MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCILS IN CO-OPERATIVE GOVERNANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA: RESEARCH RESULTS

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Objectives of the presentation

- To outline the history of student governance.
- To provide a legislative framework of the HE sector.
- To provide a brief history of students’ role in HE governance pre 1994.
- To provide the role of students in HE post 1994 per the HE Act 1997 as amended and Universities Statute.
- Co-operative governance and the role of students.
- Participation of the SRC in the governance of HEIs
- Provide research results.
Introduction

History of student governance

- Pre 1994: no voice for students; SRC not legislated; campuses were sites of struggle for liberation, students played a key role; strikes, protests, brutality by police, arrests, convictions, HEIs viewed with disdain as furthering apartheid policies
- SRC participation to be understood in the context of governance, leadership & management of HE sector, but also steering of HE by DHET, distrustful relationships amongst, HESA, HEIs & DHET
• People’s education movement:

  • played a critical role in instilling values of democratisation of governance in HE, but also
  • Ensuring that the quality of education is improved.
  • Thus, solid foundations were laid before 1994, democratic values were practically infused, by mass mobilisation in the society, with students being the integral component.
  • The above was paramount in the birth of the spirit of constitutionalism in SA HE landscape
• **Important policy documents**: National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) report of 1996 – midwife, birth of co-operative governance

• Education White Paper 3 of 1997: laid guidelines for a single democratic HE

• Higher Education Act, Act 101 of 1997, sec 35

• National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (2001)

• Guidelines for Mergers and Incorporations of 2003 determined the shape and size of HEIs transformation of the public higher education sector in its broadest sense - case of merging un unmerging of MEDUSA & UL

• HE Act 1997 increased and broadened participation of the SRCs, as statutory bodies

• Stakeholders to be committed to the values of co-operative governance (accountability, efficiency, responsiveness to societal interests and needs, and cooperation in partnerships and governance).
Introduction continued

• These principles are vital in moving towards realising the intricate concept of transformation, thereby ensuring co-operative governance is practiced.

• “The principle of democratisation requires that governance of the system of higher education and of individual institutions should be democratic, representative and participatory and characterised by mutual respect, tolerance and the maintenance of a well-ordered and peaceful community life. Structures and procedures should ensure that those affected by decisions have a say in making them, either directly or through elected representatives. It requires that decision-making processes at the systemic, institutional and departmental levels are transparent, and that those taking and implementing decisions are accountable for the manner in which they perform their duties and use resources” (White Paper, 1997: 1.19).
Functions of SRCs

- Section 35 of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 provides for the establishment of SRCs at the public higher education institutions of South Africa. The section further provides that “the establishment and composition, manner of election, term of office, functions and privileges of the students’ representative council of a public higher education institution must be determined by the Institutional statute” (HE Act 101 of 1997).
- SRC is a critical component of effective communication between students and university management.
- SCR’s overarching purpose, is to provide students with an opportunity to voice views, suggestions and concerns through a proper and efficient process.
- SRCs suggest, develop and implement solutions, that are campus specific and university wide.
Co-operative governance in SA

Conceptual and historical perspectives:

Hall et al (2002)-DoE was aware that governance in HEIs characterised by struggles for control, lack of consensus, conflict over differing interpretations of HE transformation.

• Thus, working within framework of reconstruction and development, the NCHE sought to resolve campus conflicts, which disabled HE in SA.
• NCHE moved rapidly to transform HE & instil good management practices without violating academic principles.
• Co-operative governance calls for collaborative working relationships envisaged within shared governance. Mandew (2003) collegial model.
• This concept calls for a social contract argument in which diverse parties agree to suspend their subject interest in the interest of reconstruction & development
Co-operative governance cont

Du Toit (2014)

- Co-operative is a contentious issue, interpretation & implementation
- Du Toit explored the genealogy of concept, NCHE was key in its origin
- Failure by DoE & stakeholders to consummate the founding commitment to the call for shared & self-binding principles of co-operative governance made by NCHE
- Jurisprudential or epistemological origin of co-operative governance is key to understand & contextualise it. German federal values adapted to unitary SA.
- Co-operative governance in public HEIs in SA (HE Act 1997 as amended)
Key concepts in co-operative governance

• Cooperation and partnerships in governance

For any democratic governance to succeed there needs to be cooperation and partnership amongst the different stakeholders. Within the HEIs, the key institutional structures are the Council, Institutional Forum, Senate and the SRC. This cooperation and partnership can best be guided by legislation; the Higher Education Act of 1997 regulates the relations of the above stakeholders within the HEIs.

• Democratization

Through the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997(as amended) HEIs are urged to be democratic organisations by ensuring that all the stakeholders are represented in decision making processes. For the purposes of this study, there is indeed democratization in the public HEIs as the students are represented in the decision making bodies such as the Institutional Forum, Senate and Council. The involvement and participation of students in the above bodies, as legislated, denotes that HEIs are democratic organisations.
Key concepts in co-operative governance

- Effectiveness and efficiency

Effectiveness and efficiency in HEIs can be achieved when key stakeholders work collaboratively consultatively and decisions are taken in tandem. Contested interests need to be debated and an amicable consensus reached. In co-operative governance, SRC should be effective in the governance of student affairs. Management at public HEIs needs to capacitate the SRCs to carry their duties effectively and efficiently.
Participation of the SRC in the governance of HEIs

