GOVERNANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This article presents the results of an empirical study that explored and compared the size, composition, roles and functions of Ghanaian university governing councils and the extent to which their governance systems facilitate efficiency and effectiveness in these universities. Using both primary and secondary data obtained from three private and two public universities purposely sampled from Ghana in a survey which was conducted between March and September 2007, it was revealed that the sizes, roles, and functions of the governing councils of both types of university were similar except in the case of the composition of the governing body in which the private universities have a huge presence of owners on the council. Besides, the governing systems of both types of university have contributed averagely to efficiency and effectiveness suggesting that there is more room for improvement.

The study recommended the adoption of best practice approaches to governance in all universities; the recruitment of technocrats and professionals into university governance; as well as continuous training on governance for university council members. Further research might expand the sample size to test the initial perspectives gained from this present study as well as investigate the differences between the governance arrangements of the faith-based and non-faith-based private universities in Ghana.

Introduction

Governance in higher educational institutions has become crucial in Ghana following the proliferation of private universities in recent years. This upsurge has been caused largely by an increase in demand for tertiary education resulting from high population growth and expanded enrolment at basic and secondary levels which far exceeds the

capacity of the public tertiary institutions to cope with the number involved. These private universities are not just to add to the numbers but are expected to deliver quality education for the human resource development of the nation.

Imperatively, the governance systems these universities apply to their work are crucial to meeting these expectations. In the words of Cutting and Kouzmin (2001) "one of the prime determinants of whether an organisation will survive, prosper and fulfill its inherent potential, is the quality and adaptability of governance that it is able to exert on its being, its development and its processes of achievement". That could perhaps explain why in the developed world, university governance has been a subject of periodic attention and review. The areas of governance that have attracted much attention, according to Coaldrake et al, (2003) have been the size, composition and roles of their governing bodies which, it is believed, are critical to successful performance of universities.

In spite of the importance of organisational governance in the success of an organisation, little is known about how Ghanaian private universities are being governed. A cursory search through literature indicates that there is some information on governance in Ghanaian public universities like that by Daniel (1997), Effah and Mensa-Bonsu (2001) and a host of publications by the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and National Accreditation Board (NAB), but nothing has been found regarding private universities in Ghana. Since Ghanaian private universities have become a formidable force in university education in the country, it is important to know how they are governing themselves. It is against this backdrop that this study has been undertaken to unravel the issues regarding university governance in Ghana both in the private and the public sector.

The study therefore sought to explore and investigate: the size, composition, roles and functions of the governing bodies of private and public universities in Ghana; and how their governance systems facilitate the efficiency and effectiveness of the universities.

Significance of the Study

Giving the fact that the tertiary educational sector in Ghana is witnessing significant influx of private universities and colleges and major policy overhaul, this study would provide useful information for policy makers and other stakeholders for appropriate regulation and action to improve the sector. For those desiring to establish their own private universities and colleges, the findings should help them know what is going on in the industry and also expose them to appropriate governance structures that they could consider adopting so that they would not have to face the challenges faced by their predecessors. Finally, one cannot overemphasise the contribution this study would make to the ever-growing knowledge and debates on governance in tertiary educational institutions on the one hand and the general concept of governance on the other hand.

Literature Review

University governance according to Edwards (2003) is concerned with the determination of values inside universities, their systems of decision-making and resource allocation, their mission and purposes, the patterns of authority and hierarchy, and the relationship of universities as institutions to the different academic worlds within and the worlds of government, business and community without. Gayle, et al. (2003) also defined university governance as the structure and process of authoritative decision-making across issues that are significant for external as well as internal stakeholders within a university.

