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Rethinking the Role of Universities in Africa: Leadership as a Missing Link in Explaining University Performance in Uganda

Roberts Kabeba Muriisa*

Abstract

The subject of this paper is the place of leadership in redefining the role of the university in Africa in general and Uganda in particular. The ‘African University’ today, like any other university, has clear mandates and roles; research, teaching and community service, clearly laid down on paper in many of the universities’ manuals and strategic plans. But, in reality, these roles are not performed at all or are performed in a manner that may not warrant clear roles. Increasingly, it is observed that less quality teaching, less research, and less community service are being done. This situation calls for rethinking what role should universities play. While many explanations have been offered for the declining performance of the university, in this paper I contend that leadership plays a significant role not only in influencing escalation of crises but also in averting them, especially in Ugandan universities. The paper answers mainly three research questions: (i) How do changes and transitions taking place in the university sector affect the role of universities in Uganda? (ii) How does leadership respond to the challenges faced by universities? and (iii) What are the challenges faced by leadership and how do these challenges influence their response to university challenges? Using different documents, and basing on the behaviour approaches to study organisations the study makes an analysis of the role of leadership in the functioning of the university. The paper concludes faced with many challenges, universities have changed course and focus and that they need rethinking their roles. It is concluded that the

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role of leadership has been overlooked yet they occupy a central role in the performance of the university.

Résumé

Cette étude a pour objet l'analyse de la place du leadership dans la redéfinition du rôle des universités africaines en général et de l'Ouganda en particulier. Aujourd'hui, l'« Université africaine », à l'instar des autres universités, a des mandats et des rôles ; à savoir la recherche, l'enseignement et le service communautaire clairement définis sur un document dans beaucoup de manuels et plans stratégiques de ces universités. Mais, en réalité, ces rôles ne sont pas assumés du tout ou ils le sont d'une manière qui ne garantit pas des rôles clairement établis. On constate de plus en plus qu'il y a moins d'enseignement de qualité, moins de recherche et moins de service communautaire. Cette situation exige un réexamen du rôle que les universités devraient jouer. Alors que plusieurs explications ont été servies quant à la baisse de performance des universités, je soutiendrai dans cette étude que le leadership joue un rôle non seulement dans l'influence de l'escalade des crises mais aussi dans la prévention de celles-ci, notamment dans les universités ougandaises. Cette étude répond principalement à trois questions liées à la recherche : (i) Comment les changements et les transitions en cours dans le secteur universitaire affectent-ils le rôle des universités ougandaises? (ii) Comment le leadership répond-il aux difficultés que rencontrent les universités? et (iii) Quels sont les défis auxquels font face les universités? A l'aide de divers documents, et suivant des approches basées sur les comportements utilisées pour étudier les organisations l'étude fait une analyse du rôle du leadership dans le fonctionnement des universités. En guise de conclusion, l'étude établit que face aux multiples défis, les universités ont opéré un changement de cap et de centre d'intérêts et ont besoin de repenser leurs rôles. Il est conclu que le rôle du leadership a été ignoré en dépit du rôle central qu'ils ont joué dans la réalisation des performances universitaires.

Introduction

The subject of this paper is the place of leadership in redefining the role of the university in Africa in general and Uganda in particular. The 'African University' today, like any other university, has clear mandates and roles: research, teaching and community service, clearly laid down on paper in many of the universities' manuals and strategic plans. But, in reality, these roles are not performed at all or are performed in a manner that may not warrant clear roles. Increasingly, it is observed that less quality teaching, less research, and less community service are being done. Offering of short courses have permeated

university training agenda more than the core programmes of universities; consultancy work has overtaken research work; the teaching and training approach does not quite befit the mode of teaching at a university (there is limited lecturing and tutoring) and other roles such as, community service and outreach have been abandoned and equated to student internship and placement.

Universities are at the heart and stand at the apex of higher education; they are rightly regarded as drivers of development. Through their mandates of doing research, teaching and community service, university staff and students bring to light new and emerging challenges facing society – poverty, malnutrition, disease, maternal and child health, etc – and develop new technologies to ameliorate them. Through research findings, proposed solutions, technical innovations and responses, societies transform. According to Assie-Lumumba (2006), universities have been the principal agents for the growth of scientific knowledge that has become the dominant force in the modern world. Particular emphasis is put on universities as research and training institutions, a character that makes universities distinct from other higher institutions of learning.

Recent developments in the scale and scope of expansion of the higher education sector make it difficult to delineate universities from other higher institutions of learning and separate their roles from those of other institutions. For example, while there is clear distinction in the naming of these institutions, in practice and with regard to what they do, there is no clear distinction between them. For example, vocational institutions focus on tailor-made short courses, but so are universities. Also, university education, higher education and tertiary education are used interchangeably as if they mean and refer to the same thing; as a result, a number of universities today are just universities in name. Hence it is difficult to make a clear distinction between a university, a technical college, and teacher training college, and vocational institute. Considering the nature and character, the programme orientation and mode of delivery of these programmes, Kasozi (2003) asserts that some of the universities are glorified high schools.

