

Is the Academic Degree Certificate the Bogeyman in the Quest of Ascending to Power? A Kenyan Case

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Abstract: In the run up to the country's August 9th general elections in 2022, there arose cases where some aspirants chances of being on the ballot were almost dashed away due to the purported questionable degree qualifications. It is thus imperative as a country to have a common stand in relation to our education qualifications and job placements, more so in the political sphere; that also match what is being practiced in other jurisdictions. Education and political leadership should thus be taken seriously in terms of executing service delivery to the people. In addition, this will be a clear testimony to the public on the pivotal role that education plays, where research has proven its greatest contribution to country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Keywords: Education, Politician, Authenticity, Degree, University

1. Introduction

Since the inception of the concepts power and politics, one philosopher Plato held the view that leadership is a niche for the chosen few, who are highly educated to accomplish their mandates. This is the group of persons he referred to as the philosopher kings. This is the base that most scholars pro political leaders having sophisticated education derive from (Carnes & Lupu, 2015). Political leaders in the country carry a lot of expectations to their electorates in terms of carrying out development, education, empowering the public in the economic sphere and so forth. This therefore implies that they need to be equipped knowledge wise to meet the people's minimum requirements and for their political tenure survival (Paul, 2022). We have had of cases where academic qualifications to some politicians were being purchased, and some being elected because of their wealth and family name. This has left some of them to be passive participants in the National Assembly. There is thus no point of electing a person who will only go to the August house to make acknowledgements when the speaker poses the question "will as many of that opinion say high or neigh..." when voting to different bills.

Elected leaders according to our constitution are considered as state officers who should satisfy required academic and ethics of conduct. It is important to note that chosen leaders will be tasked with vetting the

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appointed senior government officers, most of who are highly qualified (Mwiria, 2012). To the contrary, imagine an elected member of parliament with a form four level of education participating in vetting a full professor who is nominated as a cabinet secretary in the government; is there any logic in the foregoing?

This status quo also touches on the huge salary pay checks they receive on a monthly basis vis-à-vis the low salaried personnel with much higher academic credentials. As the international system is competitive, top world leaders have sophisticated academic credentials. For instance, in a study that was conducted by Kamat (2017), it found that 55 percent of world leaders had graduate degrees in humanities and social sciences, with over half of them possessing post graduate degrees. This is an approach that has succeeded in China that has risen to be among the world super power house, with its strict focus on its education as a driving pillar for socio economic and political change, through the philosophy of Confucius, that key educational mandate is to birth officials (Li, 2010). It is through China's strong educational institution that gives a clear indicator of how the country will fare in all spheres in a century or so (Li, 2010). As Kenyans, we need to ask ourselves this critical question, how is our political sphere going to be in the next century in relation to the institutions we have in place?

2. Arguments for Having Learned Political Leaders

Education is a process that equips one with an eagle eye and spirit of drawing pragmatic solutions to societal challenges, in diverse fields such as political, economic, social and technological sectors. In essence, going for education and attaining the academic qualifications is equated to finding an antidote to the populace sufferings and misery (K4D, 2017). Countries that have had the opportunity to be served by learned leaders have made positive strides due to their tendency to incorporate the spirit of democracy, togetherness and respect to the rule of law. An example in the African continent is President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania that brought the ideology of socialism through ujamaa; and President Nelson Mandela that led South Africans to the first Black African rule; with all handing over power in peace to their successors. Education is thus an important pillar that if utilized properly can pull huge milestones in a country. This is well captured by Igué (2010) who states that "The world today is driven by permanent competition where the only differentiating factor is intangible capital which, when applied properly, effectively compensates for a lack of natural resources". The solid foundation of the United States today was built at its establishment through its founding President George Washington with his perspective that leaders should go first. He did so through inviting great think tanks who brought diverse views for the growth of the nation at its early formation stage (Igué, 2010).

