

## Leadership Development through Collaborative Curriculum and Co curricular Activities for Female Commuter Students in Higher Education

**Dr Felicity W. Githinji**  
School of Education  
Department of Educational Foundations  
Moi University, Kenya  
P.O BOX 62704-00200 Nairobi  
Kenya

### Abstract

*Female Commuter Students (FCSs) in institutions of higher learning would find it difficult to become leaders. The objectives of the study were: to investigate the challenges faced by Female Commuter Students in acquiring leadership skills, establish how universities make use of the curriculum and co-curricular activities to enhance leadership skills, suggest ways in which the university would improve on student leadership. The study design was descriptive research approach qualitative in approach. The study site was a selected public university in the Rift Valley of Kenya. The respondents for the study were four lecturers and a total of sixteen students sampled from the School of Education. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The study found out that universities should be dividing students into smaller groups to enable interaction with lecturers to develop leadership skills through mentoring.*

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Co-curricular, leadership, Female Commuter Students, Higher Education

### 1.1 Introduction

The broad challenging issues facing colleges and universities today require current senior leaders to be knowledgeable, have perspective and acquire skills to lead the structural and cultural changes necessary to strengthen institutional momentum. Change, both within and outside the academy has become a way of life, a constant condition for those working in Higher Education (HE). Recognizing that successful leadership requires a wide range of knowledge and skills, the academic leaders and scholars should identify the specific knowledge and skills required by those in leadership positions. Their efforts lead to the range of resources that are being provided and programs that are being offered.

The regular students spend a considerable amount of time in living quarters where there are other students in the residence halls, fraternity or sorority houses, and various types of off-campus housing. These diverse settings ordinarily offer many opportunities to develop friendships, negotiate conflicts, and participate in group projects or other kinds of living/learning activities which also gives an opportunity for learning leadership skills. An even wider range of opportunities to engage in collaborative work is available in student activities and organizations: athletics, student government, ethnic student organizations, subject matter clubs, volunteer activities, and so on. Virtually all such activities are rich with possibilities for developing leadership skills for example, community service. Approximately two-thirds of the college student population is now engaged in community service activities (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Among other things, this kind of involvement can enable students to:

- (1) Reach a greater depth of understanding of course concepts through practical application (i.e., service learning),
- (2) Gain experience that is directly applicable to employment after college,
- (3) Achieve a greater awareness of community needs and societal issues, and
- (4) Create more meaningful relationships with faculty, student affairs educators, and other students.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. Investigate the challenges faced by Female Commuter Students in acquiring leadership skills in the universities.
2. To establish how universities make use of the curriculum and co-curricular activities to enhance leadership skills.
3. Suggest ways in which universities would improve on FCSs leadership skills.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study was significant in that university administrators would realize that lack of organized university hostels make FCSs miss a lot of academic co-curricular activities which would help in the development of leadership skills.

## 2.0 Review of Literature

Recent longitudinal studies suggest that one of the strongest effects of participation in community service during the undergraduate years is to enhance the student's leadership skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). Regardless of whether the group involvement is occurring in connection with a course or an extracurricular activity, students are likely to encounter a number of opportunities to cultivate most, if not all, of the leadership qualities.

Depending on other factors in their lives – marital status, age, place of residence, and financial resources – students may also spend substantial amounts of time working, socializing, performing volunteer work, engaging in team sports, or participating in various types of student organizations. What students often fail to realize is that such activities almost always provide an opportunity to exercise leadership and develop leadership skills. The key to understanding this assertion is to recognize that these activities inevitably involve other people, whether they are other students, faculty or staff, members of the community, or co-workers. That is, what we have conceived of leadership as a group process is predicated on group values such as collaboration and shared purpose. Any sustained activity that regularly brings the student into contact with other people represents a potential opportunity to apply the leadership principles.

Leadership development is important and useful because it can enrich the undergraduate experience, empower students, and give them a greater sense of control over their lives to develop leadership skills. Even if students are not particularly interested in developing leadership skills, virtually any of these group activities can be viewed as an opportunity either to provide service to others, or to enrich their group experience and to initiate some desired change. This study sought to investigate the challenges faced by FCSs in acquiring leadership skills in the universities.

