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The methodological profile of scientific publications on public transparency: An analysis of the African scenario

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This study seeks to analyze the methodological profile of scientific publications completed on public transparency within the context of the African continent. The following are the specific objectives of this study: to present the research methods commonly utilized in academic investigation concerning public transparency in Africa, to survey compilation of a sample of articles on public transparency contained in the Scopus, Portal de Periódicos CAPES, and Web of Science databases, within the time period of 2001-13, and to identify the activity sectors, approaches and research methods utilized in the studies making up the sample. In terms of these objectives, the methodology employed is characterized as exploratory and descriptive, while, in regard to the technical processes undergone, the study is bibliographic and documentary in nature. It was carried out using quantitative data. The study concludes that the existing research in this field is not limited to specific activity sectors, but rather relevant to the public sector in general. The survey also showed a predominate use of a quantitative approach; the principal research tool is the descriptive method.

Key words: Transparency, public administration, research methods.

INTRODUCTION

This study is framed within the context of public administration, and its goal is to reflect the methodological processes utilized by researchers during the formulation of academic research on public transparency in the African continent. Along these lines, the study seeks to analyze the methodologies employed by the authors of these existing studies, and to better understand the circumstances under which said works were completed.

What led to the research of the topic in question is the fact that many African countries are indicated to be the most corrupt in the world (Transparency International, 2013). As a result, this work aims to identify the methodological profile used in scientific publications on public transparency produced in Africa. Within this study, methodological profile is understood as the approaches and research methods employed in scientific publications

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in the African context.

Studies on transparency and accountability reporting process within national governments have received significant attention in academic publications in the past years. Along with this, empirical studies show that transparency in public administration is fundamental for citizens to remain informed regarding how public resources are used (Dea et al., 2013; Witvliet et al. 2013; Bowen et al., 2012; McFerson, 2009). This justifies the continuation of research in this field. On the one hand, a reflection on the ways in which these studies on public transparency in Africa are being developed is important. It leads to a deeper understanding of the field's theoretical and practical advances, as well as its leanings and limitations. Further, the study is justified by its specific concern for the field of public administration, as it shows how transparency can lead to better distribution of resources across activities, promoting both development of nations and better performance of states.

In terms of researchers and students within this field, the analysis contained in this study draws attention as it is a compilation of works on the topic, beginning with a methodological analysis. Additionally, once provided with an awareness of the trends in related research, researchers and students might easily identify the approaches commonly used by the scientific community, as well as the models utilized in the production of these existing works, serving as a base for continued works and guidance for their own investigations in the field.

To meet the goals of the study, articles published in the Scopus, *Portal de Periódicos CAPES*, and Web of Science databases from 2001-13 were selected. The techniques of this selection are explained in research methodology. The selected works were read with a purposefully critical perspective, considering the activity sectors, approaches, and methods employed by researchers in this realm.

Following this introduction, the second section, which handles the research methodology, will detail the characteristics of the techniques employed in the collection of data, and the procedures applied throughout the same. In the third section, which concerns a review of existing academic literature on the topic, the question of transparency in public administration will be addressed. Subsequently, the results of several previous studies on the topic in question pertaining to the African continent are presented. The fourth part contains the results of the study, while fifth part contains conclusions based on those findings, including the limitations of the present work, as well as suggestions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of a literature review in this context is to

bring several considerations regarding public sector transparency to light, being the subject of this work. Below, the researcher seeks to understand the nature of previous works within the realm of public transparency in African nations, striving to orient the reader with the current state of research on the topic in said countries. This discussion serves as a base for an analysis of the results of this current study, which are presented in the fourth section of the same.

Transparency: brief considerations on the topic

In modern nomenclature, transparency refers to something (or someone) in respect to which (or whom) no doubts are cast. Transparency is related to the principle of publicity and it is one of the main objectives set for in modern public administration. Transparency appears in the realm of public administration along with increasing demands, on part of society, for knowledge of how public resources transferred to the State, so that it may build a public infrastructure, are used. Key issues within this context are the periodic release of information on activities, the regular organization of public hearings, and the presentation of accountability reports to society in general. Culau and Fortis (2006) indicate that transparency is indispensable to good governance since it permits citizens to have access to information concerning the management of public assets.