Since the attainment of independence, the country's first administration under the stewardship of President Jomo Kenyatta identified three issues that if they were conclusively addressed will have taken Kenyans to the promised land, that is, poverty, ignorance and diseases (Ochieng, 1989). To be honest with ourselves, most of these independent leaders lacked degree qualifications, but soldiered on based on the spirit of togetherness and the urge of bringing freedom to its people. However, social scientists hold the view that people and society are not static, and hence keep on changing overtime. In relation to the subject of political leadership, there have been added challenges to leaders globally. For instance, since the millennium, there have emerged cases of terrorism and security instability in different parts of the world such as Africa and Asia, there has been the emergence of corruption, increased unemployment especially among the youth, global warming and climate change et cetera.

These are challenges that Kenya as a country has not been exempted from. This therefore calls for a paradigm shift from the manner in which we either elect or even appoint different leadership to represent the interest of all Kenyans. In a nutshell, the leadership at the time of independence, though not learned succeeded because of the main aim of getting independence, but that cannot be matched with the current challenges. There is a divergent perspective on electing leaders who possess university degrees, as they hold that leadership and education are two different entities, whose correlation is not distinct; and that the latter only needs public and political goodwill to thrive (Ouma, 2022). In essence, there has been an ongoing discourse about the need of technocrats to run public service offices in order to steer servant leadership as opposed to politicians.

Politicians tend to operate using subjective techniques such as divide and rule, popularity politics, favouring their political cronies, as compared to technocrats who use logical theorizations to formulate solutions to teething problems. This status quo of leaving the politicians to provide solutions has led to what the public refer to as “the politics of tumbocracy” which literary means politics of deceit, self-gain and one aimed at benefiting ones stomach. However, Ouma (2022) holds the view that the intellectuals within the country have been our major undoing in crafting a solid ideology that will guide the institutions in place in helping achieve its long term development goals. Even though the intellectuals are partially to be blamed for the problems bedeviling our social spheres, it is important to note that, politicians wild much influence to the public that surpasses what the appointed technocrats can influence, thus tinkering with their objective execution of their mandates. Political leadership in the country should be taken with a lot of seriousness, since the elected leaders interact and source for resources for the benefit of their electorates both locally and internationally. This is what Hans J. Morgenthau in international relations refers to as international politics, which revolves around power relations beyond the country’s borders. Therefore, having a learned politician will enhance faster delivery of projects, due to their ability to identify the problem, draw up an action plan, execute and provide solid feedbacks through appropriate monitoring and evaluation for the benefit of their people (Owillla, 2021).

In order to understand those pro political leaders having a university degree, this paper associates with James Rousseau’s two tenets of understanding power relations that include the individual and office responsibility. At an individual level, he was of the view that different personalities approach issues different; and thus in our case, learned leaders tend to push for massive growth through innovative ideas as compared to those with limited academic qualifications. For instance, change and development is a process that is influenced by certain pathways or theories that include: linear model which pictures a society that is constantly in motion towards change from a primitive to a more advanced stage, as it is inevitable; cyclic model which resembles change of society to living organisms who are born, grow and die through a certain lifetime period that is referred to as the persons year of observation (PYO); dialectical model which considers changes at hand to be attributed to the renewal of existing structures; and center periphery model that holds changes to originate from a central location and diffused to other regions. In a nutshell, therefore, change and development within countries is planned and not spontaneous, thus requires a learned political leader that can analyze and choose the right plan to steer growth in their elected areas of jurisdiction. For instance, as a country, we need to ask ourselves where were the good people to come up with vision 2030 among other plans before their establishment.

Despite having a clearly laid out job description for particular offices, the office holders are influenced by their unique idiosyncrasies. In essence, Yu and Jong-A-Pin (2016) states:

Political leaders can maximize their time in office in different ways. They can increase the welfare of all citizens or may choose only to assure the welfare of a small elite to safeguard their position.

In a different thought, Mitra (2020) states:

...politics can be defined as an art of influencing the decision makers, by logic/reason/principles/policies, in regards to formulation of policy/guidelines/principles to direct the functioning of an organization/individual/group to meet/achieve the interest or ideology, of an individual or that of a smaller group within the group, while maintaining a positive relation between/among the members of the group in arriving to a common decision, and avoid all possible conflict by installing policies that prevents the conflict between the various interest groups.

