

# INSTABILITY AND CORRUPTION IN STUDENT GOVERNANCE CAUSED BY TENDER SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: SELECTED CASES FROM UNIVERSITIES OF TECHNOLOGY

BK Sebake

University of Mpumalanga

## ABSTRACT

*The landscape of Higher Education in South Africa has made a significant move to recognise the “voice of the voiceless” and embraced democracy at all cost. This argument is attested by the establishment of the Student Representative Councils (SRC’s) in all Universities to embrace inclusive governance through representation in statutory committees as determined by the Higher Education Act: 101 of 1997 as amended and the statutes of Universities respectively. The current analysis of the role of student leaders in the supply chain committees of Universities in South Africa has been contested as having a personal enrichment on individual student leaders themselves, and it can stifle progress in some parts of the Universities. This article examines tendencies of self-enrichment and how they impact on student governance. This article also calls for and examines ethical consideration in supply-chain and its relations to the experiences of the student leaders in Universities student governance. The sample is conducted on selected Universities of Technologies in three provinces inter alia: - Western Cape, Free State and Gauteng respectively. The article then includes the overview of the role of student governance, the potential corrupt tendencies, and the theoretical analysis of the good governance, which is used to assess how Student Leadership embraces it. The study is then concluded and possible solutions to the current issues and problems will be identified in order to provide a scientific solution oriented study to improve the university governance.*

**Keywords:** Corruption, Good Governance, Democracy, Accountability, and responsibility

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Student governance of any public higher education institution reflects the current democratic policy imperatives, which the rationale for its existence being to provide space for co-operative governance. Over the

past decades, higher education institutions have faced increasing complexity related to governance (Berhal, 1991; Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar, 2000; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996) as cited by Kezar & Eckel (2004). Amongst the complexities, conflict of interest and corruption have increasingly affected stability in operational activities of governance, which compromised the legitimacy of the processes. One issue at the crossroads of formal provision and actual practice concerns how student representatives are identified and elected (Bergan, 2003), and the understanding of representation manifest in student politics. The moral fabric of "Accountability" provides space for examining the extent to which this platform for students has been circumvented by the corrupt element of student leaders themselves. The major challenge of student governance framework is the competing nature of "Mandate" versus "Representation", which often contribute to the overlooking of the university processes as part of the conduct of student leaders in statutory bodies of the universities. This was scholarly attested as Keeler (1993) who proclaimed that the mandate conception of representation is wide spreading, and scholars, journalists, and ordinary citizens relay as if it were axiomatic. The fundamental criticism of a mandate within the context of student governance is always whether the mandate is doable, and this always find no expression in some student leaders, which the ultimate actions contributes

towards "ethics hitting the snag". Over the past decade, the traditional purchasing and logistics functions have evolved into a broader strategic approach to materials and distribution management known as supply chain management (Keah, 2001). This provides space to always enquire within the scholarly reflections fundamentally and critically as to whose responsibility in the university it is to perform supply chain processes. Is it a governance process or an administrative process? Are student leaders co-governing and/or co-administering the University supply chain process? This article will then seek answers to these important questions, and the alleged holding of university processes at ransom due to temptations that may come with the involvement of student leaders into supply chain committees in Universities.

## **2. THE NATURE AND ROLE OF THE SRC**

It is understood that SRC's are established in conformity with the Higher Education Act and also in terms of the Universities statutes respectively, and members are elected in terms of their respective institutional SRC constitutions. These student leaders represent student constituencies in university statutory bodies as established by their respective universities and their role in supply chain committees have been observed to be problematic. There have been

continuous talks about growing corruption and little focus on student issues that created instabilities in student governance activities in highly political hotspots universities. These instabilities are agitated by the fragile conflict of interest with little recognition of the negative culture that is being created. The example of these was the observation of a quick accumulation of wealth by student leaders immediately upon assuming SRC office. SRC elections deployments being contested heavily and threats being made against others who don't agree on a specific deployment, which create an impression that there is more that slaving of serving students. The above reflect a snap short of the crisis of instability in student governance, which boil into embezzlement of resources in particular the supply chain processes as a quick handsome payment for holding an office as always attributed by some student leaders.

