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Students' attitudes toward campus environment: A comparative study of public and private universities in Kenya

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One of the serious problems facing education in Kenya's public universities has been a persistent student disturbance. Private universities on the other hand, seem to have established a reputation of having minimal incidence of student disturbances. As such private universities are known to have had a good record of student conduct. This may be attributed to the attitudes that students hold towards their Campus environment. Attitudes are acquired and influenced by the social, academic, psychological and physical aspects of an environment. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of Campus environments on students' attitude toward them. The study employed the Causal-comparative study design. Quantitative data was collected through a Students' Attitude Questionnaire that was administered to 352 randomly selected second and third year full-time students enrolled in three public and three private universities in Kenya. T-tests were used to test the significance and determine whether to reject or accept the study hypotheses. Results indicated significant differences in attitudes toward Campus environment between students enrolled in Public and those enrolled in Private universities. This helped to shed light on the understanding of the student behaviours witnessed in Kenya's universities. However, the effects of gender did not seem to exert any influence on students' attitudes toward campus environment. The study recommended that Managers of public universities need to critically investigate on the social, academic, psychological and physical aspects of their institutions that seem to negatively affect their students attitudes toward campus environment.

Key Words: Students' attitudes, Campus environment, private university, public university, student disturbances.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, developing countries have witnessed a rapid expansion of higher education (World Bank, 2000). Kenya for instance has been experiencing a growing demand for university education since the time she became independent in 1963, so that at present, there are several public and private universities. Currently, there are six public and fourteen registered private universities in Kenya (Commission for Higher

Education [CHE], 2002) . Out of the fourteen registered private universities, six of them have been awarded charters by the government of Kenya. Also, there are presently 24 institutions of higher learning that have formally applied to the Commission for Higher Education to operate as private universities that offer degree programmes in the country (CHE, 2002). Thus, for a country emerging from independence in 1963 without a single university, Kenya has made a significant leap in university education in this 21st century.

Perhaps, this mushrooming of private universities in Kenya may be attributed to the government's support in the expansion of higher education sector in an effort to

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remove some of the enrollment pressure from public universities in the country. Besides, it has also been an attempt to stem out the tide of Kenyan residents going abroad for degree programmes (Deloitte & Touche Management Consultancy Ltd, 1994; Teferra, 1999; Ndichu, 2003) . For instance, the Kamunge Education Report (1988) made some recommendations in favour of private higher education in the country. One of such recommendation indicated the need to both consider and encourage the development of private universities in Kenya so as to offer increased opportunities for university education and manpower training in the country (Government of Kenya [GOK], 1988; 1999). In addition to the government's encouragement, the rapid growth of private universities in the less industrialized nations of which Kenya is included, has emerged from the neo-liberal economic changes that is affecting many less developed countries of the world (Levy, 2002) . This change, that includes the present powerful global tendency to limit the financial role of the state, has led to the privatization and internationalization of a country's overall development policy that include higher education.

Unlike public universities, most of the private universities in Kenya are either affiliated to religious organizations or are under a strong foreign influence. As such, their existence is influenced greatly by strong religious and foreign principles (Nguru, 1990). In the area of academics, most of the private universities follow a narrow and in most cases a single curriculum based on theology whereas public university institutions have a highly diversified and broad-based academic curriculum (Clark & Guy, 1992; Eshiwani, 1993; Deloitte & Touche Management Consultancy Ltd, 1994). This may have been true a decade ago. However, it may not be so today because private universities have made great diversification and are currently offering broad-based market-driven curricular to meet the educational needs of many candidates who qualify for university admission and are inclined for non-theological education and career (Deloitte & Touche Management Consultancy Ltd, 1994). Considering this, the following distinguishing factors exist that characterize public and private universities in Kenya as reported by Clark and Guy (1992):

Public universities recruit the best academically qualified students and teaching staff available in the country whereas most of private ones base their recruitment on other criteria such as ability to pay fees and religious commitment.

