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## Public Participation and Performance of Chartered Public Universities in Kenya

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### Abstract

The study evaluated the relationship between public participation and performance of chartered public Universities in Kenya. The study was anchored on social network theory. To achieve the objective, the study was based on a pragmatic philosophy and mixed research method with a target population of 31 chartered public Universities. Census approach was used with 234 respondents who were university top managers. Primary data was collected using a 5 point Likert type questionnaire. The instrument was validated by research experts and yielded a Cronbach's reliability alpha of  $\alpha = 80.6$ . Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that public participation had statistical significant influence on performance of chartered public universities in Kenya. Regression analysis results showed that public participation alone accounted for 24.9 % of the variation of performance of chartered public Universities (PP) ( $R^2=0.249$ ,  $t=14.20$  p,  $<0.05$ ). This study concluded that public participation is an essential strategy Universities can use in their endeavour to improve on their performance. It was recommended that managers of universities should promote participatory management practice to enhance high morale, commitment and enthusiasm among staff in the pursuit and attainment of institutional goals and objectives. Further, the results present important implications to University top managers, other corporate entities, policy makers, and stakeholders in the University education sector in Kenya and across the world.

**Keywords:** Public participation Practices, Public Participation, Performance, Public Universities

## Introduction

Kenyan universities have been criticised for many reasons by the stakeholders among them press, parents, opinion leaders and the public. Among the criticisms, is failure to achieve their goals in terms of producing the quality of graduates needed to fast track national development agenda (Munene, 2019). The failure to achieve the objectives and goals of university education is sparking public outcry that most Kenyan graduates are unemployable and that they do not match with the market demands (Tricker, 2011). This is worrying given that poor quality of graduates is capable of crippling a nation's economic advancement. These issues have been attributed to general low funding of university education, inadequate facilities, poor remuneration and general work conditions of staff among other things (Mwiria, 2018). Consequently, government has made some improvement of universities through University Fund Board, Commission for University Education and Salaries and Remuneration Commission to revitalization improved working conditions and salaries of university staff across board. Yet, many universities still fall below expectation (CUE, 2021). According to Vinten (2001), this could be due to the missing link among various stakeholders in identifying the most critical factor in the public participation in the pursuit of organizational performance. Many university administrators adopt counterproductive management practices that do not involve members of the university community in decision making process and formulation of institutional plans. This they do in a pretext to avoid beauracatic bottlenecks, delay and unnecessary waste of time. Therefore, most plans and decision meet stern resistance from stakeholders due to dissatisfaction (Petra, 2006). This leads to lack of commitment and poor performance thus dwindling the attainment of the goals of the universities. This could be attributed to the failure of managers to adopt modern public participation that emphasize democratic principles of inclusion, collaboration, and collective participation. Therefore, the problem of the study is to determine the influence of public participation on performance of chattered public universities in Kenya.

This paper is organized as follows: following the introduction part, a second part is a literature review with theoretical and empirical studies that shed light on linkage between theory and practice. The third part highlight methodology used in the study. The forth part is on validity and reliability followed by the results and discussions of the findings. Finally, this paper concludes with key points, recommendations, future research directions and an acknowledgement of the contributors.

## Review of Literature

### Theoretical Review

This study was anchored on social network theory advanced by (William N. Dunn, 1983) to conceptualize the relationship between public participation and performance of chattered public Universities in Kenya. The theory was found appropriate for the study because of its philosophy and patterns which are based on the interaction among stakeholders and various forms of partnership between ownership and control as suggested by (Visconti, 2019). According to Shabbir and Padget (2005), social network posits that University setting is complex in nature and the role of strategy in attaining competitive advantage is of paramount importance. Faust (1997) indicate that social network theory is a sociology-based theory that build upon the relational dimension. It is built on the conceptualization of nodes, the actors in a network, and ties, and the relations existing between those actors. The theory is grounded in three principles. First, the behaviour of a node is influenced by the behaviour of other nodes

in the network. This means that nodes do not act independently from one another, they are mutually dependent. Second, the ties between nodes form the basis for the exchange of both goods and ideas. In other words, the ties channel the transmission of information through the network. Third, these ties have the ability to create structures among the actors in the network that can influence their behaviour (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). The theory links to public participation issues for instance ownership structure and the link between many or few nodes of shareholders with the University and other stakeholders (Faust, 1997). Each shareholder represents a node that is linked to other edges with other nodes. Nodes have different degree of importance (Visconti, 2019). Figure 1 below show different social networks that exist in the Universities.

