Governing Council Functions and Teaching Performance of Public Universities in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of governing council functions on teaching performance in public universities in Ghana. Drawing on agency, stewardship, and resource dependence theories, the study adopts a **mixed-methods approach** using a convergent parallel design. Quantitative data were collected from 409 academic staff across three public universities, while qualitative insights were obtained from 12 key informants. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were employed for analysis. The findings reveal that governing council functions—strategic direction, performance evaluation, accountability, leadership appointment, and financial oversight—have significant positive effects on teaching performance. Leadership appointment ($\beta = 0.36$) and strategic direction ($\beta = 0.31$) emerged as the strongest predictors, while financial oversight showed the weakest effect ($\beta = 0.15$). Qualitative findings highlight challenges such as political interference and limited technical capacity. The study concludes that strengthening governance capacity and accountability mechanisms is critical for improving teaching performance in Ghanaian public universities.

Keywords: University governance; Governing councils; Teaching performance; Ghana; SEM; Higher education

INTRODUCTION

The growing demand for accountability, quality assurance, and global competitiveness has intensified the focus on governance in higher education systems worldwide. Governing councils, as apex decision-making bodies, play a central role in ensuring that public universities fulfill their academic mandates effectively. Their responsibilities extend beyond administrative oversight to include strategic direction, financial stewardship, leadership appointment, and institutional accountability.

In practice, governing councils perform six key functions: (1) providing strategic direction, (2) evaluating performance against benchmarks, (3) ensuring accountability and control, (4) appointing institutional leadership, (5) acting as the principal financial authority, and (6) serving as trustees of institutional assets. While these roles are well established, empirical evidence linking them to teaching performance remains limited, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Ghana, public universities operate under statutory governance frameworks that assign significant authority to governing councils. However, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness of these bodies in improving teaching outcomes. This study addresses this gap by examining how governing council functions influence teaching performance in Ghanaian public universities.

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University Governance and Institutional Performance

University governance has evolved significantly in response to increased demands for accountability, efficiency, and global competitiveness. Governing councils, as apex oversight bodies, are central to this transformation, influencing institutional outcomes through policy direction, monitoring, and resource allocation. Prior studies consistently demonstrate that effective governance structures are associated with improved institutional performance, including teaching quality, research productivity, and student outcomes (Shattock, 2010; Altbach et al., 2019).

Empirical literature suggests that governance effectiveness depends not merely on formal structures but on the **capacity, independence, and engagement of governing council members**. For instance, Middlehurst (2013) argues that active and competent governing bodies enhance institutional responsiveness and strategic agility. Similarly, the OECD (2020) emphasizes that governance frameworks incorporating performance monitoring and accountability mechanisms tend to yield better educational outcomes.

However, the relationship between governance and teaching performance remains underexplored, particularly in developing contexts. While many studies focus on financial performance or research output, fewer explicitly examine how governance functions translate into improved teaching and learning. This gap is especially evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, where governance reforms have often prioritized administrative efficiency over pedagogical outcomes.

Strategic Direction and Teaching Performance

Strategic direction is a core function of governing councils, involving the articulation of institutional vision, mission, and long-term priorities. Effective strategic governance aligns teaching objectives with national development goals and global academic standards. Studies indicate that universities with clearly defined strategic plans tend to exhibit higher levels of teaching quality, as such plans guide curriculum development, staff training, and resource allocation (Shattock, 2010).

In the African context, strategic misalignment has been identified as a key constraint on teaching effectiveness. Effah and Asante (2020) note that weak strategic oversight in some Ghanaian universities results in fragmented academic priorities and inconsistent teaching standards. This underscores the importance of governing councils in setting coherent academic directions that prioritize teaching excellence.

Performance Evaluation and Accountability

The evaluation of institutional performance against established benchmarks is a critical governance function. Governing councils utilize performance indicators such as student evaluation scores, graduation rates, and accreditation outcomes to assess teaching effectiveness. Evidence suggests that institutions with robust performance monitoring systems are better positioned to identify gaps in teaching quality and implement corrective measures (OECD, 2020).

Accountability mechanisms further reinforce this process by ensuring that university management remains answerable for academic outcomes. According to agency theory, effective monitoring reduces opportunistic behavior and aligns managerial actions with institutional goals (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Inadequate accountability structures, by contrast, can lead to declining teaching standards and inefficiencies.

Leadership Appointment and Institutional Outcomes

The appointment and oversight of university leadership is another critical function of governing councils. Vice-Chancellors and senior administrators play a pivotal role in shaping institutional culture, including attitudes toward teaching and learning. Research indicates that strong academic leadership is positively associated with improved teaching performance, as leaders influence staff motivation, pedagogical innovation, and quality assurance processes (Saint et al., 2003).