There is also the contention that university education is in crisis and in a state of stagnation and irrelevance (AAU 2004); and that African universities are no longer relevant to the African economies. This is in regard to the nature of programmes offered, the nature of graduates produced and the relationship between universities and society. It is also argued that many universities in Africa are but a shadow of their past glorious days lacking academic staff, major infrastructure and teaching materials (Hanson and Leautier 2011). It is my contention that university education and universities as institutions have particular boundaries and mandates which are clearly distinct from the mandates of other tertiary/higher education institutions.

From this background it becomes necessary, therefore, to seriously rethink the role of the university. We need to recognize that the term ‘university’ goes beyond simply the ‘name’; it connotes certain functions and roles which must be fulfilled, and therefore we need redefine these roles. Is there a role for leadership in redefining the roles of the University? This paper thinks that leadership can play a role – a role it has largely failed to play in the past at least within the African context.

Various explanations have been given for the low performance of universities in Africa: high staff turnover, poor government funding, commercialization and privatization of higher education, increased consultancy work, and massification (Mamdani 2007; Kasozi 2009; Musisi 2003). It is true that the functioning of the university is not without challenges; there is the challenge of staff turnover and minimal financing of higher education by government.

Staff turnover contributes to limited staff not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of the qualifications and skills set of staff at the senior level to deliver academic programmes; hence assigning the important role of teaching and training to junior staff who cannot adequately deliver an academic programme also takes them away from tutorials where they would probably be most appropriately deployed. Financing higher education has multidimensional impacts. Apart from the direct impacts such as lack finance for infrastructural development, there are the indirect consequences from the alternative financing strategies such as privatization and commercialization. Commercialization and privatization are beginning to influence the university to move away from the production of knowledge for the sake of knowledge to the production of knowledge for its usefulness. The former implies that universities must pay attention to both basic and applied knowledge, and the latter that universities produce knowledge only because it is required. Clearly, therefore, knowledge production in universities at the moment is in danger.

Universities face yet other challenges. The World Bank in 1995 challenged the relevance of university education and suggested that investing in university education has limited return on such investment and thus proposed to governments to increase investment in primary education. Universities were then advised to design alternative funding strategies, which then to the commercialization of university education. Commercialization opened the door of university education to new stakeholders, including the business community, parents, students and donors, in addition to government. These stakeholders also make their own demands and have a new perspective of how to make university education relevant. Government, the main funder, demands accountability in the use of resources, open standards curricular relevance and that universities should generate their own incomes; politicians,

the civil society, students, donors, etc are all pushing their sectional interests and demands. Clearly, these demands have impacted greatly on the functioning and performance of universities in Africa, and Uganda in particular. Given the challenges facing universities, it has become imperative to rethink the role of universities and the responsibility of leadership in this regard. There has been little consideration of leadership as a focus of investigation. This study proposes that when investigating higher education in addition to other crises, leadership should be taken on as a new dimension and it this dimension that is the focus of investigation in this paper. Thus, this paper investigates not only the way leadership may influence escalation of crises but also how leadership can help to avert them, especially in Ugandan universities. The paper will seek to answer mainly three research questions:

- a. How do changes and transitions taking place in the university sector affect the role of universities in Uganda?
- b. How does leadership respond to the challenges faced by universities?
and
- c. What are the challenges faced by leadership and how do these challenges influence their response to university challenges?

An Exploration into Theory of Leadership and Organizations

Organizational performance heavily relies on leadership, however explaining university performance in Uganda has not put leadership in a strong perspective as an explanatory variable for much of the failures (poor performance on research, training and community outreach) registered. Instead, a lot of emphasis has been on resources, massification and other factors. We need to put leadership in perspective and consider it as an integral part of factors explaining university failure. But first, an understanding of leadership has to be developed.

What is Leadership and how does it Relate to Organisational Performance?

Leadership is a process of influence whereby a leader makes an impact on others by inducing them to behave in a certain way. The leader is considered to bear influence on the behaviour of a group towards the attainment of goals. Leadership, according to Jones, George and Hill (1998: 403) 'is the process by which a person exerts influence over other people and inspires, motivates, and directs their activities to help achieve group or organizational goals'. And this person who inspires, motivates directs others to achieve organizational goals is the leader.

According to Lwakabamba (2008: 2), leadership is a set of attitudes and practices – a way of working with people and a way of looking at what it means to work effectively in an institution. Lwakabamba argues that leadership is distinct from taking command; on the contrary, leadership is taking responsibility, sharing responsibility – being prepared to take decisions, building consensus, having trust relationships and understanding that individuals in the organization must grow together. In this sense, leadership respects the value of each individual's contribution to goal attainment and the working together of individuals as a group so as to achieve organizational goals. In consideration of the value of each individual to the organization, it is proposed that every individual in the organization has a leadership role and that leadership, therefore, takes place at all levels of the organization and not just at the top. This argument however does not devalue the responsibility of leadership and their role at the top of the organization. It is thus argued that top leadership in the organization is responsible for overseeing that the organization moves into the right direction. Thus, in a university setting, top leaders – the rector, the vice-chancellor, etc – are responsible for running the university and ensuring that universities keep moving in the right direction. Leadership at this level increases the ability to meet all challenges facing an organization. Leadership role is to influence all the working teams and leadership at other levels (faculties and institutes) to work towards the attainment of university goals – research, teaching and community service. It is such influence that increases organizational success. The success of the university is thus measured in terms of quality research and publications, quality teaching and quality community service. It is the role of leadership to define organizational goals and also give a sense of direction for others to follow (Bryman 1999). For this to be done, however, it is expected that leaders should possess certain traits, and also behave in a certain manner. Here the behavioural and trait models help us to understand what leaders must do to be effective.