According to Souza et al. (2009, pg. 12), transparency in public administration entails impeding both current and future inappropriate actions, such as the undue use of public funds by governing or administrative entities, which increases citizens' access to public information concerning a variety of issues. This will build a democratic country within which each part of society is able to successfully carry out social control, contributing to a more efficient and effective public administration. Along these lines, Sacramento and Pinho (2007) state that transparency is associated with accountability and it provides for greater trust between citizens and their government, aiding in the reduction of corruption in public offices and building a more democratic relationship between the state and civil society.

Stemming from this, it can be gathered that transparency makes it possible to access any information about how a given government functions. It is said that public administration is transparent in as much as it operates openly, based on ethical principles, and is capable of being questioned at any time as a function of the ease of access to information available to citizens and other interested parties. It can be measured by way of how decisions are made and by the efficiency of the means of interaction between the government and society overall. As the study seeks to analyze this topic

within the realm of African countries, the following section of this theoretical framework presents several studies, which, in broad terms, discuss the concept within that region.

Previous works on transparency in African countries

Witvlet et al. (2013) carried out a study that sought to explore the association between a nationwide perception and the precariousness of health in different layers of society. By way of a multilevel logistical regression model, these authors analyzed data collected in a worldwide study concerning 72,524 adult residents of 20 African nations, seeking to establish a relationship between health issues and perception of corruption within them while taking into account individual considerations, as well as the Human Development Index (HDI). Witvlet et al. (2013) conclude that the perceived national corruption in the 20 countries sampled is associated with precariousness, in general, of men's and women's health, across all socioeconomic rungs, with a higher incidence among the less educated. The authors made a case for more studies, on more countries, to evaluate the magnitude at which corruption and the lack of public transparency bear relevance to a nation's health.

In another study, Smith et al. (2012) critically analyzed the nature and quality of governance in community representation, and the role of civil society in the panorama of transnational mining operations, based on the case of the Anosy region, in Southeast Madagascar. The authors referred to an analysis of the relationship between the government, the mining company, and the local communities, which revealed a lack of legitimacy on part of the civil society actors nominated by the government to defend the interests of community residents in the region home to the mining company, contributing to their loss of power. This work engendered a debate on transparency and governance within mineral extraction companies in African countries home to abundant mineral wealth, based on a case study on Madagascar, given that the study outlines political perspectives concerning interactions between societies on the whole and its formal institutions, with a focus on transparency. Smith et al. (2012) concluded that it is necessary that the government not manipulate civil society, so that it can effectively defend the interests of the inhabitants of Anosy, and that the mining company complies with its corporate social responsibility as proposed by the Initiative for Transparency in Extractive Industries (EITI).

Finally, McFerson (2009) completed a study with the objective of reflecting on corruption and the lack of public transparency in resource-rich African countries, such as Angola, Congo, Gabon, and Nigeria. McFerson's recom-

mendation was that the mechanisms brought forth by the Initiative for Transparency in Extractive Industries (EITI) be adopted, obligating governments to publically disclose any funds received and payments made by this companies (taxes, fees, etc.) resulting from the exploitation of mineral and oil resources. The author concluded that, should these companies make what they pay public, and the governments in question do the same in respects to the payments they receive, these nation's civil societies will have the opportunity of comparing the data and, in the event of the misuse of said funds, hold their governments responsible.

Transparency aspects in African countries

Table 1 organizes the sampled articles according to year, author, objectives, results/conclusions, and the aspects of transparency presented in the work (i.e. the models and approaches utilized in the study).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodological framing, this study is characterized as descriptive as it aims to describe the traits of a given population or phenomenon, and its inter-relationships, in accordance with Gil's (1999) definition. The population taken into consideration is the collection of articles resulting from the survey carried out in the research, and the phenomenon of interest is the methodological makeup of the research outlined in the sample. The relationships established between variables within the population are based on the methodologies previously utilized by researchers in the same field, following the analysis proposal developed by Lyrio et al. (2013).

A quantitative approach is adopted to address the problem, as well as statistical analysis to "[...] guarantee accuracy in the results, avoiding distortions in analysis and interpretation, allowing for a degree of certainty in the inferences" (Richardson, 1999, pg. 70). The data generated by the survey were examined using Excel® spreadsheets, given the expectation that the way that the data were gathered be described and, possibly, replicated, as Bryman (1998) asserted quantitative studies must be. In terms of technical procedures, the study is described as documentary (Gil, 2007; Richardson, 1999) since it was made up of articles selected for examination.

