

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Exploring Staff Perception of Corporate Governance Practices of Universities in Ghana

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## Ethical Statement

Ethical approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast before conducting this study. The ethical clearance identification number for the study was UCCIRB/CES/2021/47. Consent forms were distributed and data were collected from only participants who submitted their signed consent forms.

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## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest to disclose

## ABSTRACT

Corporate governance practices of institutions such as universities have the impetus to influence the level of staff contentment. The study sought to explore staff perception of the corporate governance practices of universities in Ghana. It adopted the qualitative phenomenological design and involved nine autonomous public universities and four autonomous private universities. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 22 pro-vice-chancellors, registrars and 32 staff constituency representatives of senior members (academic), senior members (non-academic), senior staff, and junior staff for in-depth interviews. Data were collected by using a semi-structured interview guide. The data were analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. It was found that the staff of universities are discontented with the council size, composition, and the election of deans in the universities. To make sure that every member of staff is adequately represented on the councils through their unions, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), review the statutes addressing the size and composition of the universities. Moreover, it is recommended that universities institutionalise training programmes for all staff to prepare them to occupy leadership and management positions in the future. In conclusion, the existing policy regarding the election of deans in some universities should be substituted with an appointment based on an individual's experience and qualifications.

**Keywords:** Corporate governance practices, staff contentment, autonomous universities, private universities, and public universities

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## INTRODUCTION

Corporate Governance Practices (CGPs) have become increasingly important in modern institutions, particularly among universities that are adapting to the New Public Management (NPM) framework. This framework emphasises internal financial controls, accountability and transparency, ownership structure, board size and competencies, and makeup to ensure effective governance (Duarte et al., 2021; Puni & Anlesinya 2020; Ramirez & Tejada, 2018). These indicators are usually adhered to when staff are content with them. Therefore, in ensuring compliance with the NPM framework, staff contentment should be considered.

Staff contentment (SC) is the positive emotional state that staff express in response to their job and employment, characterised by a favourable attitude (Nazneen & Miralam, 2017). This definition is in line with Frempong et al.'s (2018) view on staff contentment. According to them, it is a pleasurable state resulting from one's work or employment experiences. Varshney (2020), also view SC from a psycho-social perspective. According to Varshney, it is the extent to which staff enjoy their work. Consequently, SC can be seen as the attitudes and behaviours of staff towards the CGPs of an institution such as the university.

Evidence across the globe indicates that CGPs of universities can influence staff contentment and commitment (Okyere, 2022). Studies have shown that institutions with progressive corporate cultures that prioritise staff satisfaction experience better levels of SC, which is supported by theories of organisational support and social exchange (Creek et al., 2017; Paramitha et al., 2017). The NPM also encourages institutions to use cutting-edge CGPs such as transparency and accountability, which can raise SC (Hofmann & Strobel, 2020). This dynamics of SC may in turn lead to a reduction in staff turnover (Hijazi, 2021).

Adhering to CGPs such as managerial competencies of staff in the universities ensures that the administrative and leadership capacity of the staff meet the current trends of governance practices. In addition, ensuring the manifestation of managerial competencies of staff will end up increasing their contentment with the CGPs and the institution at large. When staff can demonstrate the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies in governance practices, it can boost their contentment and efficiency (Gorenak et al., 2019; Zhu & Zayim-Kurtay, 2018). According to Paramitha et al. (2017), good CGPs adopted by the university lead to a better performance of the university which is reflected in the financial and non-financial areas of the university such as the higher contentment of its staff.

However, universities in developing nations, such as Ghana, have inadequate corporate governance standards, resulting in subpar performance (Amoateng, et al., 2017). Inadequate governance can lead to bad governance practices, which often do not meet the expectations of stakeholders, including employees. Issues related to budget, transparency, trustworthiness, legislation, and facilities are common concerns in Sub-Saharan African universities (Bingab et al., 2018; National Accreditation Board, 2017).

Wilson et al. (2018) noted that some flaws and gaps remain in planned corporate governance measures despite universities implementing internal financial control systems. These flaws and gaps can have an impact on SC and contribute to low levels of job happiness among employees. Again, contributing causes to low levels of job happiness among staff include an inadequate organisational structure that undermines corporate governance procedures (Nene & Pillay, 2019).