The trait model provides that leaders must possess certain level of intelligence to deal with complex issues; they must have expertise and knowledge for them to take good decisions, self-confidence and dominance help leaders to influence subordinates, integrity and honest help them to earn respect, trust and confidence from their subordinates; and finally they must exercise some level of maturity so that they can act selflessly, control their feelings and admit when they have made mistakes. For Klitgaard (2008), key traits of leaders are a 'thick skin' and nerves as 'sewer pipe'. In this respect, the leader should be able to withstand whatever pressures they are confronted with. Sewer pipes are expected to be thick for lack of this quality makes them burst thus contaminating the environment and this should be guarded

against. Taking this analogy, the university leadership should be one that can have such a character. Universities in Africa are depicted as facing different crises, on the one hand, it is this character that makes leadership withstand such crises and positively confront them. On the other hand, it is lack of this character that makes African university leaders fail to steer their institutions in the right direction, thus plunging them in different crises.

The behaviour model, on the other hand, provides that leaders should show subordinates that they trust, respect and care about them, and also must take steps to make sure that subordinates do their work as required (Jones, George and Hill 1998: 409-410). It is argued that leaders should have certain competences defined as personal traits, behaviours, skills, values and knowledge; that leaders should be equipped with administrative competences; flexibility, anxiety control, time and adaptive management and positive attitudes towards people, innovative, motivating, honesty and diplomatic. In addition, leaders should possess competences of social responsibility which include being sensitive to the changing environment, cultural sensitivity, analysis of demands and knowledge of economic situation.

It should be noted that universities are complex organizations serving a constantly changing environment. There has been increased demand from community for universities to adapt to social realities: universities in the 21st century are under pressure to move away from remaining the ivory towers of the 1960s and 70s. Thus, leaders must know how to move universities to address social challenges and yet remain successful as universities. Successful universities must stick to the core goals of a university. It has to be noted that while the university's goals are clearly defined as research, teaching and advancement of new knowledge and community service (Halvorson 2010), these goals have shifted and there is a need to redefine them if universities have to be successful. This is the task of leadership. Returning to Lwakabamba's conception of leadership, it should be noted that leadership goes beyond one person – the chief executive of the organization – to include all other people in the organization, including heads of departments, dean and lecturers. Moreover these are the prime implementers of university programmes. Universities are complex organizations which follow the principles of autonomy and independence. The autonomy given to the university is to enable lecturers define what they want to teach and determine the nature of research they can do; and this reinforces the argument that everyone is a leader.

It is argued that corporate performance is not only a reflection of administrative competences but also depend on different forces which may reduce and muffle a leader's impact. Apart from internal controls within the organization, the environment of the organization imposes heavy limits on a leader. But the

leader's role is to confront these forces and steer the organization to success: it is in doing this that leadership competences, especially the competence of social responsibility, becomes evident. The performance of a university is partly a function of the competition in the environment – public universities face stiff competition from the private universities, students and other multiple stakeholders make demands in addition to internal governance challenges of the university. We ask how leaders confront these challenges. Thus, analysis of an organization's success and performance depends on leadership roles: a leader motivates, encourages, plans and empowers, and these have stronger influence on the organizational output. This discussion shows that an organization's progress over time is moulded by leaders' traits as well as by constraints in the organization's character and environment, but the leader must confront these challenges for the organization to succeed. How a leader confronts these challenges may be reflected in the way leaders play their roles, such as the motivation role, the planning role and the empowering role.

Universities today are heavily dependent on their environment for resources; hence the environment imposes heavy limits on the operations of the university. Thus, it is argued that the constraints on the organization's activities may be explained by the resource dependence model (Pfeiffer and Salancik 1990) which depicts organizations as open systems which must engage in transactions with their environment if they are to survive. To survive, according to the resource dependence model, organizations depend on the environment for resource provision and organizations must interact with resource controllers who, because of resource possession, wield power over the organization. But organizations must find ways of regulating the behaviour of their members to make them contribute effectively and efficiently to the production of their primary outputs. The role and the ability of the leader in resisting the external forces and guiding the organization to sail through these forces become paramount for organization's success.

