

Rethinking Student Leadership in Higher Education Through Civic Perspective Rather than Transactional Leadership

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Abstract: Student governance in Africa and elsewhere in the world provides space for construction of leadership in various countries in the continent. This notion provides basis to make an introspection of the kind of leaders that are produced through this space in the context of civic engagement or transactional leadership. The assessment is made out of the existing literature on civic engagements, transactional leadership ethos and related aspects. The literature review in rethinking student leadership is assessed against the observations of the author to contextualise and project the kind of leaders which the student leadership space produces. The paper provides the basis upon which to project the kind of governance Africa is likely to have against what Ibrahim Index of Africa Governance will likely from the assumptions and analysis of the author, based on the kind of student leadership that is developed for the world. This paper is qualitative in nature, where empirical evidence is presented through observations of the author to attest the existing literature's validity without any specific sample used, but applies experience that was observed through the author's career in student governance in order to ensure consistent ethical considerations. The paper intends to provide a model within which sound leadership in the space of student governance should contain and how has it translated to experience in the context of sustainable development post- student leadership period. The model constitutes a recommendation to follow in the student governance by higher education and student affairs systems in particular.

Keywords: Civic engagements, Democracy, Governance, Student leadership, Transactional leadership

1. Introduction

The architect of the modern Higher Education system in South Africa requires that there be Student Representative Council (SRC) that is elected periodically as per Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. This paper examines the kind of leadership that is observed in this field through an in-depth analysis of transactional leadership, and seeks an alternative option of leadership, which is centered on civic engagements. While there is an inspiration around "Great Man Theory", this inspires many young leaders to achieve the objectives of leadership through empirical evidence in student governance. However, and interestingly, the conceptual analysis of leadership is argued by McCleskey (2014), who says that in order to advance our knowledge of leadership, it is necessary to understand where the study of leadership has been. The fundamental aspect of the paper at this stage is to clarify the concepts and their impact to the advancement of institutional goals and objectives. While an understanding is always that "Great Man Theory" is the best, it is necessary to keep focus through taking a closer look at transactional leadership, which in the context of the paper argues that the SRC in Higher Education system may have towed the line of its narrative.

McCleskey (2014) further argues that transactional leadership evolved for the marketplace of fast, simple transactions among multiple leaders and followers, each moving from transaction to transaction in search of gratification. The author argues that McCleskey provides basis that transactional leadership give interpretation of whether SRC's are transactional in nature due to their short term of office and, as a result of time, quick gains remain the order of the day? The scholarly enquiry and the narrative of SRC's represent imperial aspect that the paper wishes to highlight later. In the quest to balance the argument, Ibrahim index on African Governance provides an important framework that measure the impact of leadership towards prosperity and improvement of human life. This questions the space of reducing the Mo Ibrahim Index into a framework model that suit the SRC in the Higher Education System. However, in the context of critics, It is clear, therefore, that Nelson Mandela's attribution of Zimbabwe's woes to a crisis of leadership (*Independent*, 2008 as cited in Tettey, 2012) can be justifiably extended to the rest of the continent. His assertion is corroborated by the inability of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation to find, in the last two years, a retired African political leader who is deserving of its prestigious African Leadership Prize. The essence

of SRC framework index would provide space for transformation of the space through innovative strategies. The paper confines the SRC into transactional leaders, where behavioural ethos are those of a sealing deals, consolidation and celebrate quick gains, however the paper argues that the model is not sustainable for a future society and therefore, inculcating civic ethos constitutes, what is termed rethinking of the role and value of SRC in the current and future space. Youniss, McLellan & Yates (1997) argue that civic engagement emanates from individuals whose developmental backgrounds make them more or less able and committed to partake in the renewal and continual reform of civil society. In the quest to support the individual developmental background to it, which Berkowitz, Althof & Jones (2008:399) argue that the concept (civic), has considerable overlap with concepts such as character, personality, traits, and virtue. The above expression pursued an argument of questioning the character of SRC as transactional leaders, in the context of renewal and transformation setting. The paper argues that these desk top literature, with observations made in SRC's to pursue civic perspective as a reform strategy for student governance in Higher Education.