Some university administrative staff feel unsatisfied due to delayed promotions and additional compensation for taking on additional responsibilities and duties. Faculty members in technical universities have incentive

packages in place, but they are not happy with them, particularly extrinsic motivators like housing, pay, and other perks. A large percentage of academic staff members in both public and private universities are dissatisfied with their jobs, which is why they show such low levels of dedication (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2017; Amporful et al., 2018; Amoako et al., 2019).

According to Herzberg's two-factor model of job satisfaction, effective corporate governance procedures can raise staff contentment levels, lower employee discontentment levels, and ultimately lead to increased staff contentment. Dissatisfiers such as a lack of academic liberty, additional benefits, merit-based hiring practices, insufficient pay, lack of respect and recognition, and limited opportunities for promotion can contribute to employee discontentment, while satisfiers such as professional growth opportunities, recognition, meaningful work, and positive working relationships can improve SC (Busatic & Mujabasic, 2018; Batugal & Tindowen, 2019; Sukdeo et al., 2017).

Studies such as Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2017), Amporful et al. (2018), and Amoako et al., 2019 reveal significant dissatisfaction among university administrative staff and faculty members. These findings suggest a need to explore the specific reasons for this dissatisfaction and their relation to CGPs. While existing research acknowledges the significance of CGPs and their potential to influence employee contentment, there is a dearth of empirical studies that specifically examine this relationship within universities, especially those in developing nations such as Ghana. This study intends to fill this gap by contributing to the academic literature on CGPs and employee contentment in higher education institutions.

## **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What corporate governance system is practised in the universities in Ghana?
2. How are staff content with the CGPs of the universities in Ghana?
3. What are the weaknesses in the CGPs of universities in Ghana?

## **Corporate governance practices in higher education institutions**

The Ghanaian university system, following the British tradition, reflects a governance model inspired by British higher education institutions. Universities in Ghana employ two distinct systems of governance. Younger universities employ a two-tier or bicameral system, comprising the council and the academic board, with the council serving as the highest decision-making authority. The council establishes committees or boards that enable it to function effectively. Conversely, older universities utilise a three-tier or collegiate governance system, encompassing departments, faculties or schools, and colleges. The provosts of these colleges act as representatives of the vice-chancellors at the college level (Effah & Mensah-Bonsu, 2001).

Universities are incorporating corporate governance mechanisms to address stakeholder expectations. In this modern management framework, the university council, akin to the board of directors in private enterprises, consists of representatives from various stakeholders, including the central government, local community, and businesses (Urbanek, 2020). This aligns with the perspective put forth by Ramirez and Tejada (2018), who argue that universities in the twenty-first century are adopting innovative approaches, including transparency, accountability, optimal board size, managerial competencies, diverse board composition, and board independence, all aimed at enhancing institutional governance. These universities are seen as drawing inspiration

from governance models employed by profit-oriented institutions.

## METHOD

### Research Design

The qualitative phenomenological design that makes use of in-depth interviews was employed for the study. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) submit that phenomenological research design allows researchers to determine the meaning of human experience concerning a phenomenon as expressed by study participants. The phenomenological design was suitable for this study because the experiences and knowledge of duty bearers such as pro-vice chancellors, registrars, and representatives of staff were explored regarding the CGPs of the university and SC. Interviews were conducted with the duty bearers to explore in-depth their views on SC with CGPs because they are the heads of the academic and non-academic staff of the universities.

### Setting and Participants

Staff representatives were considered because they represent the various staff unions on the Councils of the Universities. The unions for senior members – academic, senior members – non-academic, senior staff and junior staff are the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG), Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA), Senior Staff Association of Universities of Ghana (SSAUoG), and Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU) respectively. In all, thirteen (13) autonomous universities which include nine public and four private autonomous universities in Ghana were involved in the study (NCTE, 2020).