Universities are facing a number of challenges, including the challenge of identity loss or image loss. Today, universities may not be distinguished from other technical colleges or even high schools (Kasozi 2003). As presented in the introduction, challenges which the university is facing, include decline in research; there is more focus on consultancies than scientific research work, there is a focus on short term tailor-made training programmes; and community service, the third role of the university, is conflated and equated with community placement and internship of students. This is an absurdity. Service activities constitute the extension of university expertise for the socio-economic and political improvement of the life in the community. It is distinct from professional service and is in most cases a voluntary exercise (Mwiandi 2010).

In the light of challenges facing universities, the need for a leadership with creative, innovative competences, skills and commitment to expand and attune the roles of universities has never been greater than today. Addressing these challenges requires a cadre of leaders with sound knowledge of university operations. Leadership will need to encourage and actively pursue institutional policies that foster conditions that develop and support quality teaching and research (Hanson and Léautier 2011). Before discussing different challenges facing the university, let me first address the roles of leadership.

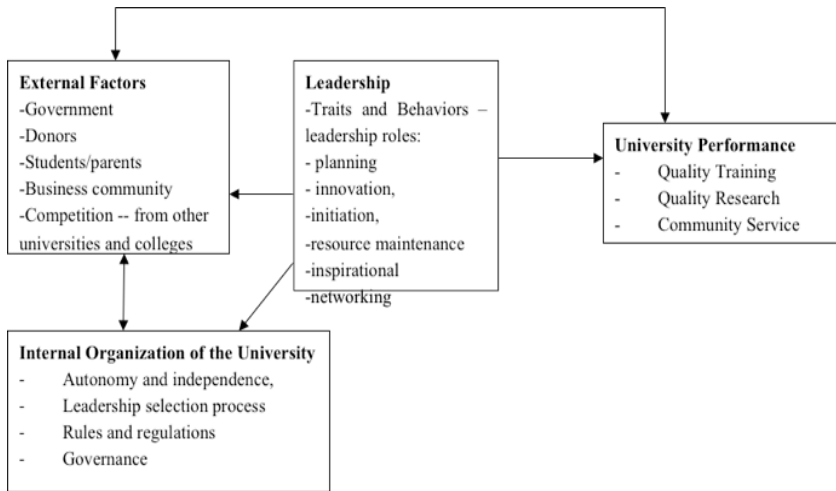
Roles of Leaders in a University

The role of a university leader can be inferred from our earlier depiction of a leader. A leader of a university must plan and initiate programmes, and should inspire others to follow. A leader foresees new research areas, and influences others to venture into those areas. Inspiration, however, does not simply come; rather it comes with what the leader does. A leader cannot inspire others to conduct research unless one also conduct research. Inspiration, therefore, comes with the involvement of the leader. Once a leader succeeds in inspiring others, we can therefore say that the leader has succeeded administratively.

The leader's role is also that of maintaining institutional resources, mobilizing and creating others. Leaders need entrepreneurial skills because they are expected to allocate resources in a manner that sustains university missions and roles. As controllers of resources, leaders should schedule and allocate personnel time and financial resources, in accordance with the roles and goals of the university. Scholars, however, have argued that university leadership, especially in Uganda, have not succeeded in this initiative. At Makerere, for example, Mamdani has discussed extensively the success of Makerere University leadership in mobilizing financial resources (Mamdani 2007), but NCHE (2007, 2006, and 2008) has shown that financial allocation to the core business activities of the university; research and all those activities that would increase university performance in this area, such as library, were negated or received the least share of mobilized resources. As indicated elsewhere, one of the key challenges universities face is financial allocation. Muriisa (2010) has thus argued that it is this challenge that limits university's performance.

Klitgaard (2008) summarizes the role of the chief executive – the president of the university – as maintenance of existing institutional resources and the creation of new resources; has ultimate managerial responsibility for a large area of non-academic activities; is responsible for public understanding; and by the nature of the office is the chief person who speaks for the institution. In these and other areas the president's work is to plan, to organize, to direct, and to represent.

Hypothetical Framework: The Role of Leadership in Influencing the Performance of Universities in Uganda



This model places leadership at the centre of all other factors influencing university performance. Based on the previous discussions, the model shows that leadership influences the way universities are structured (internal organization and control), it influences how external pressure is absorbed by the organization and all leadership has an overall influence on the performance of the university. The model is, however, a simplification of what really takes place as actual practice may be somewhat different. It has to be noted that variables are linked to each other in a complex web and the relationship may not be as clear-cut as put in the model. But the model provides a basis for analysis of what takes place in universities and how this affects effective leadership.

The Role of Universities

Universities play three key roles: research, teaching and service. Over time, however, these roles are so muffled that it is now hard to make a distinction between what universities and other higher institutions do. Research for the sake of knowledge has been replaced by research for its usefulness; professors are chasing consultancies and commissioned research, universities are ceasing to do research and are becoming ‘teaching factories’ (Halvosen 2010, 211). Universities are expected to do research-based teaching and dissemination of research-based knowledge. As we shall present later, quality teaching is no longer guaranteed in the universities, the traditional approach to knowledge dissemination characterized by teaching and tutorials is almost gone. Service

– what Mwiandi (2010) calls the third mission of the university – is in the form of research-based professional service offered to communities. Community service offered by professors and university community is usually on voluntary basis; but it is the remunerated outreach programmes that now dominate in the name of community service. Like good research and quality teaching, voluntary community service is almost no more. The only community service still in place now is student placement and internships in the industry. Professors themselves almost have no time to offer professional service because they are engaged in consultancy work; they are busy moonlighting. These issues are some of the salient issues that confront the leadership of our universities. How has leadership approached these issues in universities? The key question that professors are asked now is how much money they have brought into the university, not how much they have contributed in terms of knowledge and service. Promotions are no longer seriously based on research but on the ability to fundraise for the university.