- Origins of SRCs in SA public HEIs can be traced from the establishment of SA Univ College 1829 (now UCT) clubs & societies
- Badat (1994), Maseko (1984),
- Traditional struggle organisations: SASO, SANSCO, SASCO, AZASCO, PASMA
- Political student organisations. Mandew (2003), Tabane et al. (2003)
- Establishment of political party branches/youth leagues on campuses: ANCYI, YCL, DASO, FF+, UDESMO, AFRIFORUM
Participation of the SRC cont

Klemencic 2012: 636). The following explains four levels of participation:

Access to information

This is the basis for all subsequent levels of participation. It implies a one-way provision of information from the institutional administration to representative student bodies. The administration should ensure that there is open and free access to documents related to relevant institutional policies and decisions.
Participation of the SRC cont

Partnership
A partnership implies shared responsibilities in each step of the institutional decision-making process: agenda setting, drafting, decision-taking, implementation and monitoring of institutional decisions. It is the highest form of participation. At this level, representative student bodies and administration cooperate closely and broadly while respecting the independence of student representation. Student representatives participate in decision-making bodies typically with full voting rights. They are also delegated particular implementation activities (Klemencic 2011: 13).
Consultation

- At this level, administration solicits student representatives’ opinion on specific issues. It provides information and then asks for comments, views and feedback. Consultation is one of the fundamental elements of democracy. Constant sharing of ideas is imperative in terms of getting the general feelings of the stakeholders in an organisation. Consultation between the university governance structures and the SRC could enable a healthy environment of taking every stakeholder on board in terms of decision making. This should however not be at the expense of vigorous debates. In order for the SRC to be effective and realise the elements of co-operative governance issues should be tabled and robustly debated.
Participation of the SRC cont

Dialogue
A student representative body and administration should hold regular (formal or informal) exchange of views built on mutual interests and potentially shared objectives. Practically, this means that student representatives are involved in various consultative committees where they perform advisory functions or are informally consulted on a regular basis (for example through meetings). They also have opportunities to launch their own agenda issues. However, they do not have formal decision-making powers, such as that of voting or veto rights. If dialogue can be fostered between the SRC and management and a certain degree of decision-making given to the SRC especially on crucial student matters, dialogue could be an effective tool of communication and transformation on campuses. Real dialogue can only occur in a healthy environment, where parties have a common goal, guided by democratic principles, procedures and shared values.
Research Results

Literature

- Need for increased and broadened participation of the SRCs
- Need for commitment to the values of co-operative governance: accountability, efficiency, responsiveness to societal interests and needs, cooperation in partnerships and governance.
- Challenges in HEIs aggravated by the regulatory framework and legislative amendments
- The validity of co-operative governance challenged both at national and institutional level.
- Debate amongst stakeholders in the HE sector to realise the ideals of co-operative governance and recommendations by NCHE
- Challenges of ideological differences amongst student political structures has negative impetus towards SRCs- e.g. mandates from parties
Research Results continued

Descriptive statistics
Three factors identified & statistically analysed:

1) **SRC participation** in governance of public HEIs
   - Perceptions of the SRC members, challenges in participating in key governance structures as such its ineffective

2) **Democratisation**
   - Perceptions of SRC members, there is no participatory democracy in public HEIs not adequate platforms for SRC voice to be heard by management therefore non-adherence to the imperatives of co-operative governance

3) **SRCs understanding of university governance**
   - SRCs understanding, is comprehensive.
   - Therefore, SRCs are knowledgeable about co-operative governance, participation is meaningful
Research Results continued

Inferential statistics: chi-square: Two null hypotheses:

1. There is no statistically significant correlation between SRC’s involvement in university governance and their perceptions of the implementation of co-operative governance in public HEIs in SA. - Hypothesis was rejected, thus, SRC involvement in university governance plays a major role in how they perceive the implementation of co-operative governance in their institutions.

2. There is no statistically significant correlation between SRC’s participation in university governance and their perceptions of the implementation of co-operative governance in public HEIs in SA. - Hypothesis was rejected, therefore, SRC participation in university governance plays a major role in how they perceive the implementation of co-operative governance in their institutions.
Research Results continued

ANOVA results

• There are no statistically significant differences amongst perceptions by SRCs at different types of universities with regard to their perceptions pertaining to SRC participation in public HEIs in SA. Type of university has impact on participation.

• There are no statistically significant differences amongst perceptions by SRCs at different types of universities with regard to their perceptions pertaining to democratisation in public HEIs in SA. Type of university has impact on democratisation.

• There are no statistically significant differences amongst perceptions by SRCs at different types of universities with regard to their perceptions pertaining to SRC understanding of university governance in public HEIs in SA.

• Type of university has no impact on the SRC understanding of university governance.
Suggestions for future research

- Dedicated research in co-operative governance on each type of public HEIs in South Africa.
- Best practices on how participative democracy can be practiced in public higher education institutions in South Africa.
- Capacitation and empowerment of student representative councils in public HEIs in South Africa.
- Development of effective and representative central SRCs in multi-campus universities.
- Investigation into the effective implementation of co-operative governance in public HEIs in South Africa.
- Research on the different youth organisations that emerged in the last decade such as DASO, SADESMO, Afriforum can nuance the role of different student formations in student governance.
- Lastly, research on the involvement and participation of SRCs in co-operative governance at private HEIs in South Africa.
9 qualities of servant leader

1. Values diverse opinions
2. Cultivates a culture of trust
3. Develops other leaders
4. Helps people with life issues
5. Encourages
6. Sells instead of tells
7. Thinks you, not me
8. Things long term
9. Acts with humility