### **3. THE ROLE OF STUDENT GOVERNANCE AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The concept "governance" may in its implications reflect a very complex concept which requires continued self-reflection. While there are many others who researched on the history of student governance and its evolution, there are still more lessons to be learnt. Student activism has also been generally ineffectual in

the academic and political life of universities (Altbach; 1997: 5), therefore it reflects that very rarely have student organisations taken on interest in the University reform, curriculum, or governance. The Higher Education system exists as part and parcel of the society and is characterised by the socio-political and economic interactions (Thobakgale; 2001). Therefore, the SRC represent the microcosm of the establishment of the transformed higher education in South Africa. The historic highlight of the evolution of the political overview of students in South Africa was in the period before democracy characterised by youth activism, through the established students' movement. The character of these student movements was to look into transformation of the entire country, and little attention was given to Universities transformation. The above was dictated by the politics of the time. Thobakgale (2001) argues that the emergence of student movement in South Africa was linked directly to the country's struggle against oppression and exploitation in the quest to resolve the national question. The focus then provided the notion that students view themselves as "members of the community before they are students", and the move was a reflection of a joint efforts to transform the society first before the universities. The post-apartheid period requested a different approach from the students' movement in South Africa. The ultimate focus of which was to transform the education system

and university campuses in South Africa as a whole. Some of the burning issues includes Financial and academic exclusion; admission policy transformation; student rights and life re-curriculating within the context of inclusive education; and democratisation of the universities governance structures.

All these burning issues above demanded a strategic shift from liberation strategies to transformative strategy, which can be cited that students have lost battle for student movements particularly on the call for "free education". The loss is the manifestation of the neo-liberal policies that did not transform the economy to suite the working class and the poor that are bulk majority that pays fees for the students in Universities, and the example is the enforcement of "GEAR" which students' movement rejected with other civil societies with no luck of success. The ideological orientation of the society particularly the left wing forces, which for some reasons, students movements were behind the struggle and defined it as a neoliberal economic agenda of the capitalists forces. Narsiah (2002), proclaim that neoliberalism is a doctrine which has philosophical roots in Adam Smith's free market school of economics. Neoliberalism also stems from a reaction to the Keynesian economic programmes of the post-World War II era up to the 1970s. The argument that the root of corruption is deep among student leaders may have arisen from poverty

among student leaders as a result of economic pressures with aspirations to change the lifestyle, however corruption is not justified lawful activity.

#### **4. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ENTITIES**

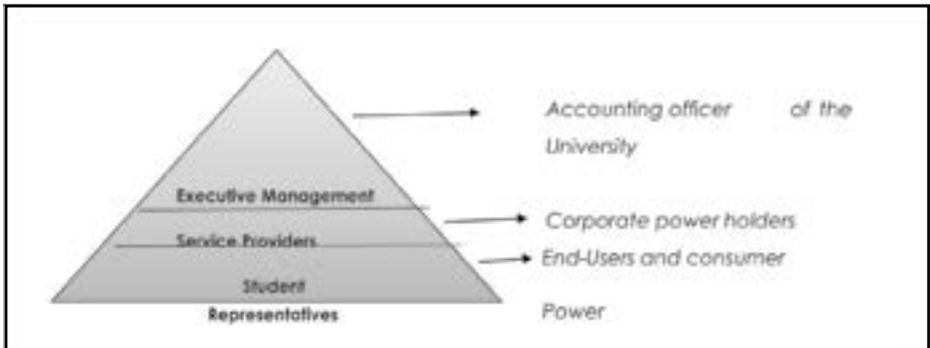
The issue of corporate governance relate largely to the monitoring and accountability as proclaimed by R.I Tricker (author of Corporate Governance Gower; 1984) that the two key elements of governance concern supervision or monitoring of management performance and ensuring accountability of management to stakeholders and other stakeholders. The supply chain, in terms of the implication of corporate governance reflects three key aspects that were proclaimed by Johnn; Hendrikse and Hefer-Handrikse (2012); which are listed below:

- **Economic power:** takes the form of channels of influence, and therefore provides space for manipulation that collapses governance;
- **Corporate power:** may be used as an instrument within which supply of goods or services and decide on the price to charge, therefore this is the power that the service providers have within the supply chain process; and
- **Customer power:** the power of voice that makes itself heard and the option to consume or not to consume a particu-

lar product. The argument of the third element may be assumed to refer to students as end-users of most of the supply chain products in universities.

These key elements may reflect demarcation of responsibility in governance of the supply chain at the universities below as indicated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Stakeholder Relations.



Source: Author

Figure 1 illustrates the stakeholder relations for the University supply chain as a scientific analysis of the corporate and stakeholders' power on the supply chain management. The analysis which further gives significance of the challenge at hand makes one to imagine the end-user as "consumer power" holder trying to play a role of a "Corporate power" holder persistently, which gives rise to the selfish compromise of the ethical values of accountability.