Public universities as compared with private universities are bigger in terms of the available facilities, the number of enrolled students, the teaching staff and level of research activity taking place.

Private universities in contrast to public universities are considerably prone to foreign influence because these institutions have a higher percentage of lecturers who are non- Kenyan and/or depend highly on external funding.

It is evident from the above institutional characteristics that most of the private universities have a low student population as compared to those in public universities. Consequently, the lecturer-students' ratio in private universities is usually 1:20 for tutorial groups (Vice-Chancellors' Committee Report, 2000). This ratio therefore, enables lecturers in private universities to be close to students and to care for them thus, promoting lecturer-students relations and efficient counseling services. Considering this, private universities unlike public universities are in a better position to control their students' enrollment to a level they can cope with in terms of the essential facilities and educational equipment (Nguru, 1990). This may not be possible for public universities in the country to control their student enrollment because a Joint Admission Board (JAB) usually determine the population of students to be admitted to a particular university based on the number of qualified candidates.

Mutero (2001) has observed that many parents are opting to fork out the extra shilling it takes to enroll their secondary school leavers in local private universities or abroad. The reason for this could be that parents may not want to keep their children at home for long as they wait for the public university admission that usually takes almost two years. Moreover, other parents and candidates may have been demoralized by the frequent public universities' riots and closures that make it impossible for a student to graduate within the prescribed period.

The Vice- chancellors' Committee Report (2000) indicated that a serious problem of education in Kenya's public universities has been persistent students disturbances. The consequences of these disturbances have been frequent and long closures of universities, deaths of students and wanton destruction of university and private property. In contrast, private universities as the report indicated, have established a reputation of having very few incidences of student disturbances and are known to have had a good record of student conduct. The question asked is: Why the difference in behaviour between the students enrolled in public and private universities? Do they have different attitudes toward their campus environments? Williams (1986) observed that interactions between students and their campus environments in the universities of west affect students' physical behaviour, the cognitive filtering of what they are experiencing, their perceptions and attitudes towards the campus environment. But, is this true for Kenyan universities?

According to researchers, there is a general belief that human behaviour and actions are influenced by attitudes, whereby attitudes are seen as the "cause" and behaviour as the "effect" (Oskamp, 1991; Mushoriwa, 1998; Holland, et al., 2002). This implies then that an attitude toward an institutional campus environment that may be

covert can serve as the foundation of overt behaviour or action towards it. Therefore, this study was set to determine whether there is a difference in students' attitudes toward campus environments in public and private universities in Kenya, which is a developing nation. This may help to explain the students behaviour witnessed in universities in the country.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of Campus environments on students' attitudes toward them. Specifically, the study attempted to achieve the following objectives:

To determine whether there are any significant differences between the attitudes toward campus environment of students enrolled in public universities and those enrolled in private universities in Kenya.

To determine whether there is any significant gender difference in attitudes toward campus environment of students enrolled in public and those enrolled in private universities in Kenya.

Hypotheses of the study

In this study, the following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

HO1: There is no statistically significant difference between the attitudes toward campus environment of students enrolled in public and those enrolled in private universities in Kenya.

HO2: There is no statistically significant gender difference in students' attitudes toward campus environment in public and private universities in Kenya

METHOD

Research Design: This study employed the causal-comparative study design. This was as found appropriate because the investigation compared the characteristics of different independent groups. In the study, the attitudes toward campus environment of students enrolled in public and those enrolled in private universities were compared. In addition, comparison was also made based on the gender of the students. Also, the study was non-experimental in that no manipulation of the independent variables was done because their manifestations had already occurred (Cohen & Manion, 1974; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996; Kerlinger, 2000). In effect, observation of an already existing phenomenon was made.

Sample: Out of a total population of seventeen thousand, nine hundred and eleven (17,911) second and third year students enrolled in both the public and private universities in Kenya that met the conditions of the study. A sample size of three hundred and seventy seven (377) students was selected. The first, fourth or any other final year students were not included in the study because the former have only been in the university for a short duration of time for them to feel a substantial impact of campus environment on their attitudes. But the latter as Feldman and Newcomb (1973)

observed tend to be less involved and less identified with their institutions as they have their concentration on other matters related to life after the completion of their studies as they are in their final years of study. Consequently, second and third year students were found suitable for the study.