The study was implemented by mapping out the Scopus, *Portal de Periódicos CAPES*, and Web of Science databases, comprising the period 2001-13. Despite the fact CAPES journal database is not largely known in other countries, it was used as mapping object in the study because it is the most-widely used database in Brazil, employed in various studies. The methodological procedures proposed by Lyrio et al. (2013), taking into account that they had already been validated by the scientific community, were put into practice, with a particular focus on public transparency in the case of Africa. The time frame was selected so as to encapsulate the first decade of the 21st century, in congruence with the existing article used as a reference point.

The selection of the articles sampled in the study was done by way of a structured, non-purposeful survey, in four stages. In order to identify the research population, the key word 'public

Table 1. Aspects of transparency in African countries.

Year	Author	Objective	Results	Transparency aspects presented (models, approaches used)
2001	McCormic	Explore the process of liberalization of the telecommunications sector in Botswana.	The study recommends that African countries adopt the same strategy of Botswana to liberalize the telecommunications sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Qualitative approach • Case study
2004	Nel and Lekalake	Analyze the transparency of monetary policy of South Africa in the light of the WB and IMF codes.	It is necessary to clarify the functions of the South African Reserve Bank; The South African Reserve Bank should make public their meeting minutes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Quantitative approach • Descriptive method
2005	Deininger, K. and Mpuga, P.	Explore how accountability and transparency can improve the quality of public services.	The econometric results of the study suggest that a better knowledge of how to report bad behavior by civil servants can help reduce not only bribery, but also improve the quality of public services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Quantitative approach • Descriptive method
2007	De Grauwe, A. and Lugaz, C.	Examining the challenges that a core actor in education, namely the education district staff, faces in a context of decentralization in four West African countries.	The study argues for stronger autonomy in the management of financial and human resources by school directors and some limited forms of community empowerment, reflecting the lack of support and control from the government, especially in rural and remote areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Quantitative approach • Descriptive method
2009	NAPM	Analyze transparency in the generic medications market in South Africa.	Advocates for the creation of a price committee that could serve to promote transparency in medicine pricing structure, so that patients not be harmed by the wave of price speculation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Quantitative approach • Descriptive method
2009	Mutula, S. and Wamukoy, A. J. M.	Overview of information management in the public sector in countries of the East Africa and South.	The study suggests that, for the fortification of democracies in Africa, accountability and the transparency, it is essential to make reforms designed to guarantee the right of access to information for citizens and of mechanisms to require public institutions to disclose this information on their websites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Quantitative approach • Descriptive method
2009	Mcferson, H.	Analyze transparency in African countries dynamically.	The companies publish the amounts they pay as taxes to governments and that these in turn disclose this information to ensure that civil society hold their governments to account in case of bad management of these resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Quantitative approach • Descriptive method

Table 1. Contd.

2009	Omar, M.	Analyze the urban governance and the quality of service delivery in Municipalities of Nigeria.	Recommends the strengthening of transparency and accountability to citizens and improved relations between the citizens of the cities and local governments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public governance Qualitative approach Case study
2010	Singh, G. et al.	Reflect on e-government in the provision of public services: case Ethiopia	The study concluded that there is a high level of perception that the introduction of the electronic platform e-Government can improve the provision of public services and consequent reduction of corruption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public governance Quantitative approach Survey method
2010	Tshamdu and Kariuki, S.	Reflect on the contours of public administration reform after Apartheid in South Africa.	The authors state that the assumptions that were at the origin of the adoption of the New Public Management have not been achieved, because public institutions are not efficient and effective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public governance Quantitative approach Descriptive method
2010	Osei, T. et al.	Analyze the practices of corruption in the public contracts in infrastructures projects in Ghana.	The study states that a downgrading of the law governing public bids has contributed to the lack of transparency in this sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public governance Quantitative approach Descriptive method
2011	Fouda, A.	Analyze transparency in the extractive industries of Central Africa.	The survey recommends that the countries of this region enact a transparent management of revenues from oil exploration in order to reduce social tensions and improve economic performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative approach Econometric method
2011	Clarke, G.	Analyze the impact phenomena, stemming from corruption, cause in the accounts of African companies.	The surveyed companies between 2005 to 2007, in 15 countries where the study took place, reported spending between 2% to 5% of their sales on payment of bribes for the acquisition or renewal of their licenses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative approach Survey method
2012	Bowen, P. et al.	A thematic analysis on corruption in the South African construction industry.	The South African construction industry (particularly its statutory professional councils and contractor affiliation bodies), together with public sector agencies and private sector client associations, should collaborate to adopt a more proactive stance against corruption, and be more engaged with detecting and reporting it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative approach Survey method
2012	Elbadawi, I. A et al.	The study investigates the relationship between foreign and assisted development, the exchange rate and economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa countries.	The study found that aid promotes economic growth, but its impact is negative in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa due to lack of transparency and the participation of all interested parties in the development process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative approach Econometric method

Table 1. Contd.