To this end, having educated leaders gives room for new ideas to be brought on board for the betterment of their respective countries. This is in tandem with a study that was conducted by Xi and Yao (2020), which found that having leaders in possession of sophisticated education resulted into bringing progressive reforms and policies in different societal spheres.

Secondly, office responsibility is another crucial area, as it outlines the roles that are expected to be conducted by the office holders. One of the minimum requirements revolves around the academic qualifications. Therefore, it is difficult for all electorates to air their grievances in the national or county assemblies, and hence the task has been delegated to their elected leaders. According to the constitution of Kenya (2010), it states that:

95(1) The National Assembly represents the people of the constituencies and special interest in the National Assembly, (2) The National Assembly deliberates on and revolves issues of concern to the people,(3) The National Assembly enacts legislation in accordance with part 4 of this chapter, 4(a) determines the allocation of national revenue between the levels of government, as provided in part 4 of chapter 2; (b) appropriates funds for expenditure by the national government and other national state organs; and (c) exercises oversight over national revenue and its expenditure.

Elected leaders have the key mandate of oversight, legislation and representing their electorate. In terms of oversight, the leadership academic credentials come in handy in terms of budgeting and allocation of resources, monitoring on proper utilization of resources through relevant committees such as parliamentary accounts committee (PAC). This task requires leaders that are well conversant with arithmetic, who can handle big budgets for the benefit of Kenyan electorates. Legislation enables appropriate by laws to be formulated in the national and county assemblies for the benefit of the populace (Mwiria, 2012). This task involves collaborating with relevant stakeholders, like civil society groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious groups, the youth, women and the elderly in order to deduce their concerns and draft appropriate bills to address their concerns (The Monitor, 2021).

Political leaders play a pivotal role in ensuring that there is quality education in their area of jurisdiction. In the country, the members of parliament (MPs) have been using the National Government-Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) partly to build new schools and renovate the existing ones. These initiatives majorly succeed in cases where the leaders are educated, and fully understand the importance of education to an individual. This position is in line with the study findings of Bastos and Sánchez (2021), that found highly educated leaders spend 5-10 percent more of total expenditure in planning activities and about 23 percent less on transportation. This clearly shows that they know how to put the priority areas first, and drawing plans on how to implement them.

3. Recommendations

The Commission for University Education (CUE) has been feeling the heat from politicians especially during general elections, during the authentication and clearing of their higher education certifications. To some, they even lack the authentic certifications, but tend to use force just to be on the ballot. It is the position of this paper that:

One, the CUE should strictly go digital, where all the graduates from different university details should be availed by their respective universities for authentication and storage purposes. This will enable all graduates to have a unique number at the CUE, just like other institutions such as National Social Security Fund (NSSF), National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF), Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC), Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) and so forth. This move will create a “one stop shop” where any employer or concerned person can login and ascertain the validity of degree certificates. This will ease the pressure that CUE faces at the time of elections when required to clear candidates.

Secondly, the legislature should come up with an appropriate law to allow CUE to go digital, and be able to store data of all university graduates for present and future purposes. This will help reduce cases where if an individual’s degree is questionable, they ask him to produce many items such as; the degree certificate, transcripts, graduation booklet, students identification card, graduation photographs and payment receipts.

4. Conclusion

It is the position of this paper that highly educated leadership will translate to massive development programs, due to the generation of new ideas and experiences that are pro development. This is a position that should be embraced by the Kenyan electorates, and move away from the culture of electing popular leaders based on their financial strength, family name, ethnicity and so forth. In essence, political leaders just like other civil servants are paid through the tax payers’ money. The minimum academic qualification for entry position in civil service is a degree. There is thus no need of having a discourse of whether political leaders such as the president, governors, senators and members of parliament should have a degree or not, but rather it should be to the affirmative. Lastly, the CUE should also be strengthened in terms of scrutinizing and authenticating the quality of higher education credentials, and further digitizes its records for easier retrieval and accessibility.

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