## 2.1 Challenges Encountered by FCSs in Leadership Development

Female Commuter Students encounter many challenges that residential students do not (Horn & Berkold, 1998). Commuter students, particularly first-years, often have a difficult time "fitting in" to the campus community especially in the following areas:

### 2.1.1. Little Interaction with other Students

They often find the task of meeting students challenging because their only point of contact with other students is in the classroom, a small part of the total college experience. Residential students live, eat, study, and socialize together in residence halls, thus having greater opportunities to make friends and to become socially integrated into the campus community and have an opportunity to develop their leadership skills. A great amount of socialization for college students also occurs in the cafeteria, student centre, recreation centre, through extra-curricular activities, or during late-night study sessions (Anderson, 1988). As a result of not living in residence halls or spending a substantial amount of time on campus, commuter students miss out on these opportunities to "connect" to the university and other students and to enhance their learning and leadership development (Astin, 1993). This was supported by Githinji (2013) in a study conducted on challenges faced by FCSs in academic performance which found that it was hard for commuter students to be involved in extracurricular activities due to insecurity when going back to their place of residence and overprotection by parents and guardians. Most full-time college students spend a significant amount of their time attending classes and carrying out class assignments. Moreover, an increasing amount of classroom work is being done in group-or team-based settings where group members collectively define objectives and processes for class projects and tasks under a leader.

Within these and with the possible exception of some very large lecture classes, most college classes provide a variety of opportunities to apply or try out some of the leadership principles (even in large lecture classes, the discussion groups – usually led by teaching assistants – can provide similar opportunities). Some of the richest opportunities for developing leadership qualities are provided by group activities that occur in connection with some college courses which FCSs miss. Such opportunities may arise as part of group class projects, collaborative learning, service learning, or out-of-class study groups (which can sometimes be carried out electronically). The focus of this study therefore was to establish how universities make use of the curriculum and co curricular activities to enhance leadership skills to FCSs.

### **2.1.2 Little Interaction with Lecturers**

The interaction time for commuter students with faculty members was often limited to a few minutes between classes or briefly during office hours, leaving commuter students feeling disconnected from the academic system of the university. Indeed, for many FCSs, and part-time students, the classroom provided the only opportunity for meaningful interaction with other students. Traditionally, the students' classroom role has been narrowly viewed in terms of the "learner," where students sit, listen, and passively receive information and instruction from a faculty member. Not only is frequent contact with students outside the classroom difficult to obtain, but commuters often faced limited contact opportunities with faculty and staff members as well (Pascarella (1993). Commuters must make additional trips to campus to meet with faculty members during their designated office hours. This concurs with a study by Githinji and Kanga (2014) on Institutional-Based Students academic dilemmas which included the commuter students where faculty members had this to say:

The students are busy, so to get them and sit together given that they are in the University for a short time, is not possible. Just like when we give them assignments and wait for them to bring in, we need to find out how far they have gone with the assignments, whether they interpret the question well and how they are doing their own things.

Frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to the satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement or, any other student or institutional characteristic. Students who interacted frequently with faculty members were more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, leadership, and variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even the administration of the institution. Research shows that interaction between students and faculty increases student involvement on campus and makes them more likely to remain in school (Astin, 1984). Interaction should be a basic element in an educational process. If, in the planning of that process, the face-to-face element is reduced, then we have to place greater emphasis on being able to compensate for the lecturers' non-presence so that students feel accompanied and supported at all times.