2. Mo Ibrahim Framework Effect

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation took interest to develop a framework that conceptualises leadership and governance in Africa, which characterises what constitutes good governance and leadership in the context of Africa. These variables of the frameworks are intended to be presented and argued in the context of both transactional leadership and reformist ideology of civic perspective in SRC's. The Ibrahim index contextualises the deficiencies that are posing challenges of human development and from the contract, in an attempt to remedy these deficiencies, Rotberg and other political scientists at Harvard University have recently developed the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (Rotberg and Gisselquist, 2008b, as cited in Farrington, 2009). The Ibrahim Index evaluates governance on the basis of five Basic Categories (BCs) of these core political goods (Farrington, 2009) such as, safety and security, rule of Law, transparency and corruption, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity and human development.

From the basis of the Ibrahim Index, the paper assumes a line of argument that all these categories

are relevant to the operation of the SRC at most through is constitutional obligations in various institutional set-up. The secured environment for students in the context of the paper is paramount to the SRC. Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, and Forbes-Mewett (2010) argue that security is an elemental human need, which is noted that it is paramount that the need for security is satisfied because without security social life would be both meaningless and relatively dangerous. The SRC's in majority of universities have vowed to ensure the environment safe for teaching, learning and enhancement of an environment that enhance social needs of the students. This view is supported by observation that security in universities, particularly in Africa is always a concern of SRC's and is always part of the top agenda. However, the limitation of security challenges in universities is not a direct function of the SRC and they are limited to advocacy project to influence the functioning of security to safeguard students.

On the second category is the rule of law, transparency and corruption, which has plugged Higher Education as a microcosm of the society. Hallak and Poisson (2002, as cited in Hallak and Poisson, 2007) argue that corruption in the education sector can be defined as "the systematic use of public office for private benefit", whose impact is significant on the availability and quality of education goods and services, and, as a consequence on access, quality or equality in education. The paper argues that the SRC operates both at the political and administrative level, and these confine some emerging temptations due to human kind that political and administrative corruption always compete with transparency and accountability. It is scientifically arguable that Student Affairs or universities does not teach these tendencies, which are against their philosophies and practices. Hallak and Poisson (2007) further argue that corruption covers a wide range of activities, such as: favoritism; nepotism; clientelism; soliciting or extortion of bribes; and embezzlement of public goods. While the paper note that Ibrahim Index is emphatic on transparency, which Hallak and Poisson (2007) argue that it is the extent to which stakeholders (school principals, school council, parents, pupil and local community) can understand the basis on which educational resources (financial, material and human resources) are allocated to their individual establishment and how they are used. The essence of good governance posits compliance and accountability to uphold to

the rule of law, which continues to be an observed struggle in inculcating it to the SRC on regular basis.

The fundamental aspect is whether the SRC's are transparent. Firstly, to their constituencies, and secondly, account on how public resources are allocated. It is the observed that most SRC's are accountable to their deploying organisations, and not to students generally, and this is against the constitutional commitment to serve all the students. The narrative according to the author is that "transparency hit the snag". It is also arguable that once "transparency hit the snag, accountability collapses" and your leadership become a transactional to the deploying organisation and sense of "civic think, hit the snag". It is in this sense that Ibrahim Index become relevant to SRC's operations and requires strategic interventions to always at macro level guide all efforts to rethink SRC models and strategies. This question of corruption in SRC's revoke the issues of ethics as part of application of the rule of law on the basis that SRC's operate in a space of learning the principles of governance and leadership, and if aspects of ethics are not inculcated at that stage, this question a future civic society within which they are going to function. The question of ethics in politics has been inspired by many as Amoureux (2015) argues through a scholarly question that "what kind of ethics in the world politics is possible if there is no foundation for moral knowledge, or, at the very list, if this global reality is complex? The argument enriches the paper under the epistemological understanding that the SRC is a microcosm of political, moral and ethical foundation for grooming future leaders of a civil society, and therefore, the author argues that the essence of politics at the SRC level should be ethicalised as a foundation for global politics.