However, in many developing countries, leadership appointments are sometimes influenced by political considerations, which may undermine institutional autonomy and effectiveness. This highlights the need for transparent and merit-based appointment processes within governing councils.

Financial Oversight and Resource Allocation

Financial governance is directly linked to teaching performance through its impact on resource availability. Governing councils, as principal financial authorities, are responsible for budget approval, financial planning, and resource allocation. Adequate funding supports critical teaching inputs such as faculty recruitment, instructional materials, and infrastructure development.

Johnstone (2004) argues that efficient financial management enhances institutional capacity to deliver quality education, while poor financial governance can constrain teaching effectiveness. In resource-constrained environments like Ghana, prudent financial oversight is particularly crucial for sustaining academic quality.

Trusteeship and Institutional Sustainability

The trustee role of governing councils extends beyond financial stewardship to the protection of institutional assets and long-term sustainability. This includes safeguarding physical infrastructure, intellectual property, and institutional reputation. Sustainable management of these resources ensures continuity in teaching and learning activities and supports the long-term mission of the university.

Resource dependence theory provides insight into this function, emphasizing the role of governing bodies in securing and managing critical resources necessary for institutional survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Effective trusteeship thus contributes indirectly to teaching performance by ensuring a stable and supportive academic environment.

Research Gap

Despite the recognized importance of governing councils, empirical evidence linking their functions to teaching performance in Ghanaian public universities remains limited. Existing studies largely focus on governance structures or administrative efficiency, with insufficient attention to pedagogical outcomes. Furthermore, few studies adopt an integrated framework that examines multiple governance functions simultaneously. Limited empirical evidence exists on governance-teaching relationships in Ghana

This study addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of how key governing council functions influence teaching performance in Ghana, thereby contributing to both theory and practice in higher education governance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on three governance theories, namely: Agency, Stewardship and Resource Dependency Theories. From a theoretical perspective, university governance is commonly examined through the lenses of **agency theory**, **resource dependence theory**, and **stewardship theory**. Agency theory underscores the role of governing councils in mitigating information asymmetry and aligning the interests of university management with those of stakeholders (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Resource dependence theory highlights the council's function in securing critical resources and external legitimacy (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), while stewardship theory emphasizes collaborative governance and trust-based leadership aimed at enhancing institutional performance (Davis et al., 1997). Together, these perspectives provide a useful framework for understanding how governing councils influence teaching outcomes through strategic and oversight functions.

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Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Conceptual Framework

Governing Council Functions → Teaching Performance
↓
- Strategic Direction
- Performance Evaluation
- Accountability
- Leadership Appointment
- Financial Oversight
- Trusteeship

Teaching Performance Indicators
↓
Teaching Quality
Student Satisfaction
Graduation Rates
Accreditation Outcomes
(Mediating Variables-optional for SEM extension. Leadership
Effectiveness- Resource Allocation)
Efficiency

Hypotheses

- H1: Strategic direction positively affects teaching performance
- H2: Performance evaluation positively affects teaching performance
- H3: Accountability positively affects teaching performance
- H4: Leadership appointment positively affects teaching performance
- H5: Financial oversight positively affects teaching performance
- H6: Trusteeship positively affects teaching performance

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model positions **governing council -functions as independent variables** and **teaching performance as the dependent variable**, with potential mediating effects of leadership effectiveness and resource allocation.

Hypotheses Development

Strategic Direction

Effective strategic direction provides a roadmap for academic excellence and aligns institutional priorities with teaching objectives.

H1: Strategic direction of governing councils has a positive and significant effect on teaching performance in public universities in Ghana.

Performance Evaluation

Continuous monitoring and evaluation enable institutions to identify and address weaknesses in teaching quality.

H2: Performance evaluation by governing councils positively influences teaching performance.

Accountability and Control

Strong accountability mechanisms ensure that management actions are aligned with institutional goals.

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H3: Monitoring and accountability functions of governing councils positively affect teaching performance.

Leadership Appointment

Competent leadership enhances institutional effectiveness and promotes a culture of teaching excellence.

H4: The effectiveness of leadership appointment by governing councils positively influences teaching performance.

Financial Oversight

Adequate and efficient allocation of financial resources supports teaching and learning processes.

H5: Financial oversight by governing councils has a positive impact on teaching performance.

Trusteeship

Effective management of institutional assets ensures sustainability and continuity in academic delivery.

H6: Trusteeship function of governing councils positively influences teaching performance.

Model Summary

The study proposes a direct-effects model in which governing council functions collectively and individually influence teaching performance. The framework allows for empirical testing using quantitative methods (e.g., regression or SEM), providing insights into the relative importance of each governance dimension.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, specifically a convergent parallel design, where quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated at the interpretation stage. This design is appropriate because it allows for both statistical testing of relationships and contextual understanding of governing council practices in Ghanaian public universities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The quantitative component examines the relationship between governing council functions and teaching performance, while the qualitative component provides deeper insights into how and why these governance mechanisms influence teaching outcomes.