Thus, finding ways to encourage greater student involvement with faculty (and vice versa) could be a highly productive activity in universities (Astin, 1999). According to Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) these informal student-faculty interactions have been linked to academic performance and to personal and intellectual development for students. However, in recent years this traditional conception of the students' role has been undergoing a transformation toward a new paradigm that embraces both students and faculty as teachers and learners. This shift has the potential to impact profoundly the students' experience inside the classroom. Students are expected to engage each other and their professors actively in a dynamic learning environment where discovery, the creation of meaning from new knowledge, and cooperative learning are valued. However unlike residential students, commuter students rarely have the opportunity to observe faculty and staff members on campus involved in non classroom activities, such as playing sports in the recreation centre or interacting with students in the student centre hence miss an opportunity for leadership development. This study sought to find out leadership development through collaborative curriculum and co curricular activities for FCSs in higher education.

### **2.1.3 Transportation Issues Faced by FCSs**

According to (Horn & Berktold, 1998), transportation issues are a large part of commuter concerns. First, commuters often readjust their course schedules to attend classes in large blocks of time, again reducing the hours spent on campus outside of the classroom and the opportunity to become socially and academically integrated into the college community. Because of long commutes to school, these students may encounter difficulty attending such classes, which are easily accessible for residential students.

Because of the short amount of time spent on campus each day, commuter students have a limited knowledge of the university itself, including the location of buildings, functions of university departments, campus policies and procedures, and current events (Anderson, 1988). Githinji (2013) supports this in a study conducted in a public university in Kenya which found out from the faculty members who acted as mentors that:

Challenges would be mostly because of time. It is too short. So when they come, we go straight to the academic lecturing work and a few minutes may be spent in mentoring. This is a big challenge because they may not know what they need and have nobody to be with them.

Some classes may be scheduled at difficult times for commuters to attend, such as early morning or mid afternoon. Residential students become familiar with the university by spending a substantial amount of time on campus, taking part in student forums, and discussing current campus events in the residence hall or in small groups under leaders whom they later emulate. Therefore, residential students often have a better understanding of the status of the university, because commuter students must wait to receive pertinent information through mailings or newspaper articles. In addition, greater proximity gives residential students more frequent occasions to establish personal relationships with faculty and staff, who serve as resources and mentors. These mentors may provide assistance and information regarding new policies and procedures (Pascarella, 1993).

#### **2.1.4 Low Engagement in Social and Academic Activities**

The factors that affect the commuter student's participation and persistence in college are many and varied. Some factors include communications about the educational programs, previous educational success, and the availability of non-credit courses for people with low ability or lack of educational preparedness. Villella and Hu (1991) revealed that the time constraints of college terms and the amount of academic rigor required in college courses can lead to student stress and dissatisfaction. This was supported by Githinji, Changach and Maina (2013) in their study on frequency of interaction among lecturers and adult learners which found out that students who consulted with lecturers outside the classroom, 125 (39.1%) students indicated they rarely meet with the lecturers, 86 (26.9%) students were not able to talk to a lecturer at all, 48 (15%) students were able to talk to a lecturer occasionally, 41 (12.8%) students talked to a lecturer sometimes like when in need of academic advice and 20 (6.3%) students were able to talk to a lecturer many times. From these responses, the study established that a high percentage of students rarely talked to a lecturer/mentor when in need of academic advice. Overall, the results indicated that a majority of the students rarely had mentoring and advising sessions with lecturers. These factors could result in commuter students leaving college and lack of mentorship for leadership development.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Setting**

