

County Governance on Universities' Autonomy and Academic Freedom in Kenya

Florence Wanjala, Sarah Likoko & Risper Wepukhulu

Abstract

Governance in higher education is inextricably linked to university autonomy and academic freedom. From the earliest beginnings of the university in the middle ages, down to the present century, autonomy or self-government has been the key ingredient in the ideology of institutions of higher learning. This ideology envisages the freedom or autonomy of the institution to make its own decisions on a broad complex of issues without interference from external, non-university agencies and political forces. It should also be qualified that universities' autonomy and academic freedom very much depend on the prevailing political system, since democracy by its nature guarantees autonomy while authoritarian form of political organization denies the concepts of autonomy and academic freedom. A more recent trend that has affected universities and attitudes towards their autonomous aspirations are cases where some University management and politicians have co-existed in an uneasy and conflictual relationship. Basing on this, the study therefore sought to analyze the effect of devolved governance on universities' autonomy and academic freedom. The objectives of the study were; to analyse the effect of County governance on University management and determine the effects of political ideologies on student leadership in Kenyan Universities. The study adopted survey research design and correlational research design. Data was collected by use of questionnaire, interview schedule and focus group discussion. The study findings of the study were; erosion of academic freedom, curtailment of university autonomy and ultimately deterioration in the quality of education. The study recommended the following; to depoliticize decision making on universities and their management, forums like seminars and conferences need to be initiated with the objective of highlighting county governments' involvement in university education. Such forums would enable political leaders, civil servants and representatives of the university community to examine facts and issues that affect university governance. What seems quite critical is familiarization and confidence building measures that will assist in defusing suspicion and raise the level of interaction especially if there is prior recognition on both sides that there is need to tackle some issues.

Key Words: *County Governance, University Autonomy, Academic Freedom, University Management*