For most countries including Ghana, university education and their governance arrangements have been greatly influenced by patterns and trends in the west especially the United Kingdom, United States of America as well as other commonwealth nations (Effah and Mensa-Bonsu, 2001). In a comparative discussion of governance arrangements in the UK, US, and Australia, Coaldrake et al. (2003) indicated that despite the highly diverse forms of institutional type and governance that may be found in these countries, there is a convergent trend in the broad thrust of reform in university governance. They stated further that this trend is also readily discernible in other countries whose university systems have been modelled on Anglo-

US examples, including Canada, Hong Kong and New Zealand. They mentioned that the broad areas of change are:

- stronger assertion of the primacy of the governing body as having ultimate authority, accountability and responsibility for the university, including over the senate/academic board;
- a shift in governing body role and composition, from being a parliament of elected university members and representatives of external stakeholders towards being a body with the appropriate expertise to exercise trusteeship of the institution. In particular, this involves:
  - o increasing emphasis on the role of independent governors in relation to the above shift; and
  - o viewing stakeholder involvement in governance as being part of a corporate board acting in the institutional interest, rather than representing a constituency;
- greater professionalisation and articulation of expectations of university governance through issuing of guidelines and protocols, and provision of induction and training of governors; and
- a growing imperative to improve clearly the relevance and relationship of the university to various communities of interest, particularly communities with an interest in graduate performance and capabilities.

In South Africa, according to Hall and Symes (2005), issues relating to the governance of their tertiary system of higher education correlate with these international trends Marginson and Considine (2000) provide a useful and up-to-date summary of the main governance trends in universities over the last ten or so years which essentially have led to stronger executive power away from a collegial form of governance. They describe this trend as a worldwide shift from "collegial governance" to "managerialism". Similar views have been expressed by Cutting and Kouzmin (2001) and Young (2004).

These trends pose a challenge for governing councils of Ghanaian universities in whose care the governance of the institutions has been entrusted to endeavour to understand the complex environment in which universities have to operate. Such

understanding would also breed sensitivity to issues pertaining to the complex changes and new direction that the institutions require.

Governance Structures in Ghanaian Public Universities

As already indicated some studies have earlier been done with regard to the governance arrangements of public universities in Ghana. Daniel (1997) and Effah and Mensa-Bonsu (2001), in separate studies, point out similar descriptions of the governance structure. They mentioned that Ghanaian public universities have internal and external governance arrangements. The internal governance arrangements comprise the Chancellor who is the titular head; the Vice Chancellor (or Principal) who is the executive head; the Council (includes lay & academic members) which is the final decision making body; the Academic Board (or Senate) which advises Council on academic matters. In addition, the universities are internally run by committees and regulated by statutes. Externally, the governance structure encompasses Ministry of Education, National Council for Tertiary Education, National Accreditation Board, and Joint Admissions & Matriculation Board. They also noted the existence of informal structures such as the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals which provides informal consultation on matters of common interest to the universities. Literature is underdeveloped as far as the private universities in Ghana are concerned and this study represents one of the initial attempts to fill this research gap.

Methodology

The study adopted an exploratory and comparative methodological approach in examining the governance arrangements of the private and the public universities in Ghana. The exploratory approach was used because it appears little is known about the governance arrangements of the private universities in Ghana.

The multi-stage sampling technique was used in this study. In the first stage purposive sampling methods were used to select three private and two public universities in Ghana for the survey which was conducted between March and September 2007. The three private universities involved in the study are the earliest to be established in Ghana. Thus, their structures might have been well formed and their experience could adequately represent the nature of governance in the private universities in the

country. They are Valley View University (VVU), Central University College (CUC), and Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG). On the side of the public universities, University of Ghana (UG) was selected because it is the oldest university and its governance arrangements have been the model for most of the other universities in the country. In addition a relatively new public university, University of Education, Winneba (UEW), was sampled to establish whether being new, its governance arrangements will differ or parallel the old ones

In the second stage stratified sampling method was used to select source of the data. This approach was used to obtain a balanced data from key stakeholders of the universities. Thus, management, central administration, deans, head of departments, students, workers and faculty constituted various strata.