In the pursuit of the role of SRC into issues of student rights in campuses of the universities, Ibrahim Index emphasizes on the issues of participation to any space that promote human rights, and therefore, students as part of human beings, Higher Education System acknowledges that students must have rights which the SRC's stands to defend and protect those rights. The author argues that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa reaffirm through the Bill of Rights that a set of recognition that is underpinned by Ubuntu should be within the cornerstone that dictate the social order in the society. In an attempt to define it, Makgoro (1998) argues that the concept has generally been described as a

world-view of African societies and a determining factor in the formation of perceptions which influence social conduct. Makgoro (1998) further posits that It has also been described as a philosophy of life, which in its most fundamental sense represents personhood, humanity, humaneness and morality; a metaphor that describes group solidarity where such group solidarity is central to the survival of communities with a scarcity of resources, where the fundamental belief is that *motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe/umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which, literally translated, means a person can only be a person through others. In measuring the response on the SRC systems in higher education, the author asserts that student rights are a fundamental instrument of the formation of the SRC in the context of Higher Education in a transformed and society that values democracy. Assembly (1948) argues in confirmation that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights they are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. It is therefore arguable that Ibrahim Index is equally relevant to the operation and space of SRC's in Higher Education, which the model that the paper is intending to suggest should reflect to how Ibrahim Index interface with the SRC civic perspective.

3. Transactional Nature of the SRC in Higher Education

In order to advance our knowledge of leadership, it is necessary to understand where the study of leadership has been. McCleskey (2014) argued that the study of leadership spans more than 100 years. Goethals and Hoyt (2017) argue that transactional leadership refers to the more mundane give and take between leaders and followers. Each party does something for the other. There is an exchange. Specifically, transactional leaders use "contingent reward", meaning that they reward followers when they perform as expected, and "management by exception", meaning that such leaders only address followers when the followers fail to do as expected, and then the leader points out errors and shortcomings. In the view of the author, firstly, the nature of the term of office of the majority of SRC's in institutions of higher learning through its institutional statutes remains a 12 months' academic calendar. Having observed this, Burns (1978, as cited in McCleskey, 2014) argued that transactional leadership practices lead followers to short-term relationships of exchange with the

leader. It is in the context of the short term nature of the transactional leadership that SRC's systems from legislative point of view provides no space for continuity and each group of SRC's projects legacy within a short space of time, and also uses tactical approaches that are not sustainable. One of the unintended consequences is the fact that the struggles of students have been observed, the same, for many centuries back.

There have been the academic and political life of universities (Altbach, 1997:5, as cited in Sebake, 2016), therefore it reflects that very rarely have student organisations or SRC's taken an interest in the University reform, curriculum, or governance. This has been due to observed transactional nature of short term goals, and lack of connectivity in the context of positive institutional memories. The author notes that perhaps the diversity of the behaviour of individual members perpetuate the transactional mode, which further influence individual goals than that of the collective in the quest to learn what leadership is all about. The above is attested by Hogan & Kaiser (2005) who argue that firstly, leadership solves the problem of how to organise collective effort; consequently, it is the key to organisational effectiveness. With good leadership, organisations (governments, corporations, universities, hospitals, armies) thrive and prosper. When organisations succeed, the financial and psychological wellbeing of the incumbents is enhanced. Second, and more importantly from a moral perspective, bad leaders perpetrate terrible misery on those subject to their domain. In the analysis of what leadership entails from the reflection of Hogan and Kaiser above, the emphasis of collective goal driven constitutes a foundation for renewal in the case the goals of SRC's clutches with its aim and objectives from a legislative point of view. However, in the quest to rethink student leadership model, Hogan and Kaiser (2005) further believe that, in essence, leadership primarily concerns building and maintaining effective teams: persuading people to give up, for a while, their selfish pursuits and pursue a common goal. Our final point is that the personality of a leader affects the performance of a team: Who we are determines how we lead. In the measure of empirical evidence as observed by the author, the individualisation and entrenchment of personal agenda at the infantile stage defies the motive of existence and perpetuate hoarding of power, which consistently allows friends of the individual leaders to determine an agenda on behalf of the student's