In this paper, I argue that the functioning of a university is strongly influenced by external and internal pressures, but leadership has a role of balancing these pressures and steering the university onto the right course. Ideally, therefore, the argument raised in the paper is that effective leadership is challenged by the need to balance the internal and external pressures. In the following segment, I discuss how university and leadership contribute to the demise of African/Ugandan universities in the way they play their roles.

Teaching

The African university is supposed to be an engine of sustainable development. Indeed, the creation of universities in post-colonial Africa aimed at developing African countries. The development of the university fitted well in the whole development agenda of post-independence African states; to develop institutions for national development. Investments in industry, agriculture, health, etc., all had the same aim; they were for national development. Thus development of the university fitted perfectly within this framework and the universities were considered an indispensable agency for state building (Assie-Lumumba 2008). Universities were established principally to aid the new states build up their capacity to develop and manage their resources, alleviate the poverty of the majority of the people and close the gap between them and the developed world (Sawyer 2004: 2). It is within this framework that politicians and other stakeholders demand for relevance. The demand for relevance has overshadowed the role of universities as providers of solutions to today's and future problems. Governments demand that universities should produce the human resource the economy demands; students and parents demand that

universities should provide education programmes that would guarantee employment after graduation; while the market (business and corporate sector) demands that universities produce graduates that would solve their problems without further training; thus firms no longer focus on general ability but on vocational skills as basis of employment. Responding to these demands, the higher purpose of universities as research institutions – doing research and training researchers – research based training (Mamdani 2012) is avoided. It is within this framework that skills-based training and vocationalization of university education and changing traditional technical schools and vocational institutes in most African universities are being turned into universities without paying attention to the qualities and demands of universities (see, for example, Mwiandi 2010; Muriisa 2010).

I argue that the university's leadership role of planning and directing has failed in this regard. It should be noted that today's university programmes are defined by the market, and leaders are swayed in all directions as long as the market does exist for these programmes, and as long as they can mobilize money for universities no matter how. For Halvosen (2010: 211) 'knowledge shopping', that is anything that makes up for lack of public funding or student loans, like fee-paying students, professors doing consultancies and chasing for commissioned research, or universities securing their finances through patents and parking fees is, first of all, driving the way research universities' work, more than the ideals of research-based teaching, and the dissemination of research-based knowledge.

Leadership, Reform Process and Decline in Quality Teaching

Universities in Africa are depicted as being in crisis; crisis of funding, lack of adequate facilities and major infrastructure to stir their countries' development. The contribution to development is muffled by the current neo-liberal approach to university service provision. Within the neo-liberal approach, universities in Africa, and Uganda in particular, have resorted to producing only saleable programmes. Universities have changed their curriculum, introduced brand-name courses, and as part of a solution to the lack of teaching space caused by increased enrolment, have started parallel programmes such as evening, weekend and classes running late into the night. These changes have different implications for the quality of teaching. It is stated that the quality of education has deteriorated (NCHE 2007) following the entry of sub-standard providers (World Bank 2008). Furthermore, it is stated that neo-liberalism has resulted in increased – but not always healthy – competition between departments and faculties, as evidenced at Makerere University, resulting into duplication of programmes of even poor quality (Mamdani 2007).

Liberalization of university education, particularly its privatization, was introduced upon the recommendation of the World Bank which made government to reduce investment in this sector, thus drastically limiting funding for this sector of education. In the 1980s, whenever government faced financial problems, the university's budget automatically faced cuts. The financial cuts continued in the 1990s with World Bank's calling for governments to direct funding to primary education. According to Mamdani (2007: 7), in 1990-1991 when government effected the 30 per cent mandatory cut, the university had also to share the misfortune. As priority funding of lower education took effect in 1990s, the viability of investing in higher education for social, economic and political development became questioned. The World Bank argument was that investing in higher education increases social inequality which should be redressed by minimizing public spending in this sector and prioritizing the funding of primary and basic education for equitable and cost effectiveness (World Bank 1995: 12). The Bank prescribed that:

- a. Institutions should be encouraged to differentiate the education system to move away from the single-tier system to allow private programmes and programmes offered at different times of the day – hence, daytime and evening programmes were introduced;
- b. Government and university authorities should diversify funding sources, allow cost sharing and reform the public funding approach to take care of role performance;
- c. Universities should redefine their relationship with government, and focus more on quality, responsiveness and equity (World Bank 1995).