The last stage involved the use of a purposive sampling technique again to select members from each stratum to constitute the sample size. This technique was used because even in each stratum, not all members have knowledge of the governance systems of their respective universities.

Previously piloted questionnaires were then distributed to key members selected from the various strata. This was supplemented by structured interview with a key respondent from the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) which is one of the major legislative bodies in the tertiary educational sector in Ghana. Most of the questionnaires were self-administered and this gave the researcher the opportunity to probe further on responses and also offer explanation to the questions that seemed ambiguous to respondents. In all 130 questionnaire were administered but only 95 were received for analysis, giving a return rate of 73.07%. In addition to the primary data, secondary data were used for the study. These include information from documents such as brochures, strategic plans, charters, legislations, statutes and journals obtained from the universities as well as NAB and NCTE relating to the objectives of this research.

Results and Discussion

The results were discussed along the lines of the objectives of the study. These findings were presented using a combination of summary statistics and cross tabulations in terms of frequencies and percentages, as well as independent t-test results.

Size and Composition of Governing Councils

The independent t-test results revealed that there was no significant difference between the average sizes of the governing bodies of the two types of institutions. This situation thus contradicts what pertains in the United States of America as indicated by Coaldrake et al (2003). They stated that private not-for-profit governing bodies are typically much larger than public university boards.

TABLE 1: Independent t-test Summary Table on the Size of Governing Body

	Type of Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t-obs	sig
Size of Governing Body	Private	21	18.7143	7.15642	41	1.876	0.68
	Public	22	15.5000	3.58236			

Source: Field Data, 2007

As far as composition of the governing body is concerned, results showed that most (68%) of the members in the private universities are people appointed on the basis of their knowledge and experience in fields relevant to the objects of the institution, even though some (42%) are representatives of important stakeholders of the university. Quite a number (28%) are appointed by owners of the university to represent their interests whilst a few (2%) are appointed for the financial contribution they could make to the university. Thus, one would realize that there is a higher external membership of the governing body made up of people mostly connected to the owner(s) of the university. A content analysis of the statutes and other documents of the private universities and which was confirmed by the key respondent from NCTE reveal that

there is a huge presence of the ownership of the university on the governing body. In other words, there are a lot of people on the governing council of the private universities who represent the interest of the owner (s) of the university. For instance, MUCG has seven (7) representatives of the Methodist Church on the Council including the head of the church who is Chairman of Council. VVU has about twenty (20) out of the thirty-seven (37) members of the University Council being people who occupy key positions in the Seventh Day Adventist Church and its affiliate bodies. It is only CUC that does not have direct membership from the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) on its Board of Regents apart from the founder of the church who happens to be the Chancellor of the University College. Even with that most of the members are people connected with the church in one way or the other.

Other people usually found on the governing councils of the private universities are representatives of the NCTE, industry, the university it is affiliated to (since most private universities are colleges affiliated to established universities both in Ghana and abroad) and in some cases representatives of staff and students (MUCG) as well as alumni (VVU). CUC has no representative from staff, students and alumni. Members of the governing body are all external except the President of the University College. This resembles the composition of the governing bodies of private not-for-profit universities in the United States of America described by Coaldrake et al (2003).

Responses from the primary data, as far as the public universities are concerned reveal that a majority of the members of the governing body are stakeholder representatives (91%), followed by people appointed due to their knowledge and experience (29%), and then government appointees (7%) [Note: each criterion is 100%]. A critical look at the Statutes and Acts that established the public universities showed that almost every institution or body that has some direct impact on university education in Ghana has representation on the Council. There is also strong internal representation made up of students (bachelors and graduate), unionized staff (teachers, junior and senior), as well as convocation. This confirms what has been put forward by Effah and Mensa-Bonsu (2001) that the Council of the public universities in Ghana is an admixture of persons from within and without the institution, with special effort being made to include representation of business and industry in the selection of

Government-appointees into the University Councils. Thus, the governing bodies of the public universities are composed of members appointed from within and without the university who represent a wide-spectrum of stakeholders. The private universities, on the other hand, have most members from outside the university representing predominantly the interest of owners of the university.