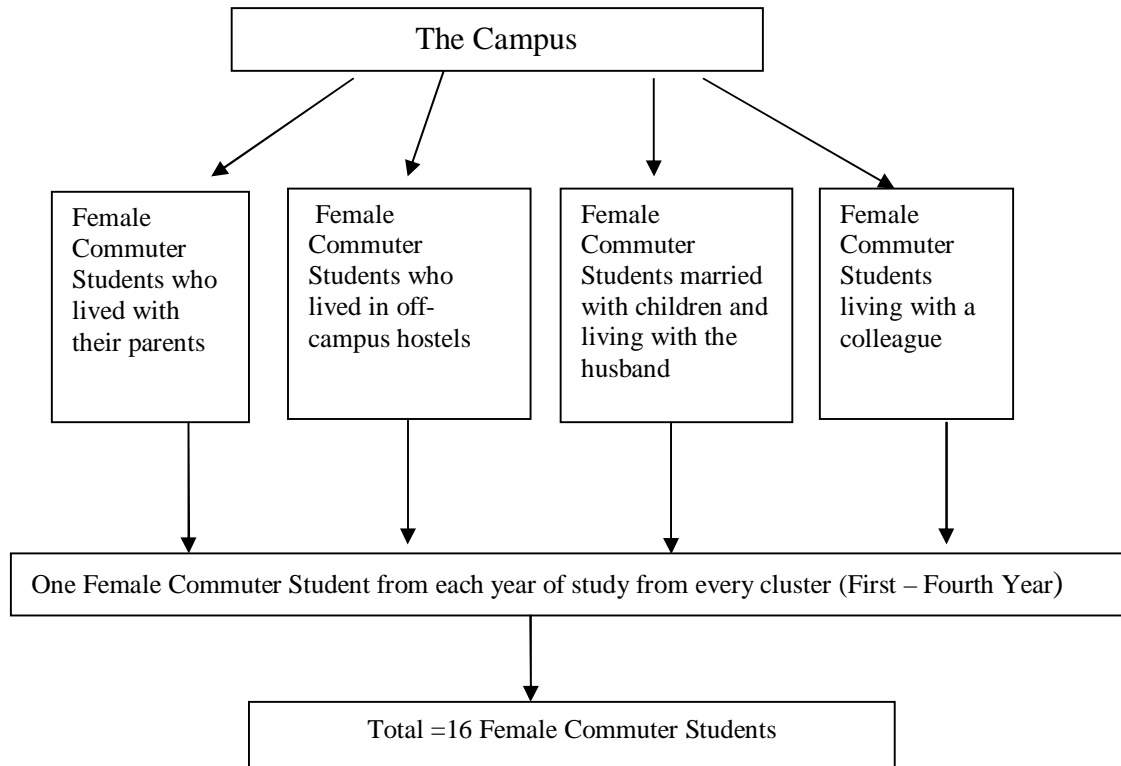
The study was conducted at a constituent college of a public university in the Rift Valley of Kenya. The choice of this campus as the locality had been influenced by the fact that it was among the first established campuses of the public university. The campus was also one of the largest and densely populated campuses with a variety of programs and courses of different modes of study (that is school-based, regular students, evening, with both undergraduate and master's degree). In addition the campus was situated in a medium sized town and therefore, most of the FCSs could have been coming for their studies in the campus from the rural areas to stay with their spouses/relatives or rent hostel rooms. Hence, the experiences of the FCSs in this campus might have been similar in other campuses where there were FCSs.

#### **3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique**

##### **3.2.1 Selected Sample**

The sample was made up of sixteen first to fourth year FCSs and four lecturers teaching university common units in the Campus. The lecturers were sampled from the departments of Educational Foundations, Educational Psychology, Curriculum Instructional and Educational Media and Educational Management Planning and Policy Studies. One lecturer from each department was sampled using convenience sampling technique and so was the coordinator of the Campus. Convenience sampling was used to sample the female commuter students. A total of 16 FCSs participated in the study.

In carrying out the study various factors were considered as follows: FCSs who lived with their parents, FCSs who lived off-Campus apartments on their own, and FCSs married with children and living with a husband and those living with colleagues. This would bring out similarities and differences in the challenges faced by FCSs in the different environments as shown the figure below.



**Figure 1: Schematic Representation of Sampled Female Commuter Students**

### 3.3 Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were used in collecting data for this study as follows:

- Interview schedule for the FCSs, the lecturers teaching university common courses and the coordinator of the Campus. The main reason for having an interview with the female commuters was to get an insight of the sort of challenges they faced in participating in co curricular activities and what they thought could be done to improve
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for the FCSs examined aspects of the students' connectedness.