Introducing marketable, relevant and sustainable programmes of study became the character of the privatization process; curriculum change and design was done in favour of the market – with students and government demanding for relevance. Commercialization of higher education attracted more students and the expansion of number of students paid no attention to the teaching and research facilities. Open competition for saleable courses and programmes became the defining characteristic of university departments as pioneered by Makerere University (Mamdani 2007). Hanson and Léautier (2011) have argued that universities are caught between their traditional missions – pursuing truth through research and excellence in teaching – and excelling in market-driven programmes. Confronted with challenge of declining finances, Makerere University's leadership focused on engineering the reform process. Privatization was aimed at bringing greater benefits to staff and the institution in general in terms of the financial resources it would bring. Privatization of education

went hand in hand with commercialization of education. The practice started with Makerere University has now affected almost all universities. It should be noted that commercialization was more of a challenge than privatization. In a bid to produce saleable programmes and to be 'relevant', universities ignored disciplinary divides and foundations and opted for vocationalization of academic programmes; a travesty that proper leadership would have been expected to handle. But, as already noted, being prone to financial crisis, the main concern of the university leadership was finance. And this overshadowed all the quality challenges that came along with commercialization of programmes. The responsibility of not safeguarding disciplines and quality cannot be blamed on any other agency involved in the reform process but on leadership (Mamdani 2007).

In 2006, the National Council for Higher Education reported that private universities were spending 0.4 per cent of their budgets on research and more than 50 per cent on infrastructural development. Another National Council for Higher Education report on 16 universities, four of which are public (Makerere, Mbarara, Kyambogo and Gulu), shows that 1.1 per cent of budget was spent on research and 70.2 per cent on staff welfare (cited in Kasozi 2009: 145–146). Even the little that is allocated to research often gets diverted to other uses that more crucial to the survival of the universities (NCHE 2005). Also, research inputs such as books, equipment, subscription to journals and recruitment of qualified academic staff are very limited (Ajayi, Goma and Johnson 1996). As indicated, the consequence of minimal funding of university education is the concentration of effort on the welfare of staff and students instead of focusing on the core activities of the university. The leadership of the university pays greater attention to generating funds than the core missions of the university. The result is minimal research activity, low-quality teaching and virtually no service to community by universities.

Ideally, good leadership is expected to guide universities as they advance into new ventures – corporate organizations – as well as on how they allocate their funds. Universities need leaders with discretion: people who can change the inclement environment, lobby governments to change the legislation in favour of a privatization that maintains university autonomy and academic freedom. In the African setting, university leadership is confronted with leadership selection. Most top executives of universities in Africa are appointed but must be seconded or confirmed by government (Hanson and Léautier 2011). There is limited commitment by such leaders to move universities in the direction that may not be in agreement with government's decision. Governments may choose to close programmes and leaders emerging from this scenario cannot be expected to put up any resistance because of their inclination

to appease government. In addition, most appointments of vice-chancellors of the universities are based on the business plans they have drawn for the universities and their track record for fundraising; it is not so much on their academic credentials anymore (Sawyer 2004).

It has been argued that the leader of the institution must look at the institution not in the context of the pressure but must seek to align its vision and mission with the changing environment (Hanson and Léautier 2011). In the era of commercialization of education, universities are driven in all directions by multiple stakeholders; hence there is no longer talk of academic freedom or autonomy since universities have to produce only what is demanded and saleable. With the increasing stakeholders in higher education there is increased demand for relevance, but the question to ask is: whose relevance is being talked about? (Brennan 2007). Universities should be in a position to define what is relevant and what is not. It would take a visionary leader in this scenario to seek to maintain the university vision and mission while responding to pressures and demands from society. Such leader would first attempt to scientifically predict the impact of external pressures on the functioning of the university and work out strategies to meet them. Relevance defined from each stakeholder's point of view makes universities less focused on their purpose. It is no wonder that Smith (2007) argues that universities in the south are having a crisis of purpose. The crisis of purpose goes along with loss of academic autonomy and freedom which universities once enjoyed. The reason for this loss of autonomy is the demands and pressures from the many stakeholders. With multiple pressures, the universities, therefore, tend to give up their autonomy in trying to be relevant and responsive to multiple demands. Thus, Kasozi (2003: 116) points out that given that universities access public and private funds '...to train students who will seek jobs in a changing and competitive job market, to tap research funds at home and abroad, to justify their existence to the public and to set internal mechanisms of control, they have no option but to give up part of their institutional autonomy by subjecting themselves to external judgment on agreed quality indicators'.

The role of the leader in this regard is to resist changes that may impact negatively on roles and mission of a university. Theories about leadership contend that the leader should take a responsive role, which is concerned with adapting the organization to demands and constraints imposed by its environment. The role of the leader is to obtain information on the state of the environment and estimate its implications on the organizational functioning of the university; that is what defines where to draw the line and resist external pressure. Thus, Sawyer argues that universities must reclaim their glory as places of scholarship and debate. But for this to happen university leadership

must take the initiative and resist the pressure to concede the core values of the university in the quest for the 'survival of the institution' (Sawyer 2004: 26). Leaders must resist conceding everything for the sake of survival. The task of leadership is to convince the public and government that the core value of the university goes beyond teaching and production of skills for the market, 'that indeed, the longer term interests of society are best served by the university as a thinking and learning space'.