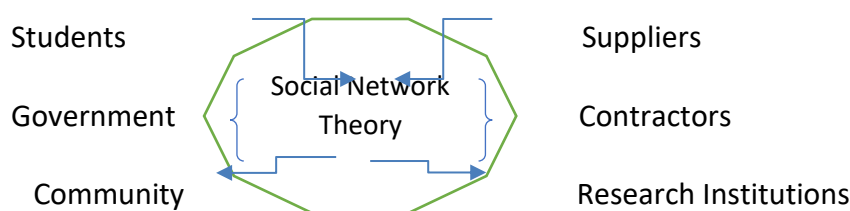


Figure: 1- Social Network; Source: Authors, 2021

According to Shabbir and Padget (2005), the social network theory emphasizes participation and teamwork that result to strong internal public participation structures that help improve University performance. It holds that there is need for the setting up of rules and incentives to align the behaviour of managers to the desires of owners (Hawley and Williams, 1996), thus it determines the governance mechanisms to be adhered through formulation of codes of public participation in order to reduce firm conflicts and attain wealth maximization through enhanced performance. The social network theory therefore enriched the study by creating an understanding of the need to be transparent and involve people in decision making for superior University performance. Social network theory acknowledges that Universities do not only exist merely to teach, but has a responsibility to serve a wider social purpose and interests (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Thus, there is need to take all their interests into consideration while making corporate strategic decisions (Freeman, 1984 a; 2010 b; Lawal, 2012). It argues that Universities are expected to extend their fiduciary duty and social responsibility to the local community and the environment in which they operate (Freeman, 1984) hence providing a mechanism for collaborations. As such, corporations that conscientiously strive to serve the interests of all stakeholders build more value overtime translating to high performance (Freeman, 1984; Harrison and Wicks, 2013). The social network theory therefore is useful in the study for promoting an understanding of the relationship between University stakeholders and the overall University performance. Even through both public participation and network science are well grounded theories, their possible connection has been hardly investigated (Vermeulen, 2015).

### Empirical Review

Studies examining the association between public participation and firm performance so far point to a lack of consensus on the effect of public participation on firm performance majorly attributable to the existing conceptual, empirical and theoretical gaps inherent in the studies, thus making it hard to form a conclusive opinion as to whether there truly exists a reliable

linear relationship between the two variables. Evidence in the empirical literature is largely contradictory and debatable.

According to Mwebi (2017), institutions are established to pursue and achieve determined goals and objectives. Therefore, the goals and objectives of any institution serve as the benchmark for measuring its effectiveness. Hence, society and critical stake holders form expectations for institutions in line with the goals and objective they pursue. This makes the achievement of institutional goals critical to both managers and members of the organization. Universities all over the world, are established for the essential goal of producing high quality graduates that can compete favourably with their peers around the world and serve as critical manpower in all sectors of the economy (Mwiria, 2014). In keeping with this, the broad goals and objectives of University education system in Kenya were articulated in the Universities Act (2012) which include; advancement of knowledge through teaching, scholarly research and scientific investigation, promotion of learning in the student body and society generally; Promotion of cultural and social life of society; Objectives of university education, support and contribution to the realization of national economic and social development, promotion of the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research, education, training and retraining higher level professional, technical and management personnel, dissemination of the outcomes of the research conducted by the university to the general community, facilitation of life-long learning through provision of adult and continuing education, fostering of a capacity for independent critical thinking among its students, promotion of gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees and promotion of equalization for persons with disabilities, minorities and other marginalized groups.