The Institutional governance reflects supply chain as not one of the statutory committees of the university, but the University Governing Council as a statutory body, which then provides an administrative and managerial support to the University Executive Management. This is attested by the "King Report" that (code 2.1.1.) reflect that "The Board" is ultimately accountable and responsible for the performance and affairs of the company, also that code (2.1.7.) reaffirms that the board has to adopt a strategic plan. This then condemn any reference of the supply chain as the statutory requirement, but a managerial and administrative tool of reaching the objectives.

## 5. SHIFTING FROM REPRESENTATION TO TENDERPRENEURS

The intention of the existence and establishment of Student Represen-

tative Councils in universities is to represent the views of students, in which Mashele & Qobo (2014: 83) reflect that the role of politicians should therefore be to advance the well-being of the society, rather than self-enrichment. This kind of approach thrives better in democratic societies, where the normative framework of the political system is constructed around enhancing the capacities of citizens, as well as promoting transparency and accountability of those who govern. The argument may be a critical question: are student leaders themselves embracing the values of accountability and transparency in their activities within the supply chain committee where they are serving in the midst of the growing trends of corruption? It is hoped this study will answer this fundamental question. Citing the important observation of the dominating student movement in South Africa that share ideological context with the ruling party (ANC), South African Student Congress (SASCO) observed a rot in its cycles that the most sensitive discussions in the organisation for both good and bad reasons. On the good, comrades (SASCO deployees) fight around this because it involves the framework that guides the manner in which the organization deploys cadres who advances own objectives in strategic areas such as Councils and Senates of Universities (Buku; 2010) also observed on the bad side that the fight is about the fact that being deployed involves a change in one's lifestyle and thus

to one's friendship clique on campus, and therefore recommended that SASCO deployees must not sit in tender committees. The above reflect the admission from the political trenches that the rot is changing the ideological character of the student movement into that of the "tenderpreneurship", which has no interest of the students but that of self-enrichment.

## **6. RELATIONS BETWEEN CORRUPTER AND CORRUPTees**

The scientific question to always ask is the impact of corruption on the society, which provides space to interrogate the relationship between the corrupter and corruptee. Most people claim that they are against crime and that corruption should be classed as a crime (Senior; 2004). However, the problem with crime, corruption and many other acts is that criminality frequently is in the eye of the beholder. Huisman & Vande (2010) attest that when corruption was researched, it was mostly in the context of broader concepts of crime, such as organized crime. This is rather strange because other concepts are perfectly suitable for a criminological analysis of corruption. From the context of the argument, it can easily be concluded that the relationship between the corrupter and the corruptee is based on unlawful arrangement, which constitutes a criminal act and must be classified as such.

The fundamental question is

whether these corrupt activities have been accepted as part of the society. Mashele (2011) asks this critical question: how does the society liberate itself from the belief that there is no alternative to the corrupt, incompetent, arrogant and unaccountable government under whose weight the rest of the society is collapsing? This scholarly argument reflects the cracks in student governance, which also agrees that corruption may then reflect non-creativity to participate lawfully to the economic trenches of the universities or society as a whole, and therefore elements of incompetence and persistent arrogance to stifle the University governance compromises the governance and administrative values.

The relationship between the “corrupter and the corruptee” does not have any consideration of transparency and accountability, it is always questionable as the country as a whole and universities as well have the policy framework that deals with corruption. This creates space for asking if leaders of our country and student leaders in universities have the political will to deal decisively with corruption. The argument is informed by the realities that all these policies need political leadership that is willing and not observe corruption silently and babysit it, which reflect what Mashele (2011) refers to as the political rot in the society.

## 7. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research method constitute a scientific qualitative orientation of gathering information; Popper (2002: 16) states that in order to make this idea a little more precise, we may distinguish three requirements which our empirical theoretical system will have to satisfy. First, it must be *synthetic*, so that it may represent a non-contradictory, a possible world. Secondly, it must satisfy the criterion of demarcation, and it must not be metaphysical, but must represent a world of experience. The study draws a particular theoretical context on “good governance” and creates space for qualitative nature of the experience of a sample of three (3) University officials, one (1) from each and twelve (12) student leaders, four (4) from each Universities of Technologies in Western Cape, Free State and Gauteng as a selected sample. The standard questions are developed to relate experience of the sample and quality information will be analysed and interpreted.