Instruments: A University Student Attitude Questionnaire (USAQ) was used to collect data. The researcher through an examination of the research objectives, hypotheses, personal experience, related literature and other attitudinal questionnaires developed the instrument. This was for the purposes of framing items that adequately addressed the crucial variables of the study in depth. The questionnaire had 40 Likert-type items with equal number of positive and negative items as suggested by researchers in attitude studies (Moxon, 2001). These items addressed various aspects of the campus environment in which students' attitudes toward them were sought. Before the questionnaire was used in the actual study, it was piloted in two of the universities (i.e., one public and one private) to determine its reliability. The USAQ was tested for reliability by using Cronbach's Coefficient alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above is usually considered respectable and desirable for consistency levels (Henerson, Morris & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987; Koul, 1993). In the present study, the reliability of the USAQ was 0.86. Thus, the instrument was considered reliable.

Theoretical Framework

The study was conducted within the behaviouristic approaches to attitude formation. Proponents of these approaches argue that attitude formation is guided by certain principles (Ostrom & Davis, 1994). Therefore, the principles governing the classical conditioning as advocated by Pavlov (1849- 1936) guided the study in describing and explaining student attitude formation owing to their interactions with the various aspects the campus environment in which students' attitudes toward them were investigated.

The classical conditioning theory argues that repeated and systematic association between the attitude object (Conditioned stimulus) and a positively or negatively valued event (Unconditioned stimulus) is assumed to produce a favourable or unfavourable affective reaction (attitude) toward the object and situations with which it is related (Oskamp, 1991).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of Students' Attitudes towards Campus environment in Public and Private Universities.

As explained earlier in this study, there is a general belief among researchers in social psychology that human behaviour and actions are influenced by attitudes, whereby attitudes are seen as the cause and behaviour as the effect. As indicated in the statement of this study's problem, there have been persistent student disturbances in the public universities. In contrast, private universities have established a reputation of having very few incidences of student disturbances, thus have been known to have a good record of student conduct. This difference in student behaviour between the public and the private universities led to the urge to investigate whether differences in attitudes exist between the students enrolled in public universities and those enrolled in private universities. Therefore, the first objective of the

Table 1. Independent Samples t-test for Equality of means of Students' Attitude toward Campus environment in public and private universities.

University	N	Mean	S.D	t – value	sig.
Public	180	103.078	17.257	8.774*	0.000
Private	172	120.744	20.448		

Table 2. Means, SDs and t-test Analysis of Students' Attitude toward Campus environment by Gender in Public universities

Gender	N	Mean	S.D	t – value	sig.
Male	97	101.835	18.410	1.045 ^{ns}	.298
Female	83	104.530	15.790		

Note. ns –Not significant at .05 level

Table 3. Means, SDs and t-test Analysis of Students' Attitude toward Campus environment by Gender in the Private universities

Gender	N	Mean	S.D	t – value	sig.
Male	75	120.653	21.005	.051 ^{ns}	.959
Female	97	120.814	20.117		

Note: ns –Not significant at .05 level.

study was to compare the students' attitudes toward campus environment in the two categories of universities, with the view of determining whether differences exist in student attitudes. To achieve the objective, a t -est analysis was done. Detailed results of the analysis are shown in Table 1.

The t-test results indicate that there is statistically significant difference, ($t = 8.774$, $P < 0.05$) between attitudes toward campus environment of students enrolled in public universities and those enrolled in private universities. Examination of the mean scores in the two types of universities revealed a mean score of 103. 078 for public universities, and 120.744 for private ones. In effect, the mean attitude score difference was 17.666 in favour of private universities.