Despite the increase of universities in Kenya, these noble goals and objectives seem not to be achieved as expected. The quality of Kenyan graduates has constantly been criticized of lacking the requisite skills and capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development. The study by the Institute of Human Resource Management Kenya (IHRM) as cited by Monyoncho (2015) observed that the quality of graduates from Kenyan universities is declining rapidly. Similarly, Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) lamented that the quality of Kenyan graduates does not meet the demands of industry. This indicates that Kenyan universities have not been able to achieve some of the goals of university education. The seeming inability of Kenyan universities to train the right mix and quality of graduates could be attributed to public participation practices that do not allow for effective participation of members of the university community (academic/non-academic) in the day to day affairs of university life. This is because, the success or failure of any organization highly relies on effective leadership and managerial practices. In fact, poor managerial practices affect employee's perception of institutional vision and values, potentially causing unhappiness and leading to a high turnover.

Hence, Koroma (2018) avers that, to circumvent potential negative impacts of managerial approach, there is need for conscious and conscientious development of competent leaders to enhance organizational sustainability. Therefore, public participation that ensures inclusion of all members of the university is key to achieving the goals and objectives of university. This is because, modern day universities are large and complex institutions with sophisticated and multifaceted units, missions, objectives and goals. Letting (2010) noted that universities operate as complex institutions rooted in participatory democracy with highly

professional and knowledgeable participants. This implies that management must seek to ensure effective involvement of staff and students in all aspects of university life.

Kassa (2017) noted that a leader who uses participative management style rather than making all decisions, seeks to involve other people thus improving commitment and increasing collaboration and networks which leads to better quality decisions for improved performance and hence sustainability. Kassa (2017) pointed out that a critical managerial challenge is the ability to mobilize others to want to get extraordinary things done in the organization. This involves the ability to collaborate or ensure adequate participation of critical stakeholders in the system through the development of a shared vision, mission and goals. Numerous studies on this subject point to the fact that employee involvement or participation in decision making does influence organizational commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness (Osim et al., 2012; Mbon, 2017; Arop et al., 2019; Bassey et al., 2019; Madukwe et al., 2019). To some, it lowers absenteeism, enhance work attitudes, and higher individual work performance (Buch and Spangler, 1990) lower employee turnover and increase returns on equity, improve organizational learning culture.

However, Akuegwu (2016) posits that, it is the combination of organizational structure that shapes university administration. It is the organizational structure adopted by different institutions that creates a framework of order and command through which the activities of the organization can be planned, organized, directed and controlled. Therefore, the organizational structure adopted could influence stakeholders' participation in the planning and decision-making activities of an organization. Basically, they are three major organizational structural patterns operated in the university namely the line, line and staff and the committee. The line is occupied by those directly responsible for the achievement of the primary objectives of the institution, while the line and staff comprise of key actors on the line and subsidiary support staff who perform advisory roles in the organization and occupy the horizontal axis and provide support services to line staff. In the line, and line and staff structure, an individual's rank, and position is key determinant of the level of participation in decision planning and decision-making process in the institution. On the other hand, the committee structures in university is a major platform that ensures high level of participation of both academic and non-academic staff in the process of decision making in spite of level or rank.

Akuegwu (2016) asserts that committees are meant for group involvement in institutional decision making and they facilitate task performance by enlisting the participation of staff in policy decisions. He further noted that committees constitute integral parts in the smooth operation of higher institutions worldwide. They are established at top management, faculty and departmental levels to cater for the administrative and academic needs and aspirations of the university, college, faculty, department or unit. There is an inexhaustible catalogue of committees in universities, they include: council committee, senate/academic board, staff discipline committee, appointment and promotion committees, steering committee on endowed chairs and foundations, admission committee, research development committee, committee of deans among others. These committees afford for high participation of staff in the decision making and planning processes of the university. Therefore, the assertion that participatory approach to decision making and planning is a critical factor to employee commitment to the achievement of group goals is stating the obvious. Hence, the need to

determine the influence of public participation on performance of Chattered Public Universities in Kenya.

Previous studies on public participation have given mixed results. According to a study by Waduge (2011) while examining the association between public participation and University performance pointed to lack of consensus on its effect on University performance. A cross sectional descriptive survey by Tusubira and Nkote (2013) examined the relationship between public participation and financial performance among private universities in Uganda revealed that Council and Senate size negatively affected the financial performance of private Universities while policy and decision making were found to significantly affect the financial performance of the Universities measured by actual revenue/budget revenue ratio and actual expenditure/budget expenditure ratio. A related study by (Ndiwalana et al., 2014) Ssekakubo and Lwanga (2014) among 59 savings, credit and cooperative societies in the same country found that public participation did not have any effect on the financial performance of savings, credit and cooperative societies in Uganda and therefore the study concluded that there is no relationship between public participation and firm performance, effectively demonstrating inconsistency with the conclusions made by (Tusubira and Nkote, 2013) among other researchers.