Leadership and Declining Research

While research decline has already been alluded to before, it is imperative place particular stress on the trend of research going on in universities now. Although universities are part of the higher education system, what distinguishes them from other institutions of higher learning is that universities offer training and advance new knowledge while other tertiary institutions focus basically on training. According to Assie-Lumumba (2006: 9) training connotes the acquisition of technical skills aimed at performing specific tasks without necessarily an opportunity or the requirement for the learner to acquire competence in critical thinking, broader knowledge and character to understanding the wider education and societal contexts. But the pressure on university education has almost made this character impossible to maintain even in universities. Since the 1970s, universities in Africa and particularly Uganda, have seen unprecedented declines in research, training, and community service.

African universities have registered a decline in research and research based-training. Current indicators show that the contribution of African universities to international referred journals was registered at less than 2 per cent, and most of them coming from Egypt and South Africa (Muriisa 2010). In Uganda where over 30 universities are registered as operating, only Makerere University appears on the list of 50 best universities doing research. But the listing also appears one-sided since on the 100 best universities contributing to research in humanities and social sciences, Makerere University is not visible. This is not surprising, however, given that the challenges confronting the arts and social sciences in this institution have been clearly elaborated by Mamdani (2007). The decline in research outputs of the university has largely been attributed to public financing and financial governance (Muriisa 2010).

This paper challenges notions of decline of financing since there is enough evidence showing that while public financing of universities in Uganda has declined over time, overall university finances have increased over time; that universities have reaped highly from private financial contribution resulting from student fees, international donor transfers and other non-public financial sources (Mamdani 2007). With the increase in financial resources from other

sources and limited research outputs, Muriisa (2010) contends that good financial practice and transparency are to blame for the abdication of the core roles of the university. In this paper, I argue that beyond good financial practice there is the indisputable role of leadership as the central factor in financial planning. Moreover, studies have shown that declining public funding does not necessarily lead to a decline in research and scholarship (Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson 1996; Clark 1998, 2001; Geiger 1986). These researches show that the growth of research universities in Britain and United States took place despite a decline in public funding for universities (Clark 1998; Geiger 1986). In the United States, for example, there was a cutback in federal funding of research in the 1980s, and the universities responded by seeking other sources of funds, notably from industry, something similar to what has taken place in Uganda recently.

In Uganda, public funding reduced but money from other sources such as private programmes increased (Mamdani 2007). In spite of the increase in funding, research outputs did not increase. There are a number of reasons why research did not increase; priority spending on the students' and staff well fare, limited time for researchers to do research since much of time is dedicated to teaching and brain circulation – what Mamdani (2007) refers to as moonlighting – since most new universities do not have capacity in terms of staff and the few qualified staff, especially at PhD level, keep moving between universities. Leadership theories present that leaders should have competences and knowledge skills and, as earlier indicated, leadership in universities involves a multitude of persons, including lecturers, who must do research. Without a staffing profile with the requisite capacity (holding PhDs) it is hard for universities to successfully pursue a research role. It is argued that university leadership follows a set of principles akin to shared governance which partly recognizes that 'faculty and professional staff are in the best position to shape and implement curriculum and research policy...' (Klitgaard 2008: 4). Thus, the top executive of the university have limited power to influence decisions. This argument agrees with Lwakabamba's argument that leadership takes place at all levels of the organization and every individual in the organization shares responsibility in leading.

Taken beyond the level of every individual in the organization, it should be noted that most of the top positions in some of these universities are filled with people without PhDs. Tables 1 and 2 show, for example, that staff establishment of Mbarara University of Science and Technology as of June 2011 and January 2015 was only about 30 per cent of the approved establishment. It is especially bereft of the required staffing at the top leadership positions (from senior lectureship to professorial grades). The tables that the positions that

should direct and influence research are clearly not filled. Staff establishment is dominated by people who do not have the required training of doing research. How can such staff inspire others? It is argued that knowledge workers respond to inspiration and not to supervision. Without knowledge and required training (at PhD level) to do research, leaders cannot inspire others to do research. To inspire others, one must lead by example and lead by doing, so that others and subordinates can follow the leaders' paths. With this limitation, inspirational leadership in universities is seriously lacking.

Table 1: Approved vis-à-vis available academic staff establishment at Mbarara University 2011 June²

Category/Rank	Approved	Available	Shortfall
Professor	69	3	66
Associate Professor	76	8	68
Senior Lecturers	102	25	77
Lecturers	162	99	63

Source: Mbarara University (2010) as cited in Muriisa (2013).