Consequently, the hypothesis (H_0) suggesting no statistically significant differences between the attitudes toward campus environment of students enrolled in public and those enrolled in private universities was rejected. This is a clear implication that students in the private universities have significantly better positive attitudes toward their campus environment than those in public universities. This implication may explain the few incidences of student disturbances witnessed in private universities as compared to the persistent ones in public universities. This is because of the general belief that human behaviour and actions are influenced by attitudes (Oskamp, 1991; Mushoriwa, 1998; Holland, et al, 2002; Kiboss et al, 2002).

Moreover, this finding could also be responsible for the observation that many secondary school candidates in Kenya are spurning public universities in favour of private universities, despite the introduction of market-driven self-sponsored degree programmes in the public ones to attract students (Aduda, 2000). In fact, some private universities are so inundated in applications for enrollment that they are fully booked up a year in advance (Muteru, 2001). Further, as Siringi (2001) noted, private universities have grown fast due to change in attitudes of parents and students toward them.

Comparison of Students' Attitudes towards Campus environment by Gender in Public and Private Universities

In order to determine whether or not gender differences in attitudes toward campus environment existed, Male and Female students' attitude mean scores and deviations were computed. However, t-test analysis was done to test the significance of any existing differences. Tables 2 and 3 give a summary of the results obtained for public and private universities respectively.

An inspection of the results in Table 2, indicates that attitude mean scores difference exist between male and female students enrolled in the public universities. The attitude mean for males was 101.835 whereas that for females was 2.695 points higher than that of males at

104.530. This implies that female students have a more positive attitude toward campus environment than the male counterparts in the public institutions of higher learning. In determining the statistical significance of the two means, t-test analysis revealed insignificance, ($t = 1.045$, $P > 0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis (H_0) that no significant differences in students' attitudes toward campus environment based on gender was accepted for the public universities.

From the results depicted in Table 3, it is clearly evident that slight mean differences exist in mean attitude between male and female students enrolled in private universities, just as it was noted among a similar group of students in public universities. The mean attitude for males was 120.653 whereas that of females was 0.161 points higher at 120.814. However, these mean differences in attitude between male and female students in private universities were found to be statistically insignificant, ($t = .051$, $P > 0.05$).

From the findings shown in Tables 2 and 3, it is clear that gender does not significantly influence students' attitude toward campus environment in higher institutions of learning, both public and private. However, it should be noted that female students in these types of institutions seem to have higher positive attitudes toward campus environment as compared to their male counterparts. This may be attributed to the observation that in the African setting in which the study was situated, women are generally taught to be accommodative and not to openly express their negative feelings about something (GOK, 1976).

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that:

Significant differences in students' attitudes towards campus environment exist between students' enrolled in public and those enrolled in private universities in Kenya, with those enrolled in the latter showing stronger positive attitudes toward their campus environment. In effect, it may help in explaining the differences in the student behaviours observed in the two categories of universities. This is because research experts through a wide range of studies have concluded that human behaviour and actions are influenced by attitudes, where attitudes are seen as the cause and behaviour as the effect (Oskamp, 1991; Mushoriwa, 1998; Holland, Verplanken and Knippenberg, 2002; Kiboss, Musonye & Kitetu, 2002). This is a positive contribution of the findings, considering the frequent student disturbances in all Kenya's public universities and very few of such cases in private universities.

Students' gender does not significantly influence their attitudes toward campus environment. As such, being a male or a female does not significantly affect one's perceptions of various campus aspects that constituted campus environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that students enrolled in private universities seem to have better attitudes toward their campus environment than their counterparts in public universities. It is therefore recommended that managers of public universities need to critically investigate on aspects of the campus environment that seem to weigh down on students' satisfaction with it.

Since students' admissions to public universities in Kenya are done through the Joint Admissions" Board (JAB), there is a possibility that there are many students admitted to universities they did not choose. This is unlike the private universities, which students apply to study in them after considering what the universities offer in terms of academic and extra-curricula activities. It is recommended that JAB be disbanded. This will give public universities opportunities to improve on their campus environments in order to attract students to their campuses rather than depending on ready market in student recruitment.

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