## 8. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section of the article reflects the narrative experience of current and former student leaders and officials in student governance of the universities of the respondents. Summaries are provided in tables 1 to 8. The following naming are used to represent the names of the institutions that par-

ticipated in the study below respectively, and not use actual name for ethical purposes:

- University A (Western Cape)
- University B (Free State)
- University C (Gauteng)

**Question 1: Are student leaders’ part of the supply chain in your respective University and what the experience of the involvement is?**

UNIVERSITY A	The Student Representative Council (SRC) members were sitting on the supply chain committee before 2013. Given the service providers lobbying students for their support in exchange for “kickbacks”, and the university withdrew their membership.
UNIVERSITY B	The respondents indicated that the University had to take a decision to exclude SRC members as they used to fundraise in exchange for putting in a word on behalf of preferred suppliers.
UNIVERSITY C	The experience is that before 2011, SRC was participating during evaluation. After that period, the university decided to remove the SRC from this committee.

**Question 2: Are there any procedures around declaration of conflict of interest and how it was handled by student leaders?**

UNIVERSTITY A	At the time SRC members were part of the supply chain committee, there was a form for declaration of conflict of interest, but often they were not informed of its implications.
UNIVERSTITY B	There was always an indication that each member of the committee who is conflicted can recuse him/herself, but SRC were not and, at times, they will even leaked information.
UNIVERSTITY C	The university had a conflict of interest form, which was issued with the agenda in the meeting.

**Question 3: Do the student leaders make decisions to select the service provider or are they sitting at an observer level? Relate the experience?**

UNIVERSTITY A	At the time, the SRC members had full voting powers such that it could even stop the meeting if it was not happy with the service provider chosen.
UNIVERSTITY B	Before the University take decision to exclude the SRC, its members were able to make decisions to influence the process, even to bring service providers to the institution.
UNIVERSTITY C	The SRC at the time were regarded as full members with decision making rights, as such they were not regarded as observers.

**Question 4: Is it the correct practice to involve student leaders in this field and why?**

UNIVERSTITY A	The experience shared by respondents shows that the SRC's views are necessary not at the stage of decision making, but only on making inputs on service standards.
UNIVERSTITY B	The respondents feel that involving SRC in such processes is a tantamount to exposing them to the danger of the underworld and corruption.
UNIVERSTITY C	An understanding of SRC is that there is nothing wrong to involve SRC members, but teach them to act in accordance with the rules of the committee and also it will assist in career development.

**Question 5: What is the reaction of the University Executive towards student leaders' involvement in the supply chain committee?**

UNIVERSTITY A	The University Executive always looked at the interest of protecting the image of student leadership given the past experience of alleged corruption.
UNIVERSTITY B	The University Executive always views the SRC as an important component of the university, but given the bad experience of their involvement in supply chain committee, the SRC be removed.

UNIVERSITY C	The SRC were always used as a tool to support management decision, given the allegations of corruption by student leaders. There is still corruption reported even when they are no longer seating on the committee.
--------------	--

**Question 6: Are student leaders often corrupted by this system and does student governance become dysfunctional based the system?**

UNIVERSITY A	The respondents agreed that the system has made student leaders corrupt and those deployed always saw SRC as an advancement to a gravy train.
UNIVERSITY B	The respondents reflected that once a commitment is made with the service provider privately, if the move is objected and nothing must function. These tendencies led to majority of student leaders being charged and suspended.
UNIVERSITY C	The respondents also provided an indication that student leaders are often corrupted by the system, as the service providers also corrupt them by providing "kickbacks". The corruption is not only caused by tenders, but by the political ideological system.

**Question 7: Do student leaders account to students openly on their role in supply chain committee? If not why? If yes, relate the experience?**

UNIVERSITY A	In most cases, student leaders are not accounting openly to students on the activities of the supply chain committee. The only area of accountability is on mandatory issues such as financial aid.
UNIVERSITY B	It was said that student leaders are not accounting on activities of this nature at all and if they sense that there are those who are going to ask questions about corruption and SRC interest on service providers, they would then send students to disrupt such a meeting so that it does not conclude its business.
UNIVERSITY C	SRC is not accounting to the students on matters of supply chain committee, unless they lost the debate in the committee and need support of students.

## Question 8: What do you recommend to be done to improve?

UNIVERSTITY A	Believe that no SRC members should be involved on supply chain committee and further student affairs put processes for student leaders to account.
UNIVERSTITY B	There is a need to caution the SRC members of the rot of corruption and its unintended consequences. The need to emphasis on public accountability as one of the pillars of democracy.
UNIVERSTITY C	The respondents believe that the SRC must be included on the committee, but feel the conflict of interest be investigated and taken to the disciplinary process if they transgress.