Population and Sampling

The study was delimited to three public universities in Ghana, focusing on three key respondent groups:

- Governing Council members
- Senior management (Vice-Chancellors, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Deans)
- Academic staff

A **multi-stage sampling technique** is employed:

1. **Institutional selection**: Stratified sampling of public universities to ensure representation (older vs. newly established institutions).
2. **Respondent selection**:

- Purposive sampling for council members and senior management
- Stratified random sampling for academic staff

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Sample Size (Quantitative)

The sample size of the study was 421, which comprised 409 staff who responded to survey questionnaire and 12 interview participants. Four participants from each university. According to (Hair et al., 2019), a minimum sample of 300–400 **respondents** supports robust statistical analysis particularly for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data

Data were collected through structured questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Key Constructs:

- Strategic Direction
- Performance Evaluation
- Accountability & Control
- Leadership Appointment
- Financial Oversight
- Trusteeship
- Teaching Performance (dependent variable)

Qualitative Data

- Semi-structured interviews with council members and university leaders
- Interview themes:
- Governance effectiveness
- Challenges in oversight
- Influence on teaching quality
- Institutional constraints

Measurement of Variables

Independent Variables (Governing Council Functions)

Adapted from governance literature:

- Strategic Direction (policy clarity, vision alignment)
- Performance Evaluation (use of KPIs, monitoring systems)
- Accountability (transparency, control systems)
- Leadership Appointment (merit-based selection, evaluation systems)
- Financial Oversight (budget control, resource allocation)
- Trusteeship (asset protection, sustainability practices)

Dependent Variable (Teaching Performance)

Measured using:

- Teaching quality
- Student satisfaction
- Graduation rates
- Accreditation

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Data Analysis

Quantitative Component

The questionnaire data were reviewed and edited to ensure completeness and validity in line with the hypotheses. Data were then coded to facilitate easy analysis. IBM SPSS Version 23, Microsoft Excel and SEM were used to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to determine the characteristics of governing council's functions on teaching performance

Qualitative Component

The analysis of the qualitative data was guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase model of thematic analyses (Maguire & Delahunt, 2018)

Reliability and Validity of the Survey Instruments

The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). All constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70. Factor loadings were above the recommended threshold of 0.60, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also established using the Fornell- Larcker criterion

RESULTS

A total of **421** participants were involved in the study, comprising **409** academic staff who completed the survey questionnaire and **12 key informants** (4 from each university) who participated in interviews. The quantitative analysis is based on the 409 valid survey responses, representing a high response rate suitable for robust statistical analysis. The analysis begins with descriptive statistics of the study variables. The results indicate that respondents generally perceive governing council functions to be moderately effective, with the mean scores ranging between 58.2% and 65.7%

Descriptive Analysis of Governing Council Functions

Table 1 presents staff perceptions of governing council functions and their influence on teaching performance.

Table 1: Staff Perceptions of Governing Council Functions

Variable	Agree (n)	Disagree (n)	% Agree
Strategic Direction → Teaching Performance	266	139	65.7%
Monitoring & Evaluation → Teaching Performance	244	161	60.2%
Accountability Function → Teaching Performance	253	152	62.5%
Leadership Appointment → Teaching Performance	293	164	64.1%*
Financial Oversight → Teaching Performance	236	170	58.2%

Interpretation

The results indicate that a majority of respondents perceive governing council functions as positively influencing teaching performance. **Strategic direction (65.7%)** and **leadership appointment (64.1%)** recorded the highest agreement levels, suggesting that staff consider these functions most critical. Conversely, **financial oversight (58.2%)** and **monitoring and evaluation (60.2%)** received relatively lower agreement, indicating potential weaknesses in these areas.

Inferential Analysis (Chi-Square Tests)

To determine whether the observed distributions are statistically significant, **Chi-square (χ^2) tests** were conducted.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test Results

Hypothesis	χ² Value	p-value	Decision
H1: Strategic Direction → TC	39.21	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H2: Monitoring & Evaluation → TC	17.54	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H3: Accountability → TC	25.67	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H4: Leadership Appointment → TC	41.83	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H5: Financial Oversight → TC	10.92	$p < 0.01$	Supported

Interpretation

All governing council functions show **statistically significant relationships** with teaching performance. Leadership appointment and strategic direction exhibit the strongest associations, reinforcing their central role in university governance.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

To further examine the relationships, a **Structural Equation Model (SEM)** was estimated. Governing council functions were modeled as independent variables predicting teaching performance.

Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Threshold	Interpretation
χ^2/df	2.31	< 3.0	Good fit
CFI	0.94	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
TLI	0.92	≥ 0.90	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.056	≤ 0.08	Good fit

The model demonstrates an **acceptable-to-good fit**, indicating that the proposed framework adequately explains the data.

Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Table 3: SEM Path Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	p-value	Decision
H1: Strategic Direction → TC	0.31	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H2: Monitoring & Evaluation → TC	0.18	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H3: Accountability → TC	0.24	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H4: Leadership Appointment → TC	0.36	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H5: Financial Oversight → TC	0.15	$p < 0.05$	Supported

Interpretation of SEM Results

The SEM results reveal that all five governing council functions have **positive and statistically significant effects** on teaching performance.

- **Leadership appointment ($\beta = 0.36$)** emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that effective selection of university leadership significantly enhances teaching outcomes.
- **Strategic direction ($\beta = 0.31$)** also shows a strong effect, confirming the importance of clear institutional vision and planning.
- **Accountability ($\beta = 0.24$)** plays a moderate but significant role in ensuring teaching quality.
- **Monitoring and evaluation ($\beta = 0.18$)** has a weaker effect, suggesting gaps in performance tracking systems.
- **Financial oversight ($\beta = 0.15$)** shows the least effect, indicating that financial governance may not be optimally linked to teaching outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide strong empirical support for the argument that governing council functions significantly influence teaching performance in public universities in Ghana.

First, the dominant role of **leadership appointment** highlights the importance of governance in shaping institutional leadership. This aligns with stewardship theory, which emphasizes leadership as a driver of organizational performance. Effective leaders create academic environments that promote teaching excellence, innovation, and staff motivation.

Second, the strong effect of **strategic direction** reinforces the view that governance bodies play a critical role in setting institutional priorities. Universities with clear strategic frameworks are better positioned to align teaching objectives with national and global standards.

Third, **accountability mechanisms** were found to significantly influence teaching performance, supporting agency theory. Governing councils that enforce accountability ensure that management remains focused on academic outcomes.

However, the relatively weaker effects of monitoring and evaluation and financial oversight suggest structural and operational challenges within Ghanaian universities. While these functions exist formally, their implementation may be limited by:

- Inadequate data systems
- Limited technical capacity
- Weak enforcement mechanisms

The qualitative findings further support this interpretation, with respondents indicating that the councils often lack the expertise and tools needed for effective performance monitoring.

Integration with Qualitative Findings

Interviews revealed that:

- Council members sometimes lack training in academic quality assurance
- Political influence affects decision-making
- Financial decisions are not always aligned with teaching priorities

These insights help explain why some governance functions show weaker statistical effects despite being theoretically important.

Implications

Policy Implications

- Strengthen training and capacity of governing council members
- Improve data-driven performance monitoring systems
- Ensure autonomy and reduce political interference

Theoretical Implications

- Confirms applicability of agency and stewardship theories in African higher education
- Demonstrates the multidimensional nature of governance-performance relationships

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that governing council functions are significant predictors of teaching performance, with leadership appointment and strategic direction being the most influential. However, improving monitoring systems and financial governance is essential for maximizing the impact of university governance in Ghana

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. To the appointing body of the governing councils of public universities, (thus the minister of education responsible for tertiary education) should ensure that the selection and appointment of representatives to councils be merit-based devoid of political affiliation, nepotism, and cronyism. There must be a good balance between academia and industry.
2. Regular training sessions should be organized by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, the regulatory body for university education in Ghana to equip council members with skills and tools to monitor and assess the general performance of their universities
3. Adequate and timely financing is a prerequisite for quality teaching and learning. The government must address the problem of inadequate financing in public universities
4. The management of universities should recruit qualified academic and administrative staff. Staff should be regularly trained to promote quality teaching performance
5. The management of universities should strengthen governance capacity, accountability and monitoring at all levels of university operations to improve total performance.

Limitation of the Study

Out of 23 public universities which comprise 15 research and 8 technical universities, the study was confined to three research universities. Criteria for inclusion were: that the university's the governance structure had be operated for over five decades, runs under graduate to PhD programmes. Again only full-time staff of the universities were sampled. The aim was to find out the perspectives of students and staff of various universities on the quality of teaching at all levels in public universities. Only information-rich staff of the selected universities were sampled for the in-depth interview. This was due to the nature of the phenomenon under study. However, the findings offer insights relevant to policymakers and university administrators across similar developing contexts

Ethics approval statements

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana (Reference number: **UCCIRB-0003/19/2022**)

Citation Diversity Statement.

Because of our desire to broaden the scope of research on university governance, we were intentional is situating this study on governing councils of public universities in Ghana within a cross-cultural perspective relevant to Sub-Saharan Africa. Whiles much of the literature on university governance originates from Europe and North America, we incorporated insights from Asia, other parts of Africa and local content to ensure more inclusive understanding of university governance form a broader perspective. All sources consulted have been properly acknowledged, and full credit has been given to the scholars whose works forms the foundation of this study.

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