2012	Smith, S. et al.	Analyze critically the nature of relations between government, mining companies and communities of Anosy region in Madagascar.	The authors concluded that civil society members named to defend the interests of local communities are abused by the government; mining companies do not comply with corporate social responsibility codes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative approach • Econometric method
2012	Walker, H. and Brammer, S.	This study examines the relationship between sustainable procurement and e-procurement, two recent initiatives in public procurement in many countries.	The study concluded that the E-procurement and communication with suppliers might help environmental, labor, health and safety aspects of sustainable procurement. Conversely, e-procurement may hinder buying from small local firms that are not e-enabled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative approach • Survey method
2013	Witvliet, M. et al.	Detail corruption and precariousness in public health in 20 African countries.	The study says that the national perception of corruption in the countries studied is associated with a higher prevalence of health problems;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Quantitative approach • Econometric method
2013	Dea, M. et al.	Analyze the dominant logic in government procurement from lessons learned from Ghana.	The study recommends that the Ghana enter public bidding law reforms with a view to minimize the lack of transparency in government procurement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public governance • Qualitative approach • Case study

Source: Survey data.

transparency' was searched for under the "All Text" field in each of the databases previously mentioned. This initial search produced 14,123 results, of which not all were necessarily related to the present research topic.

Following this, the data were refined. A second key word was used – 'Africa' – in the Refine Search field, modifying the results of the initial search. Following this initial filtering, 1,654 articles remained, all of which dealing in some way with the topic of public transparency as well as Africa. From that point, results were subsequently filtered manually, by way of the deletion of articles not falling within the established timeframe of 2001-13, which yielded 65 remaining articles.

Finally, in the fourth stage, each of these article's abstracts were read and checked for relevance, leading to the removal of 42 more articles from the sample.

After these four stages, 23 articles made up the research sample, and each was read in its entirety so as to frame it within the study's analysis criteria, keeping with Lyrio et al.'s (2013) proposal. Within the authors' criteria, the following were employed:

- a) Sector: regards the discipline in which the study was completed;
- b) Approach: refers to the approach utilized in the development of the study, meaning, one of either qualitative, quantitative, and quali-quantitative approaches.
- c) Method: deals with the research methods used in the study.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This section presents and discusses the results obtained

during research. Initially, there is an analysis of the selected articles in the databases Scopus, *Portal de Periódicos Capes* and Web of Science. Following this, the activity sectors making up the study and the research approaches adopted, and methods used, by various authors in related fields were analyzed. Finally, the results of the study are summarized and discussed.

Presentation of findings

The survey carried out in the Scopus, *Portal de Periódicos CAPES*, and Web of Science databases produced a sample of several previous studies related to the present work's topic. These are examined in this section, in accordance with the criteria stated in the section related to research methodology. Figure 1 represents the proportional representation of the activity sectors about which the sampled articles were composed.

The data showed that the larger portion of the previous studies (52.4%) deals with transparency within public administration in general, rather than in application to specific activity sectors. In this way, 12 works dealing with public administration that envision good governance and citizens' access to information were identified (Mpuga, 2005; Omar, 2009; Willet, 2009; McFerson, 2009; Wamukoya, 2009; Osei-Tutu 2010; Singh et al.,

