bunch of abilities too broad to be moved by any one person possibly. Waldersee and Eagleson (2002) argue that throughout eras of change or new ventures, shared leadership among two leaders, one task-oriented and the other behaviour-oriented, would result in more tremendous success than leadership by a single individual. A shared leadership system does not overly burden any single leader, reducing stress levels for key leaders (Pearce, 2007). This makes the model attractive and robust.
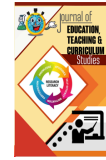
In any case, despite the many advantages of shared leadership, one should not ignore the innate limits of the model. First, resisting the model can make it very hard to implement it. O'Toole et al. (2002) state that resistance results from thousands of years of cultural conditioning. There is a nearly universal myth; the prevalent belief holds that leadership is always one-dimensional. However, Locke (2003) disagreed with this idea and insisted that the resistance is rooted in reality and logic's rules. From the top, core values must be cascaded. Steinert et al. (2006) concurred that the execution of shared leadership is a general battle, strikingly expressing that all authors underscore that the presentation of shared leadership requires broad preliminary work to overcome conventional expert boundaries.

One more shared authority issue to consider includes independent direction. Decision-making can take longer because it can be challenging for a group of leaders to agree (Miles & Watkins, 2007). According to Jackson (2000), individual career goals, team attitudes, and turf wars are potential roadblocks to effective decision-making. Locke (2003) posits that nothing can be accomplished without a clear and shared group goal. According to Miles and Watkins (2007), disagreements over organisational priorities negate the advantages of complementary leadership, making it difficult to make decisions and move forward.

The complex nature of Kenyan public universities today may challenge student leadership, especially when student leaders are not well-grounded in leadership competencies. The University Act 2016 revised the election process of student governing councils. A student is eligible for a one-year term in which he/she can be re-elected for another term. However, most of student leaders only reign for one term. This necessitated the research to study leadership styles, which are key determinants of leaders' effectiveness. The favoured traditional leadership set up in many institutions of higher learning expects a heroic leader to make most of the decisions. No single individual possesses all the leadership skills and aptitudes required to lead an organisation today effectively. This calls for incorporating shared leadership that can promote continuous performance improvement, hence the need for this study.

Methodology
The research adopted the descriptive survey design. The study was anchored on shared leadership theory (Wassenaar & Pearce, 2018). The target population was student leaders in public universities. Simple random sampling was used to get 30% of the total population, which consisted of a sample size of 10 universities and 70 student leaders. A quantitative approach was used to collect data to address the research problem (Creswell, 2003). The questionnaire was the main instrument of data collection. Data was collected from 70 student leaders regarding the awareness and application of shared leadership. Data was analysed descriptively and presented through narrations and percentages.

Results and Discussion

The study's objectives served as the foundation for the results and discussion.

Leadership Styles Used by Student Leaders

The results of the first objective were shown and discussed as follows;

Table 1: Styles of leadership

Styles	Yes	%	No	%
Autocratic	32	45.7	38	54.3
Democratic	36	51.4	34	48.6
Shared	17	24.3	53	75.7
Bureaucratic	45	64.3	25	35.7
Coaching	21	30	49	70
Laissez-faire	14	20	56	80

From the above results, the most commonly used leadership style was bureaucratic (64.3%), followed by democratic (51.4%), Autocratic (45.7%), Coaching 30%, shared 24.3%, and the last hardly used laissez-faire (20%). This indicates that Laissez-faire at 20% and shared leadership at 24.3% were barely used as the respondents favoured bureaucratic at 64.3% and democratic leadership at 51.4%, where the two were at the top.

Bureaucrats are like autocratic leaders who expect their team members to adhere to the written rules and procedures. The regulatory style centres around fixed obligations inside various levelled frameworks, where every representative has set rules, and there is little requirement for coordinated effort and innovativeness. The challenge with bureaucratic leadership is that it does not promote creativity. Additionally, this leadership style resists change and does not thrive in a dynamic setting. Ernie et al. (2023) support that dynamic leadership is needed today, where leaders are expected to establish and maintain a system of collaborative leadership, demonstrate competence, and collaborate effectively with others. Leaders are also expected to articulate their vision through a sense of direction regarding the organisation's requirements. Student leadership is a complex assignment that involves diverse leaders undertaking different assignments. Therefore, shared leadership is appropriate because it enables collaboration, knowledge transfer and innovative thinking, enhancing team performance.