A study by Kamau (2018) using both descriptive and explanatory research designs among 162 financial institutions in Kenya to establish the influence of public participation on firm performance revealed that overall public participation had a significant influence on firm performance. Individual components of public participation however produced mixed results regarding their influence on firm performance. Board skills and committees were found to have significant and positive influence on performance of the financial institutions while board independence, board size, board diversity and codes of public participation (accountability, transparency, ethics, and fairness) were found to have no significant influence on firm performance among the financial institutions, thus demonstrating inconsistencies and similarities with other studies in equal measure. Firm performance was conceptualized in terms of financial soundness, customer focus, internal business processes, social equity, learning and growth and environmental consciousness. Also producing mixed results is a cross-sectional study conducted among 47 companies listed on the Nairobi Stock Exchange to establish the relationship between board of directors' attributes, strategic decision-making and corporate performance by (Letting ,2011) where the effect of various board attributes on corporate performance was assessed.

Another study by Okoko (2017) to investigate the relationship between public participation and firm performance among 40 insurance companies in Kenya revealed using panel data that overall, there exists a relationship between public participation and firm performance. Various attributes of the board however produced varying nature of relationships with firm return on assets used as the measure of performance. Board composition and frequency of board meetings were found to have positive relationship with performance while board size showed a negative relationship with firm performance among the insurance companies. Based on the reviewed literature, it is evident that there exists empirical literature on public participation from previous research work. However, the study notes that the literature available is limited and previous scholars have measured public participation against other variables in limited scope such as innovation performance, operational performance, financial

performance, board size and growth. The study also notes that most of studies conducted were among financial institutions such as commercial banks and insurance companies but no known study has linked public participation and performance of chartered public Universities. Hence, the objective of this study was:

- ❖ To evaluate the relationship between public participation and performance of chartered public Universities in Kenya.

**Hypothesis**

*H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant influence of public participation on performance of chartered Public Universities in Kenya.*

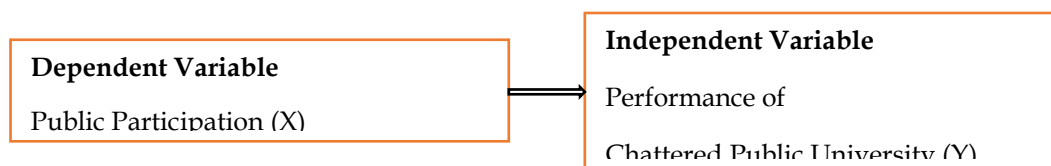


Figure: 2- Conceptual Framework; Source: Authors, 2021

**Methodology**

The study adopted mixed method research and in particular convergent parallel design. The design enabled the researcher to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand the research problem (Creswell and Clark, 2011). The study surveyed 31 public chartered Universities in Kenya. Primary data was obtained through semi structured questionnaires and an interview guide which was tested for validity using content validity and reliability internal consistency via Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) respectively. The questionnaire was designed on a five point Likert -type scale ranging from (1) - strongly disagree to (5) – strongly agree (Sekaran and Bougie, 2017); (Saunders, et al. 2017). Moreover, Pilot testing was done to ensure that the research tool was valid and reliable and also to improve its content validity (Cooper and Schilder, 2011). The target respondents were Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Finance Officers and Quality Assurance Officers because they were best placed to answer the research questions.

In this study, data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and standard deviation and presented inform of tables as well as inferential analysis using measures such as correlation and multiple regression analysis to establish the nature and magnitude of the relationships between the variables (Jobson, 2012). Regression analysis was conducted using linear and multiple regression models to determine the extent to which public participation affect performance of chartered public universities in Kenya. The multiple regression model was as follows.