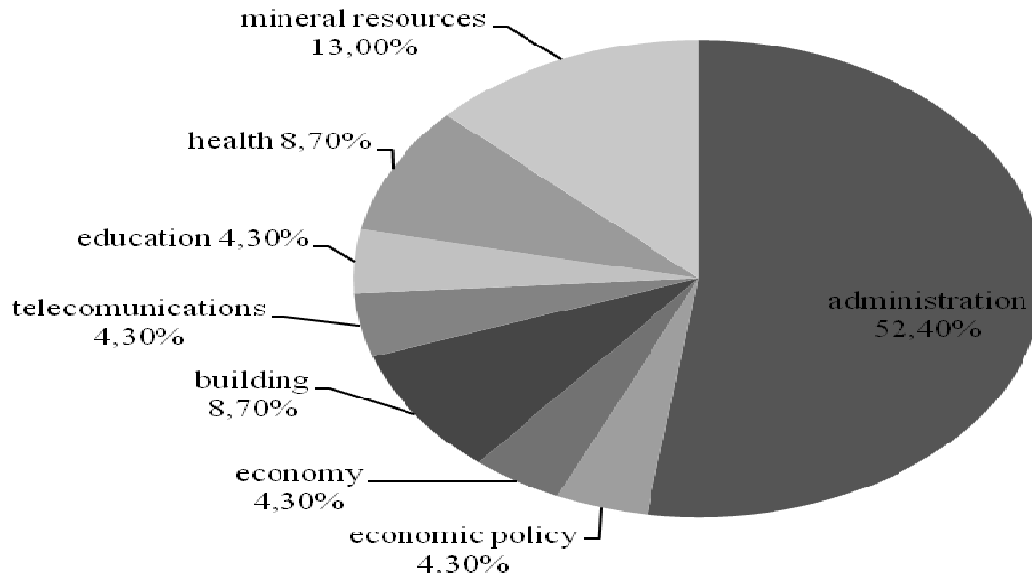


Figure 1. Activity sectors. Source: Survey data.

2010; Kariuki, 2010; Clarke, 2011; Hu; Lin, 2011; Brammer, 2012; Dea et al., 2013).

The remaining works were based on the notion of transparency as a guide for promoting economic efficiency. Along these lines, Elbadawi et al. (2012) studied the relationship between outside (i.e. foreign) aid and the transparent management of the same, with the goal of promoting economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, given that, currently, the impact of such programs is insignificant. This results from the lack of a total participation on part of all parties affected by the development process. Nelake and Lekalake (2004) refer to transparency in South African monetary policy, recommending that its methods be improved by way of an adherence to World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) codes. Finally, McCormick (2001) highlights the political liberalization of telecommunications in Botswana, suggesting that other African nations adopt the same model of transparency within their own telecommunications sector reforms, as a way of ensuring the participation of domestic users while also protecting their interests.

The studies concerning the mineral resources sector report elevated levels of corruption and largely opaque processes underlying exploration licensing. Smith et al. (2012) comment on the perspective of local representation in extractive resources, basing their findings on the situation examined in Madagascar. The authors state that such circumstances as those found in Madagascar are results of the manipulation of civil society members, designated by government officials, which threatens the

interests of communities surrounded by mining companies. McFerson (2009) writes on hypercorrection and a lack of transparency in African nations rich in natural resources such as Angola, Congo, Gabon and Nigeria. McFerson recommends that the Initiative for Transparency in Extractive Industries (ITIE) guidelines, which obligate governments to make public any payments or collections received from companies (taxes, fees, etc.) in mineral or petroleum extraction activities, be made public. Fouda (2011) seeks, through his research, to make a connection between the increase in state revenues originating from petroleum exploration and the growth of generalized corruption in mineral-rich Central African nations, stating that a decrease in social conflicts would occur, should those countries prioritize transparency in managing those funds.

Regarding the studies on the health sector, Witvliet et al. (2013) illustrate that the perception of national corruption levels has an effect on a country's health situation. This research was completed in 20 African countries, using the International Corruption Perception Index (ICPI) to show that a lack of transparency in the health sector and generalized corruption are linked to health system deficiencies, across all socioeconomic levels in the countries examined. In its own analysis, the National Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers (2009) studied transparency in pricing structures of generic medications combating infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, with the hopes that patients being treated for these diseases might not have to pay speculative prices. The Association advocates for

the creation of a price committee that would serve to promote transparency in medications pricing.

Bowen et al. (2012) completed a thematic analysis on participative research within the civil construction sector. The authors describe the degree of corruption in sub-Saharan Africa civil construction industries, exploring the nature and scope of this phenomenon, and going on to state the need for creating a Corruption Authority to regulate public works contracting in this region of the continent. Concurrently, Osei-Tutu (2010) analyze the practices inherent in public contracts related to infrastructure construction in Ghana, with a focus on the economic gains made possible through transparency in such civil projects. The only article related to the education sector present in the sample (Lugaz, 2007) reflects on the challenges stemming from the process of decentralization in Benin, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal. The authors draw the conclusion that, with increased autonomy, schools must counterbalance the augmented power of their (local) directors in terms of human and financial resources, which could be possible through clear accountability norms.