population. The model confined itself to focus on individual quick gains, which transform into transaction of self-benefit, and therefore transforming the current observations constitutes a reform in student governance, in which Theoharis (2007) argues that leaders for social justice should guide their schools to transform the culture, curriculum, pedagogical practices, atmosphere, and school wide priorities to benefit marginalised students. Therefore, in the analysis of this important literature, the author notes that the governance ills in the society requires a radical shift for the Student Affairs in Higher Education system to prioritise the reform in capping the current observed pedagogy of practice in Student Governance as key for addressing social imbalances of the past and the present.

4. Understanding Civic Ethos as Part of Social Justice

The civic ethos in the arguments of the author gives effect to social justice discourse in which the formation of the SRC is empirically expected to be at the cutting edge of championing it as part of reform. From the contract of the assertion of the author, Fleck (1935, as cited in Krieger, 2001), in affirmative posits that both thinking and facts are changeable, if only because change in thinking manifest themselves in changed facts. Conversely, fundamentally new facts can be discovered only through new thinking. The efforts to advance social justice from the author point of view, requires a balancing act in a diverse and competing demands of students and therefore, SRC's has expectations of thinking in the interest of the poor students. Theoharis (2007) argues that the literature on leadership for social justice identifies schools that have demonstrated tremendous success not only with White, middle-class, and affluent students but also with students from varied racial, socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Capper & Young, in press; Maynes & Sarbit, 2000; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000, as cited in Theoharis, 2007), and therefore social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy. There has been an effort of redress and ensuring equal access to all inclusive of the disadvantaged group, which Haveman and Smeeding (2006) argue that traditionally, the nation's higher education system, especially its public component, has had two primary goals: economic efficiency and social equity. The notion of economic efficiency and social equity is at the centre of what civic ethos as the foundation

of the transformation role that the SRC's in Higher Education should take into consideration. It is therefore that SRC's should also in their civic perspective note as argued by Haveman and Smeeding (2006) that the traditional role of colleges and universities in promoting social mobility has attracted the attention of both policymakers and social science researchers. In his discussion of what he calls "education-based meritocracy," John Goldthorpe explains that a merit-based higher education system can offset the role of social class in determining economic outcomes. In affirmative, the author argues that the SRC's should be confined to the agenda of social justice at all times which its orientation is geared to advance social responsibilities towards students, particularly the current and deserving disadvantage groups through institutional sustainability. The author introduces the question of morality and judgement of what constitutes social justice as fundamental to eradicate contradictions in the expense of those students that are vulnerable. Turiel (2002:1) argues that one perspective on the development of morality was that it entailed the construction of judgments about justice, equality, and cooperation. However, the observation of the author that contradictions of what constitutes justice in student governance gets clouded by abuse of intellectual competitions that is politically driven which, in some instances, becomes part of popularity syndrome than factual, for instance, taking time to defend the external political positions that look into the narrow interest of a specific population. This will assist in ensuring focus and relevance towards social justice and development of the vulnerable students, which therefore, SRC's in their civic understanding requires that they should think globally and act locally. The notion of thinking globally and act locally meaning within their respective universities is fundamental to contextualise the national agenda on social justice to influence and mobilise in the context of its impact on their universities environment.

5. Understanding Civic Enterprise as Servant Leadership Theory

The formation of the SRC in Higher Education should be understood as a calling for services than that of self service for narrow interest. It is in the argument of the author that civic enterprise is about the service to the people as a basic principle. Leadership is one of the most comprehensively researched social influence processes in the behavioral sciences.