Student Leaders' Awareness of Shared Leadership

The second objective was to determine student leaders' awareness of shared leadership. Five items Likert scale; strongly disagree SD, disagree D, undecided U, agree A and strongly disagree SA was used. The results were as follows:
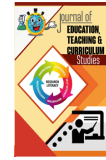
Table 2: Awareness of shared leadership

Awareness		SD	D	U	A	SA
I have been mentored on shared leadership	F	22	23	2	10	13
	%	*31.4*	*32.8*	*2.9*	*14.3*	*18.6*
I have acquired knowledge on shared leadership	F	32	15	1	9	13
	%	45.7	21.4	1.4	12.7	18.6
I have acquired skills on shared leadership	F	26	17	2	13	12
	%	37.1	24.3	2.9	18.6	17.1
I have shared leadership's values	F	20	25	2	12	11
	%	28.6	35.71	2.9	17.1	15.7
I embrace shared leadership's principles	F	23	27	3	8	10
	%	32.85	38.57	4.3	11.43	14.3
Average	**%**	**67.1**		**2.9**	**30**	

Results discovered that 67.1% of student leaders were not sensitised and, therefore, unaware of shared leadership, while 30% were aware and 2.9% were undecided. This indicated that shared leadership has not taken root in institutions of higher learning. Sally (2002) posits that despite the early application of shared leadership, the majority of institutions largely depend on traditional leadership, which is hierarchical.

Acar (2010) postulates that in hierarchical leadership, a particular leader influences, inspires, lures, commands, controls and shapes the attitude and behaviour of followers. The traditional leadership model has limitations since power is regularly too centralised, and information sharing is hardly encouraged. Debatably, the utmost challenge with traditional leadership is that it is exceptionally inappropriate for continuous improvement (Graen, 2013). Therefore, student leaders who rely on conventional leaders may have nothing new to offer, and this makes them not to be re-elected.
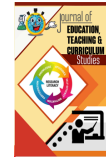
Application of Shared Leadership Style
The study's third objective was to examine the application of shared leadership by students' leaders in their headship endeavours, and the results were as follows.

Table 3: Application of shared leadership

Application		SD	D	U	A	SA
We use shared leadership in decision making	f	20	35	1	10	4
	%	*28.57*	*50*	*1.4*	*14.3*	*5.7*
We use share leadership in problem solving	f	28	27	1	13	1
	%	*40*	*38.57*	*1.4*	*18.57*	*1.4*
We use shared leadership in allocating resources	f	18	37	1	6	8
	%	*25.7*	*52.85*	*1.4*	*8.57*	*11.4*
We use shared leadership in setting goals, vision and mission	f	30	25	1	5	9
	%	*42.85*	*35.7*	*1.4*	*7.1*	*12.85*
We use shared leadership in change management	f	21	34	1	7	7
	%	*30*	*48.57*	*1.4*	*10*	*10*
Average		**78.5**		**1.4**	**20.1**	

On the degree of application of shared leadership, the study revealed that 78.5% did not apply shared leadership, while 20.1% applied and 1.4% were undecided. This indicates the minimal application of shared leadership despite its benefits. A leader driven by shared leadership principles discharges knowledge and aims to provide transparency to the team for enhanced collaboration (Scott-Young, Georgy & Grisinger, 2019). Delegating responsibility throughout the organisation is
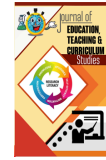
the mainstay. The backbone of the shared leadership culture. Leadership style is one of the determinants of effective leadership (Singh, Del Giudice, Tarba & De Bernardi, 2019). Nevertheless, many leaders lean on traditional leadership, which is ineffective, and this might have caused leaders to keep on being voted out or changed from time to time. In the traditional leadership style, there is a tendency for leaders to become dictatorial; hence, they are thrown out after a short period.

Conclusion

Shared leadership is a model where team members share decision-making in an authority. Student leaders may benefit from this strategy's numerous advantages, which include improved team cohesiveness and productivity. However, most student leaders are not sensitised or aware of shared leadership. Moreover, there is the trifling application of shared leadership by student leaders. The uproar for changes of leaders after one year may be associated with ineffective leadership. There is a need to embrace shared leadership and integrate it with traditional leadership.

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