## 9. IMPLICATIONS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Governance has become a “hot” topic as evidence mounts on the critical role it plays in determining societal well-being (Graham, Amos & Plumpre; 2003). The concept also gives rise to a fundamental question of what is the character of “good governance”. This concept has been argued by scholars such as (Mas-erumule; 2011) proclaimed in his thesis that *good governance* is a conceptual problematique. It means different things to different people depending on the context from which it is used. Good governance is a complex concept. It therefore cannot simply and only be understood from a positivist or realist epistemology. The reflection of “good governance” is the ability to abide by a set of rules that govern the environment, therefore quote of good practice constitutes that framework. It

therefore implies that the implication for student governance is the ability by elected leaders to follow the provision in their constitution and abide by the University rule in adhering to their responsibilities e.g. resist corruption when seating in supply chain committees and stick to rules to avoid what Saint Paul attested that “My own behaviour baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but doing what I really loathe.”

## 10. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The article demonstrated the rot of corruption emanating from the involvement of student leaders in the supply chain management committees of universities as per the selected sample. The point of departure was to unpack *corporate governance* as an important governance transformative move that necessitated the inclusion of student leaders in the form of SRC

on the statutory committee. The second point of departure was to critically analyse whether the supply chain committee is a statutory body that needs representation of all stakeholders or is it a management tool. The third point of departure was that the research demonstrated that the historical evolution of student movement which was of a character of reforming society as a whole, and the emergence of shifting from the transformative role to that of self-liberation through “*corruption*” have created danger of democracy in the space occupies by student governance in Universities. The conclusion of the article is that, as attested by the respondents, student leaders often get corrupted by the process such that they view being deployed in the SRC as “*gravy train*” and consequently their exclusion was a wise move, which supported the conclusion that students must be excluded from the committee as it falls outside their scope. Given the narrative experience and in a quest to ensure that SRCs’ focus on their role of representing students in statutory bodies, the study recommends that drawing of specifications and services standard student leaders as end users be consulted. This constitutes an initial and internal stage of determining service standards, which will then use supply chain as an administrative tool.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Altbach, P.G., 1997. *Student Politics in America: A historic analysis*. McGraw-Hill: New York
- Bergan, S. 2003. *Student Participation in Higher Education Governance*. [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Governance/SB\\_student\\_participation\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Governance/SB_student_participation_EN.pdf). (Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016)
- Buku, L. 2010. Purpose of the National Political School within the context of SASCO Resolutions, [www.sasco.org.za/event/buku](http://www.sasco.org.za/event/buku), (Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016)
- Dekel, E., B.L. Lipman, and A. Rustichini. 2009. Temptation-driven preferences. *Review of Economic Studies*. 76 (3), 937–971
- Graham, J., Amos, B. & Plumptre, T. 2003. Principle of Good Governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Policy brief no: 15. [www.iog.co](http://www.iog.co). (Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> April 2016)
- Handrikse, J.W; & Hefer-Handrikse, L. 2012. *Corporate Governance Handbook: Principles and Practice*. Juta & Co: Pretoria
- Huisman, W.; & Vande, W.G. 2010. The Criminology of Corruption. Hogent.be. (Accessed 09<sup>th</sup> April 2016)
- Keah, C.T. 2001. A Framework of Supply Chain Management Literature. *European Journal of Purchasing & Supply Chain Management*. 7( 1):39-48.

Kezer, A.J.; & Eckel, P.D. 2004. Meeting Today's Governance Challenges: A Synthesis of the Literature and Examination of a Future Agenda for Scholarship. *The Journal of Higher Education*. 75( 4):371-399

Maserumule, H.M. 2011. Good Governance in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): A Public Administration Perspective. Thesis- [www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za) (Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> April 2016)

Narsiah, S. 2002. Neoliberalism and privatisation in South Africa. Department of Geography. University of Natal: Pietermaritzburg.

Przeworski, A.; Stokes, S.C. & Manin, B. 1999. Democracy, Accountability, & Representation.

Cambridge University Press

Senior, I. 2004. Corruption, The Government and The Private Sector: Why it matters and what can be done. *Economic Affairs*. 24( 2):22-29

Thobakgale, S. 2001. Transformation in Higher Education: *Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*. Centre for Higher Education Transformation. [www.chet.org.za](http://www.chet.org.za) (Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2016)