## 4.0 Results

### 4.1 Student Participants

A nine item interview schedule was given to 16 female commuter participants from different categories of students as follows. FCSs that lived with their parents, who lived with colleagues, lived in off-campus hostels, married with children and living with a husband and finally, single with children. The first question asked the students if they obviously lived off-campus and which part of the town they lived. All the participants said they lived off-campus though around the town but within various distances from the campus. The second item asked them about their living arrangements; if they lived alone, shared accommodation or lived with the family. Some of the participants said they lived with colleagues and that they had a rental single room with two beds and a reading table in a shared accommodation and walked to campus, another said she used public means to and from campus. Another participant said she shared accommodation with a master's level student. Two others shared with a colleague from the same campus but in another Programme. Others said they lived with friends from the campus while others lived with relatives (aunt). Those who lived with the family had this to say. *"I stay with my family at an estate outside town and so I require transport"*. And another one said, *"I [live] with my parents at a place which is six kilometres away from the campus."* Another participant said, *"I use public means because I live fifteen kilometres away from the campus."*

Others said they used public means which took time to reach the campus. Others walked to campus. Another participant said, "I did not use public means though the distance was a little far from campus, about two kilometers".

The study found out that most FCSs used public means while others walked to college. The other item asked them whether the means of transport they used affected the way they interacted with the lecturers or other students. Some participants who studied social science and education reported to have had difficulties with the time table, because of dealing with two Schools that was School of Education and Social Sciences. Another respondent said, "There was exposure because I got to interact with students from other universities and this helped me learn a lot as a female student and made me to focus enough on what I was doing and got hope of success in future life. It also gave me confidence and avoided facing many challenge as many female students faced. I kept in mind that we were all equal with male students in whatever activity they did and that even us could perform equally better in academic performance, leadership and courses that were termed hard for female students."

The final item asked participants if there was anything else they would like to add about their experiences as commuter students. Some participants said - *as a commuter sometimes the classes end up so late like 8.00 pm and being girls one was supposed to be at home by that time so it was risky*. Some participants who lived with parents said when that when they arrived home late parents could sometimes not understand them and were scolded. *It was difficult to attend parties and get to know people because of lack of freedom; I did not attend interactive places because I did not have freedom at home*. Harassment on my way to and from college, when I did not have enough fare the touts harassed me, and had no time to study at home, I struggled to read since I used a lamp, when photo copying handouts, it became difficult for me to access them because I was unable to know where they were placed and my friends did not know either. I lacked funds and so it was only hectic walks, nothing more.

Participants who stayed alone said, "I stayed alone with many individuals who had families. I found it hard to study in the room due to distractions from loud music and the likes, insufficient materials to use during reading of work in preparation of examinations, in conducive environment for example the library itself was attached to the class and so there was disruption and a lot of commotion and so could not concentrate. As a commuter mixing and mingling with villagers affected my academic work as they poked their noses on my issues. I lacked money for shopping which affected me very much and I was unable to concentrate on my studies and disturbance from men as I walked from my house. They asked me if they could give me a ride and some made fun of my dressing style which made me angry, negative attitude towards some lecturers and negative peer groups. From their responses the following was observed that there was:

#### **4.1.1 Few Opportunities to Interact with Faculty (Commute Time, Over-Protective Parents/Guardians)**

Although some participants said that how far or near did not "affect their interaction with lecturers, majority of the participants said that they met lecturers during the lectures or after the lectures. One participant said I rarely get time to interact since I am always in a hurry to get home by public means, and my aunt was too inquisitive about my whereabouts and who I associated with. I rarely interacted with the lecturers because I needed to catch up with buses since they were not many. Interaction with lecturers was actually not so good except in the case of lecture rooms during lectures. Another one said, I found it difficult since while the lectures were over one had to hurry from one side of the class to another.

#### **4.1.2 Few Opportunities to Interact with Other Students (Commute Time, Over-Protective Parents/Guardians)**

Some participants said that they mostly interacted with other students occasionally and even met at their houses. Another participant said, "She interacted with other students because they walked home with most of them. Another participant who lived with the parents said that, it was hard to interact because there was no time since they had to hurry back home "as my parents asked me why I was late." Another one said, *there was no time to interact due to insecurity when going back home late in the evening*. One participant said that, with the students it was difficult to get to know most of them because of the little time available. The participant who stayed with the auntie said, "There was overprotection by my auntie, depriving me the chance to interact with my fellow students or, even have enough time to engage in discussion groups."