**Equation**

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where

Y- Performance of chartered public universities,  $\beta_0$  = The intercept,  $\beta_3$  = Regression coefficients shows the change in the value of Y from a unit change in X, X- Public participation,  $\epsilon$  = Random error.



### Reliability of the Research Instruments

Reliability of the research instrument in this study was tested using internal consistency test. The internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) which indicates how well the items in a set are positively correlated to one another (Nunally, 1978). The study calculated the reliability of the study variables and the results are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Validity and Reliability Analysis*

Variable	Measure	Number of Dimensions	Cronbachs' Alpha	Comment
Public participation	Public participation	21	0.806	Reliable
<b>Total</b>		<b>21</b>		

Source: Researcher (2021)

### Results and Discussions

The study used descriptive and inferential statistics to make conclusions on the relationship existing between the study variables. The descriptive statistics provides a summary on the characteristics of the study variable through measures of central tendency: specifically, the mean and the standard deviation. Public participation practice was operationalised through public participation as advised by (Garaika et al., 2018). The descriptive results were as shown in Table 2.

### Descriptive Statistics

In order to establish responses made to the research items, the mean and standard deviation were determined. The mean gave indications on the average direction of the variable for each construct, while the standard deviation provided information on the level of dispersion from the mean. A low standard deviation meant that most of the responses group were around the mean.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Analysis: Public Participation Practice*

Indicator	SA		D		N		A		SA		M	SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Public participation	16	9.4	21	13	5	37	9	2	9	6	1	0
<b>Mean</b>											<b>2.1</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Source: Field Data (2021)

The results in table 2 found out that the respondents agreed that the chattered public universities were low on public participation. The level of public participation in chattered public universities recorded a mean score of 2.1 and a standard deviation of 0.0. The study found out that the respondents disagreed that there was public participation in chattered public universities.

The results of the study are consistent with the findings by (Agiri, 2020) that Universities in Kenya have not put in place enough emphasis on public participation, accountability, transparency and ethics mechanisms meant to institutionalize management practices to propel effective performance of the Universities. Public participation among Kenyan Universities is still generally weak and therefore require strengthening because it is positively and significantly related to University performance and that public participation significantly affects performance of universities in Kenya. Further, collaborated by observations of (Monyoncho, 2015) that lack of public participation and accountability in Kenyan Universities had created fertile grounds for corrupt and unethical tendencies and inefficiencies in the appointment and selection of University leaders and delivery of academic programmes which in turn negatively impacted on performance of the institutions in general. Rockoff and Turner (2010) found that a transparent system that evaluated universities based on a set of continuous metrics with focus on mathematics and English subjects significantly increased student achievement in Math and English. In light of these revelations, the study finds that chartered public universities in Kenya would benefit immensely if they adhere to public participation especially on public participation in decision making including the processes and sharing this knowledge across the university.

### Regression Analysis Results

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of public participation on performance of chartered public universities in Kenya. The influence of public participation and specifically public participation on performance of chartered public universities in Kenya was tested. The findings are as shown on table 4.

Table 4

*Regression Results for the Effect of Public Participation on Performance of Chartered Public Universities*

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	1.897	.141		14.204	.0001	.720	2.274
<sup>1</sup> Public Participation	.345	.041	.779	8.388	.000	.264	.426

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of chartered public universities

Model	R	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				Model F
				R Change	Square Change	df1	df2 Sig.	
1	.779 <sup>a</sup>	.249	.226	.624	.239	70.360	1	224.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), public participation

b. Dependent Variable: Performance of chartered public universities

Source: Field data (2021)

According to results in Table 4,  $R^2$  was 0.249 meaning that 24.9 % of variance in performance accounted for by the level of public participation. 68.1 % was explained by other factors not considered in the study.

Further, the results reveal statistically significant results for the independent effect of public participation on performance ( $p$ -values  $< 0.05$ ).  $R^2 = 0.249$ ,  $F=70.360$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) indicating goodness of fit for the regression model and producing a statistically significance beta coefficient of  $\beta=0.345$ , ( $t=14.20$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The results reveal a unit increase in level of public participation is responsible for increasing performance of chartered public universities by 34.5 %. These can be summarized using the following equation.

$$UP = 1.897 + 0.345 PP + e \dots \dots \dots (4)$$

The t-statistic for the regression model was 8.3 which was greater than 1.96 with  $p$  less than 0.05. Therefore, for the hypothesis that there no significant influence of public participation on performance of Chartered public universities in Kenya, the study found the relationship to be statistically significant. Therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis that there is significant influence of public participation on performance of chartered public universities in Kenya.