This is because the success of all economic, political, and organizational systems depends on the effective and efficient guidance of the leaders of these systems (Barrow 1977, as cited in Parris and Peachey, 2013). The author argues that civic enterprise reaffirm the purpose of why individuals and collectives are in the position of leadership from principle point of view. Servant leaders are distinguished by both their primary motivation to serve (what they do) and their self-construction (who they are), and from this conscious choice of 'doing' and 'being' they aspire to lead (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, as cited in Parris & Peachey, 2013). In its thematic essence, the development of self-conscious to SRC's remain the foundation of civic enterprise, which Higher Education is required to build its ethos in both curriculum and extra-curriculum to inculcate its existence in humankind in the interest of understanding that SRC in leadership is about service. A service-oriented philosophy of and approach to leadership is a manifestation of and an antecedent to enabling a wise organisation. Servant leaders have been described as capable of managing the various paradoxes of decisions, which may foster the development of organisational wisdom (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1998, as cited in Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006). The dynamics of student governance and the civic methodology characteristics are intertwined with servant leadership on the basis that "service to the constituencies" and championing their interests is the order of the day. Servant-leaders are those who serve with a focus on the followers, whereby the followers are the primary concern and the organisational concerns are peripheral. The servant-leader constructs are virtues, which are defined as the good moral quality in a person, or the general quality of goodness, or moral excellence. (Personal communication, 30 January 2003, as cited in Dennis, Kinzler-Norheim & Bocarnea, 2010). In the spirit of indepth analysis of the literature on servant leadership, Patterson's (2003, as cited in Dennis *et al.*, 2010), extrapolate that the theory extends existing literature and includes the following constructs, in that the servant-leader leads and serves with love, acts with humility, is altruistic, is visionary for the followers is trusting is serving and empowers followers.

The observation of the author is that some situations in student governance through SRC are contrary to the pillars of servant leadership on the basis that sound judgement lack on student leaders and trust in relationship with the university and in particular

Student Affairs is in the "intensive care unit". The sustainability of these relationships always closes any space for theoretical inculcation of the theory into the scientific practices in student governance. It is therefore, the servant leadership is presenting itself as a corner stone of civic engagements character, which requires a rethinking and reform towards the SRC narrative. Russell, and Gregory Stone (2002) state that servant leadership take place when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers, and the author in agreement confirm that the relationship between SRC's and students signifies relationship of "service". Larry Spear (1998 as cited in Russell and Gregory Stone, 2002), CEO of Greenleaf centre, concluded that Robert Greenleaf's writings incorporated ten major attributes of servant leadership, which includes listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community. In the similarities of characteristics of servant leadership, it is conclusive that civic engagement shares same elements through simply implying that humbleness and humility is the emphasis in the scientific journey of SRC reform, which required constant observation.