I also did not have chances to engage in discussion with my colleagues after class *because I* arrived to class late hence missing part of the lecture. Those participants, who were married said, they stayed with their children and husband, and others husbands had extended families so it I had to look for another place and someone else to revise with.

#### 4.2 Suggestions on how to Reduce the Challenges

Hostels should be provided so that everybody could get a place to stay, and make it compulsory for all students to live in to avoid travelling challenges and create time for interaction. Other respondents suggested that, the institution should approach the owners of the houses near the university on behalf of the students as it was difficult for students to get. Allocating bigger rooms, dividing students into smaller groups enabled interaction with lecturers in the class; Lecturers to take their work seriously; stock more books in the library to enable group discussion since the ones that were there were few and add more chairs. Those respondents who had units from the two different schools/faculties requested them to make the timetables jointly to avoid clashes. Those who had financial problems suggested that the university should help them to identify small business and investment which could not affect them academically. Lecture rooms should be enlarged by the university management; reduce the finances for handouts; the university to provide transport to pick students from town, timetables to should be considered before fixing classes, subject clashing for example, you have a class and on the other side another class was going on; sometimes there was lack of fare and scarcity of vehicles; There was little time to study because you had to do the house chores before studying;

#### 4.3 Lecturer Participants

Challenges faced by FCSs in participation of extracurricular activities. All the eight participants reported that:

a) FCSs faced challenges in interacting with the other students while in the campus. Intensive programme: This concurs with a finding by Githinji (2013) which found that non-traditional students who included commuter students had intensive programme which meant that students spent most of the time in class and did not have much time to seek for remedial advice and interact with other students. Githinji (2013) added that non traditional students lacked time to interact which was another major challenge; as reported by one of the lecturers during an interview sessions, that:

Challenges would be mostly because of time. It was too short. So when students come we had to go straight to the academic lecturing work and a few minutes spent in mentoring. This was a big challenge because they might not have known what they needed and had nobody to be with them.

- b) Most of the participants said no specific time unless with appointment.
- c) Never, always in a hurry to go home
- d) Brief encounters after a lesson
- e) After lecture hour and during lecture days mainly after class in office.

#### 4.4 How the Challenges would be overcome According to the Lecturers

Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) should give a full loan for PSSP (Privately Self Sponsored Programme) students, enhance part-time work plans for students to enable them have pocket money, remedial classes for these students, tutorial lessons to be taken seriously and dividing the students into small teachable groups and be assigned to more members of staff.

#### 4.5 The Coordinator of the Campus

Students were always leaving their classes early for fear of insecurity. It was also expensive to commute and the dangers that accompanied distant residences. Class concentration was also poor as they think of home as most of them are either married or have children. Post-lecture conferences where they briefly confronted the lecture after class and during focus discussion groups to discuss a topic in the course outline.

#### 4.6 How the Challenges could be overcome

Through regular class attendance for better academic performance, more academic research activities were suggested as opposed to note dictation which they simply rehearsed and so E-learning concept needed to be introduced so as to reduce physical contacts with the lecturer and facilitate virtual.

#### 4.7 Way Forward

Students should be provided with on campus accommodation, encourage the community near the university to build hostels, University to build hostels nearby, the university should provide accommodation for all students to give them ample time for extracurricular activities to assist students build leadership skills and providing university transport for students.

#### 4.8 Conclusion

From the foregoing suggestions it could be observed that students who lived on campus were more engaged overall compared with students who commuted. In addition, it appeared that the further away from campus (walking distance, driving distance) the less likely a student was to take advantage of the educational resources the institution provides. Thus, proximity to campus made a difference in commuter students' level of engagement and leadership development. Also, today's students' lead busy lives that could make it difficult for many of them to focus on broader campus or societal concerns, much less to become deeply engaged in the kinds of leadership activities that we believed were central to responsible citizenship.

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