Table 2: Approved vis-à-vis Available Academic Staff Establishment at Mbarara University as of January 2015

Category/Rank	Approved	Available	Shortfall
Professor	69	10*	59
Associate Professor	76	16*	60
Senior Lecturers	102	39	63
Lecturers	162	85	77

Source: Mbarara University Human Resource office Documents-Staff establishments

* *The above staff includes expatriates*

Table 2 shows that staff increase did take place especially at the level of professor, associate professor and senior lecturer where the biggest increase did take place. Another observation shows that there was a decline in the number of lecturers from 99 in 2011 to 85 in 2014. A close examination shows that the rate of decline is the same rate of increase in the number of senior lecturers

(14). The implication of this is that staff establishment did not widen, rather it was as a result of internal promotions. Thus one can therefore say that staff increase at various levels was vertical rather than horizontal which would result into increasing staff numbers through recruitment of new staff. It should also be noted that Mbarara University follows a simple motivational strategy of promoting staff who may not be necessarily competent to handle research. Immediately they complete their Master's programme, they are automatically promoted to the rank of lecturer, a position long abandoned by Makerere University in favour of obtaining a PhD to be promoted to this rank. This may also apply to becoming a senior lecturer especially by appealing to the human resource manual which allows management to waive any condition for promotion. Appendix 5.0 of Mbarara University Human Resource Manual (HRM)³ states thus 'In exceptional circumstances, the Appointments Board may waive any of these (*conditions to be fulfilled e.g. number of publications in the case of academic staff*) requirements' (MUST Human Resource Manual, pp. 74). The human resource manual, therefore, provides room for manoeuvre and manipulation.

Leadership and Governance of the University

Governance is the process through which organizations, such as universities, direct and controls their functions and relate to their stakeholders in order to achieve their missions and objectives. It relates to the process of decision-making and processes through which decisions are implemented, or otherwise. The implementation of decisions depends on the internal organization of the organization. If organizations are not well structured, this may pose a challenge to leaders and implementers of programmes. Thus, Thomas (2003) points out that internal organization – structure, size of the organization, age of the organization, etc – all matter and exerts influence on the leadership. But leadership may have a role to play in influencing the internal structure of the organization. Recently, Makerere University changed its organizational structure to adopt the collegiate system. Mbarara University of Science and Technology's Faculty of Development Studies with all its Undergraduate programmes, was replaced with the Institute of Interdisciplinary Training and Research (IITR) with an argument that Teaching and Research will improve. The leadership of the New Institute undertook a new turn and produced two new undergraduate programmes; a gamble that the top leadership has now overruled in the interest of research and teaching of the undergraduate service course (this is a course in development studies taught to all other undergraduate students in other faculties and institutes). We are yet to see whether the college system and the restructuring at Mbarara University may have influence on scholarship and

overall university performance. For effective performance, universities need leadership that can organize universities in a manner that allows unhindered scholarship and knowledge generation. Obanya (2007: 36) clearly states that the major problem facing African higher education institutions has been that of putting their homes in order, by instituting effective management, by developing and nurturing strategic plans, by resisting political interference, by frequently re-examining themselves, by investing in quality issues, and by practical engagement in national development issues. This may take place when leadership issues are given consideration, especially given the fact that leadership has responsive, discretionary and symbolic roles; roles that impact greatly on scholarship and performance of universities in general.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented that universities in Africa and Uganda in particular are confronted with many challenges that have created a new crisis. I have indicated that a lot of these challenges have been discussed, for example, in Zelesa and Olukoshi (2004). Different conferences including the UNESCO 1998 Paris conference, have discussed how African universities can be reformed to improve scholarship, training and community service. In all these endeavours, little consideration has been given to leadership challenges.

Universities in Africa and Uganda in general have faced skilled manpower and leadership challenges. From brain drain to brain circulation, clearly African universities do not have enough skilled manpower to confront the challenges of African Universities. This paper has argued that the available skilled leadership, confronted with increased internal and external pressure has paid much attention to outside focus – knowledge economy than support for research, quality teaching and community service. I have presented that universities are under pressure (internal and external) to perform according to government requirements, and to produce according to market demand. Society – government and the market – has given up their role and they look up to the universities for finished products (university graduates) for them to be successful. I have presented that the relevance of universities is thus measured by universities' ability to produce these finished products.

I have argued that confronted with different challenges, universities have changed focus; from research-based teaching to market-based vocational teaching; from research for the sake of knowledge to commissioned research and short-term consultancies; and from community service to internship and student placements. Given this change of direction, it is concluded that the universities should rethink these roles and retrace their steps. It is in this light that the paper draws its argument that proper leadership is the central thing

missing since a focused and thoroughbred leadership – working as planners, resource mobilizers, initiators of university programmes, and serving as role models – is what would ultimately put the universities back on course. The paper thus concludes that leadership is as important as any other crisis facing the universities in Africa and Uganda today. Proper leadership remains the missing link for effective and visionary performance of universities. It is thus recommended that universities' performance may not improve until leadership is given critical attention.

Notes

1. Research universities are clearly distinct from other universities in a sense that research guides the operations of such university but universities themselves as a precondition for their existence must do research, research based teaching and knowledge dissemination, to make them distinct from skills-based training institutions.
2. By this date, there were no fresh recruitments and promotions
3. <http://www.must.ac.ug/sites/default/files/Human%20Resource%20Manual.pdf>
11/08/14
4. Added explanation

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