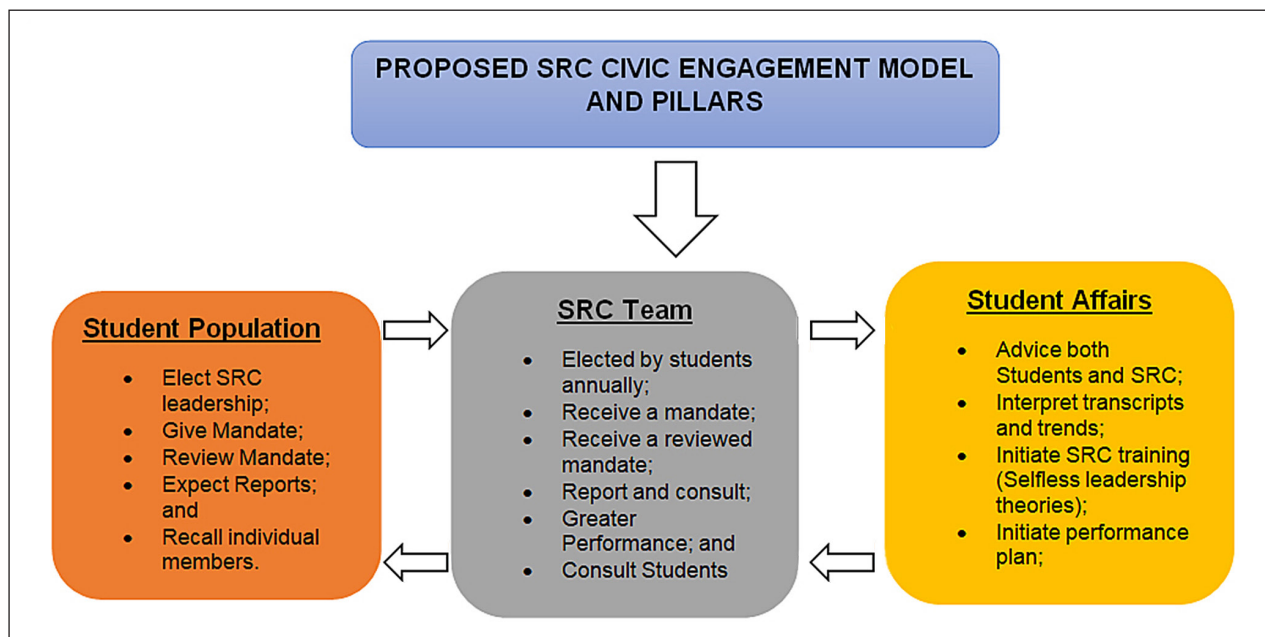
6. Proposed SRC Civic Model

The below model is encouraged by the intention to go back to basics in questioning the intention of the

formation of the SRC. As proposed, it should scientifically provide radical and positive demarcation of responsibilities to each of the parties that have a role in the service model of the student governance.

In the interpretation of the model, it requires that the recognition of the role of each party inter alia: Student population; SRC's and Student Affairs understand their role in the civic engagement relationship. Ring and Van de Ven (1994) argue that the propositions have academic implications for enriching interorganisational relationships. In the analysis of the author, the model assists in the space of professionalising the relationships with students and demarcates the political space and, therefore, the relationship is based on development and mentoring, which scientifically prepare both general students and SRC's on how to approach competitive governance space beyond university life. The author further argues that the model, while emphasising on SRC's devoting their interest to students, but further devote their energy to service to the students, while Student Affairs provides and mould and support the initiatives that aims at advancing the interest of student's populations. Woolthuis, Hillebrand and Nooteboom (2005) posit that to the debate on the relation between trust and control in the management of inter-organisational relations. More specifically, we focus on the question how trust and formal contract are related. The model constitutes a contractual way of engagements

Figure 1: Scientific Civic Engagement Model for SRC and Role and Responsibilities



Source: Author

that monitors whether the civic strategy is carried well and lives of ordinary students are improved and reduce the distance between the SRC and its followers, monitored by Student Affairs and key stakeholder of the contractual engagement.

7. Conclusion

The conceptual overview of student leadership in a form of the SRC's in the Higher Education remains relevant. However, the literature reviews presented that lack of focus through continuous sealing of quick deals that are not sustainable. SRC's have been proven through the model of democratic set-up that it should operate closely with the general students for openness and accountability purposes. The empirical essence of democracy in this instance has been affirmed as Adejumbi (2017:1) argues that democratic institutions promote developmental governance by counteracting temptations for opportunistic behaviour that is economically damaging. The individualisation of SRC operations, which are translated into temptations of corruption, defiance of the existing space of democracy, and its unintended consequences shows in a distance between the SRC leadership and the general student population. Political participation, which defines the people's sovereignty and in a sense, confers legitimacy on the political system, is a product of the nature of democratic politics especially in its interphase between the political class and citizens, the mediating dynamics of that relationship, and the perceived influence of the latter on the system (Adejumbi, 2017:1). The later was presented through SRC's preferring to account to student political parties deployed them than the general student population. Out of these challenges that are individualistic in nature and defies the principle foundation of the existence of the leadership in this space, the competitiveness in a form of SRC methodological review and reform into civic perspective constitutes a necessary reflection and therefore, the proposed model remain ideal to explore.

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