The finding is consistent with those of earlier studies (Ndwiga, 2018; Kamau, 2018; Gregg, 2001; Letting, 2011; Gompers et al., 2003; OECD, 2004; Kiel and Nicholson, 2002) that have reported a positive and significant relationship between public participation and performance. Paramitha et al (2017) also reported a conceptual relationship between public participation on performance of Indonesian universities but recommended that a study to establish whether such a relationship was significant or not needed to be carried out. Nonetheless, the results contradict that of a study by (Garaika et al., 2018) who found that public participation did not have any effect on performance of private universities in Indonesia, although performance was measured based on the balanced score card theory which was not adopted by the current study.

Further, results in Table 4 are in line with the Article 10 of the Constitution of Kenya that lists public participation as one of the national values and principles of governance that binds all state organs, state and public officers, and all persons in Kenya whenever any of them applies or interprets the Constitution, enacts, applies or interprets any laws, or makes or implements public policy decisions. To operationalize the requirement, the Public Service Commission in 2019 developed framework for public participation. In the policy, public participation is conceptualized as the process by which citizens, as individuals, groups or communities also known as stakeholders, take part in the conduct of public affairs, interact with the state and other non-state actors to influence decisions, policies, programs, legislation and provide oversight in service delivery, development and other matters concerning their governance and public interest, either directly or through freely chosen representatives.

The Constitution of Kenya promulgated in 2010 restructured and transformed the state-society relations in several positive ways. It states that the country's governance is based on social contract, an arrangement in which the citizens only delegate their power to the government but retain the sovereign power. The Constitution places the citizens at the centre

of development and related governance processes; it provides for public participation as one of the principles and values of governance.

The results and the constitution requirements are consistent with observations by (Cooper, 2005) that public participation is the process of engagement in governance, in which people participate together for deliberation and collective action within an array of interests, institutions and networks, developing civic identity, and involving people in governance processes. The importance of public participation cannot be overstated. Its contribution in anchoring democracy is significant because it ensures inclusivity and transparency in the governance process, with citizens and government agencies sharing power among themselves (Arnstein, 1969). It ensures government responsiveness to citizen needs and increases the legitimacy of the government's decisions and institutions. Further, at the individual level, public participation increases patriotism and trust in public institutions. This in turn increases social inclusiveness and social capital (Raimond, 2001), making public participation a process and not a single stand-alone event.

It is concluded that public participation has a greater effect on performance of chartered public universities in Kenya. The findings are consistent with the observations by Bechker and Garhart (1996) that teams and collaborations are better for improved performance of institutions.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the strength of the findings of the study, it was concluded that public participation practices such as participative planning and decision making in university has statistically significant relationship with institutional goal attainment of the universities. In other words, the effective involvement of staff members in planning and institutional decision-making process enhance the goal attainment because, it facilitates transparency, feeling of self-worth thus promoting a sense of responsibility and commitment to the pursuit of institutional objectives and plans.

Findings revealed that public participation had statistical significant influence on performance of chartered public universities in Kenya. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ): there is no significant influence of public participation on performance of chartered Public Universities in Kenya was rejected. Public participation explained 24.9% of the variation of performance of chartered public Universities. The findings are supported by argument held by Agiri (2020) that public participation is key to the success of public universities.

### **Recommendations**

University top Managers should promote public participation practices to enhance high morale, commitment and enthusiasm among staff in the pursuit and attainment of universities goals. They should avoid non-democratic management practices that could negate the achievement of the overall goals of their institutions.

Further, the government through the Commission for University Education should enhance surveillance on University managers to ensure compliance with the Universities Act, 2012 and the Universities Standards and Guidelines, 2014 which provide public participation framework for all Universities in Kenya. The study further suggests that other studies be

conducted among private universities in Kenya to determine if there are relational factors that influence the relationship between public participation and performance of private universities in Kenya.

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