To better understand the characteristics of the sampled article's research methodologies, it is necessary to first identify the approaches employed by their authors: qualitative or quantitative. It was noted that, as shown in Figure 2, quantitative approaches are predominant in the works examined.

Within those using quantitative approaches, nine articles were selected for their descriptive characteristics (Nelake and Lakalake, 2004; Lugaz, 2007; McFerson, 2009; Mutula, and Wamukoya 2009; Osei-Tutu, 2010; Kariuki, 2010; Brammer, 2012; Gujba et al., 2012). In the six works that used a quantitative approach, the econometric method was also represented (Witvliet et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Elbadawi et al., 2012; Fouda, 2011; Deininger, 2005). In addition, five articles carried out survey research (Singh, G. et al., 2010; Clarke, 2011; Gujba et al., 2012; Bowen et al., 2012; Paul, 2013). No article recounting a use of an experimental method was found.

Among the qualitative studies, there was a predominant incidence of case study methods, appearing in three articles (McCormick, 2001; Omar, 2009; Dea et al., 2013). One study was completed using a critical analysis of a speech (Hu; Lin, 2001). Figure 3 presents the proportional distribution of research methods used by the authors of the sampled articles.

The descriptive method stands out among those used by the authors. Deininger and Mpuga (2005) used econometric research to analyze the ways in which transparency might improve the quality of public services. Tshamdu and Kariuki (2010) write on public administration reforms in South Africa following the end of apartheid in 1994. Mutula and Wamukoya (2009) describe informa-

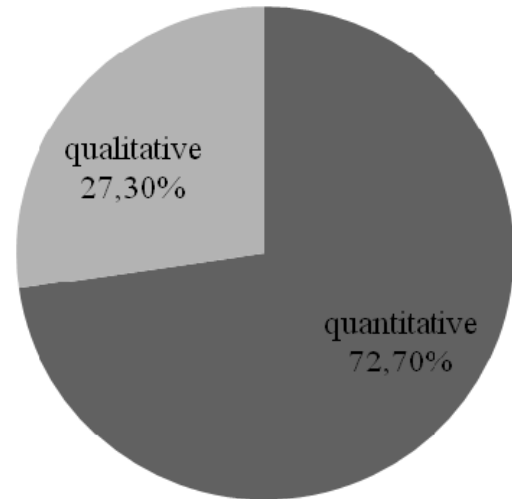


Figure 2. Research approaches. Source: Survey data.

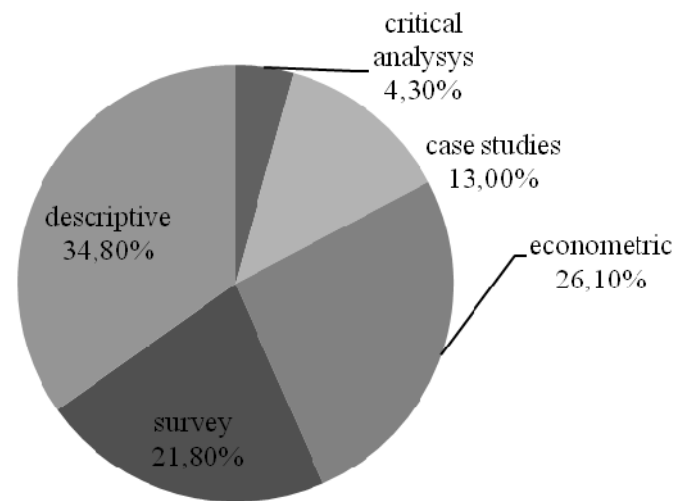


Figure 3. Research methods. Source: Survey data.

tion management in the public sector in East and Southern Africa, including the implications that this process bears in terms of the transparent use of public resources. Nelake and Lakalake (2004) analyze the degree of transparency in monetary policy in South Africa. De Grauwe and Lugaz (2007) discuss autonomy, professionalism, and accountability reporting process in the context of education sector reforms in Benin, Guinea, Mali, and Senegal. McFerson (2009) analyzes governance and hypercorruption in mineral-rich African nations. Osei-Tutu (2010) write on practices inherent in contracting public works and infrastructure projects in Ghana. Walher and Brammer (2012) illustrate relationships

between sustainable acquisitions and 'e-procurement' in the realm of the public sector. Finally, Gujba et al. (2012) draw conclusions regarding the politics of access to energy in Africa.