Role and Functions of Governing Bodies

Regarding the role of the governing body in the university, results indicate that in both types of institution, the governing body serves as the final decision body of the university. 28% and 11% respectively noted that the role is advisory whilst 4% and 2% respectively mentioned other roles of the governing body. On the issue of fundraising, there were divergent views: the public university respondents did not believe their governing councils played a role, where as 4% of the private university respondents thought the Council played a role in fund-raising. This may be due to the fact that private universities are self-financing and therefore may have the governing body playing a critical role of helping to raise funds for the university. This may also explain why some members are co-opted into the governing body due to their financial contribution.

With regard to the functions of the governing bodies, a content analysis of the statutes and Acts (in the case of public universities) of both types of university reveals that their key responsibilities are similar. As a matter of fact, most of them are couched in a similar language. This may be due to the fact that the private universities are affiliated to most of the public universities whose governing councils have functions stipulated by their establishing Acts. These functions include:

a) Providing strategic direction, and monitoring implementation for the university;
b) Controlling finances of the university;
c) Exercising control over all property, funds and investments of the university;
d) Instituting measures for the conservation, augmentation and allocation of resources in the university;
e) Prescribing the manner in which accounts of units of the university are to be submitted;

f) Awarding degrees (including honorary degrees), diplomas, and certificates.

Thus, as far as the functions of the private university governing councils are concerned, one could categorise them into Law-Making, Administrative, and Oversight responsibilities, as suggested by Effah and Mensa-Bonsu (2003). These, it can be seen, are not significantly different from those of the public universities in Ghana.

Governance Structures and Institutional Efficiency

Generally the study wanted to find out how the governance systems of the universities facilitate efficient delivery of work. The findings revealed that they do to a large extent although there is a lot of room for improvement. However compared with the public universities the governance structures of the private universities seem to better facilitate efficient delivery of work. The reasons given for this state of affairs include the fact that the governance structures of private universities are less cumbersome; relationships, roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined; and decisions are based on consensus.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis and discussions, the following conclusions have been drawn from the study:

- The average size of the governing body of the private universities does not differ significantly from that of the public universities. This differs from what pertains in the United States of America as revealed by Coaldrake et al (2003).

- With respect to composition of the governing body, both types of institution have their governing bodies made up of internal and external stakeholders of the universities. However, in the private universities, most of the members were appointed from outside the university. They are mostly people with knowledge and experience in fields relevant to the university and also people appointed to represent the interest of the owners of the university. The extent of representation of internal stakeholders (staff and students) on the governing body is lower in the private universities than in the public universities.

- The role of the governing councils of both types of university is predominantly that of a final decision making body, even though they may also sometimes act in an advisory capacity. Additionally, the governing bodies of the private universities play a fundraising role; thus, people may be appointed to the governing bodies simply because of the financial contribution they can make to the university.

- There is no major difference between the functions of the governing councils of both types of university. Indeed, most of the functions are couched in the same language and include providing strategic direction, financial control, the control of property and investment, resource conservation and allocation, as well as the award of degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

- On the whole, when it comes to determining the degree to which the governing structure has facilitated efficient execution of work in the universities studied, the private universities would seem to have a slight edge over the public ones. This suggests that there is a lot of room for improvement by both types of institution regarding governance.

Recommendations and Further Research

The study recommends the adoption of best practice approaches to governance in all universities, especially the principles proposed by the OECD; the recruitment of technocrats and professionals into university governance; as well as continuous training in governance for university council members.

Future research might expand the sample size to test the initial perspectives gained from this present study as well as investigate the differences between the governance arrangements of the faith-based and non-faith-based private universities in Ghana.

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