Econometrics is the second-most frequent research method observed in the selected works. Witvliet et al. (2013) utilize this method to study the degree of corruption perceived in 20 African countries, and its effect on health problems in those populations. Smith et al. (2012) used this method to analyze a variety of perspectives in terms of the representation of community interests in extractive industries in southeast Madagascar. Elbadawi et al. (2012) illustrate the potential influence of transparency in the management of foreign aid, steering it towards economic efficiency and a greater participation in development processes by concerned parties. Finally, Fouda (2011) used econometrics to study transparency within extractive industries' value chains in Central Africa.

As to the survey method, Singh et al. (2010) sought to explore how "e-government" can improve performance in public services in Ethiopia. Bowen et al. (2012) used questionnaires to analyze commentaries on corruption levels in construction industry in Southern African nations. Further, Paul (2013) carried out survey research to draw conclusions on the water privatization process currently taking place in various African nations. Lastly, Clarke (2011) made use of the survey method to elaborate on corruption in Africa.

Case studies were observed in just three articles. McCormick (2001) wrote on reforms that culminated in the privatization of the telecommunications sector in Botswana, in attempts to understand up until what point the process was advantageous to the country, and what lessons might be taken from the example so as to promote transparency and domestic user rights, suggesting the creation of an oversight authority to regulate competition within the sector. Omar (2009) sought to outline the ways in which a lack of transparency puts social services at risk in Nigerian municipalities. Finally, Dea et al (2013) sought to present major logical arguments evidenced in public acquisitions, based of lessons learned in Ghana. Through a critical analysis, Hu and Lin (2011) evaluated oversight and informational transparency in African governmental reporting.

Analysis of results

Following the presentation of the data gathered, the results of the study are presented here. Regarding activity sectors, the study demonstrated that previous research in this field deals mainly with public administration, which account for 52.4% of the articles sampled. More specifically, the study shows that the most-represented sectors are health and civil construction,

each one representing 8.7% of the sample.

Among prevalent research methods, the descriptive method was shown to be the predominant one as it represented 34.8% of the articles examined. Following this, econometric methods held 26.1%, while survey methods, 21.8%. Concerning the qualitative approach, there was a predominance of case studies at 13%, and 4.3% of the sampled articles adopting the critical analysis methodology. The similarity between the findings of this present work and the results of Lyrio et al.'s (2013) research is noteworthy, as they too, identified frequent use of econometric methods in studies conducted on public budgets. This congruence might suggest that researchers working in the field of public administration tend to use these methods to work towards answering their research questions, given that econometrics stands out in both budgets and public sector transparency articles, in the case of Africa as well as that of Brazil. From that, it is evident that, in studies concerning public transparency in the African scenario, the predominant approach is quantitative incorporating statistical analysis to identify trends in the data. Regardless, the articles making up the survey sample of this study could not explain whether the lack of transparency in African countries was the prevailing cause of poor service in public administration, if it is due to inefficient public institutions, or if it results from low education levels in some countries, which prevents oversight in government's activities. This missing link might provide course for further research in this field.

Final considerations

This study sought to analyze the methodological profile of academic research regarding public transparency in the African scenario. The research question that drove the study was: *what is the current state of the research methodologies employed in academic research on public transparency in Africa?* To meet this objective, a survey of academic articles was compiled, searching in the Scopus, *Portal de Periódicos CAPES*, and Web of Science online databases, with the results limited to the time period of 2001-13. In this way, sectors of interest, approaches, and methods contained within the existing research were selected.

Within the data analyzed, it was found that 52.4% of the articles sampled deal with public transparency in general, without concerning a given sector in particular. Also, a strong tendency towards a utilization of the quantitative approach while carrying out research in this field was observed, accounting for 72.7% of the sample. In terms of the methods used by the researchers examined, the descriptive method was shown to be the most frequent, representing 34.8% of the sample.

Taking this all into account, it is concluded that the

research question was answered, in as much as the specific objectives of the study were reached. A limitation, in the context of the present work, is the fact that it did not compare its findings to those of studies completed on public transparency in other scenarios. For further research, the author recommends a study on methodological trends in studies on public transparency in parallel circumstances or continents, such as the Americas or Europe, with the goal of establishing comparisons between the results.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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