Specifically, 26 participants representing one pro-vice chancellor and one registrar from each of the autonomous universities were considered. An autonomous university, within the context of this study, refers to a university that exercises independent control over its day-to-day operations and curriculum; including the awarding of its certificate to graduates and other honoured awardees. Their academic programmes are not controlled by the government or its agencies; however, they are subjected to accreditation requirements in the area of quality assurance, financial regulations, academic programmes, and cooperate governance practices. Moreover, 40 staff constituency representatives from both private and public autonomous universities were considered. This involves one representative each from University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG), Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA), Senior Staff Association of Universities of Ghana (SSAUoG), and Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU) in all the universities considered for the study. On the whole, 22 pro-vice chancellors and registrars, and 32 staff representatives were used for the study when the saturation point was reached.

### Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect the data. To ensure consistency and authenticity of the instrument, it was piloted with 12 participants. This comprises seven and five participants from one public and one private university in Ghana. These two universities were not included in the main study. Also, we ensured that the study adhered to the flexibility and serendipity conditions by demonstrating our objectivity and minimising the impact of unexpected events on the outcome of the study.

### Data Procedure and Analysis

The study subjects participated in either in-person or online interviews where they were encouraged to feel at ease,

freely express their thoughts, and seek clarification when needed. Additionally, participants were posed supplementary or probing questions as required to delve deeper into the subject of investigation. These interviews were structured around the emerging study themes and typically spanned a duration of 30 to 45 minutes.

In line with Smith and Osborn's (2003) assertion, the interpretative phenomenology analysis was followed in analysing the data. Firstly, themes were established by analysing the transcripts multiple times to identify emerging themes, which were then organised and structured to give them meaning. The main themes that emerged from the study are the corporate governance system, staff contentment with CGPs in universities and weaknesses in the corporate governance of the university. Secondly, the themes were linked by identifying the conceptual connections between emergent themes, which were then grouped into clusters. The transcripts were double-checked to ensure that the participants' genuine words were captured. Thirdly, the themes were arranged by ordering the themes to respond to the research question with the superordinate themes represented by the clustered themes. Fourthly, the core and cluster themes in later interviews were examined and new themes were acknowledged. Finally, the meanings contained in the participants' lived experiences, translating patterns into the participants' narrative accounts were summarised. The findings of the study were supported by direct quotations from participants.

### **Rigour of the Study**

Data credibility was rigorously established through several key methods to ensure reliable outcomes. Firstly, member checking involved soliciting feedback from participants to validate the accuracy of transcribed data in capturing their ideas. Additionally, an inquiry audit was conducted, whereby audio recordings, interpretations, and transcripts were returned to participants for verification, ensuring alignment with their perspectives. The use of an audit trail technique further bolstered data integrity by meticulously documenting the entire research methodology, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. To facilitate data transferability and comprehensibility, the researchers furnished comprehensive descriptions encompassing sample size, sampling methodology, participant demographics, interview procedures, and excerpts from real interviews.

## **RESULTS**

In answering research question one, what corporate governance system is practised in your institution? The main theme corporate governance system of universities emerged. The study revealed that the majority of the participants have adequate knowledge of the governance system of the universities. Participants believed that the governance of the university is based on the statutes. Participants maintained that the university has a comprehensive governance system and adopts corporate governance practices. Three sub-themes emerged from this theme and they include statute-based university governance, bicameral and collegiate systems of governance, and corporate governance practices.

### **Statutes-based university governance**

Participants believed that the university is governed by the provisions of the statutes that establish it.

*The structures and provisions of the statutes stipulate how the university should be governed (P2).*

### **Bicameral and collegiate system of governance**

Participants maintained that the young universities operate the bicameral system of governance while the old ones

run the collegiate system.

*The university which runs the two-tier or bicameral system of governance has the university council and the academic board. The university council which is the highest decision-making body of the university makes major decisions on behalf of the university (P1).*

*The collegiate system establishes a three-tier system of governance i.e., department, faculty or schools and colleges. The provosts of the colleges are the representatives of the vice-chancellors at the college level (P3).*

### **Corporate governance practices of the university**

Participants conceded that university governance is gravitating towards the corporate world because a lot of practices are being imported from the corporate environment.

*The governance of the university is inclined towards the corporate world and so a lot of the corporate governance practices are adopted (P5).*

*In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many universities are embracing practices such as board/council size and composition, internal financial control system, transparency and accountability which are akin to the corporate world (P2).*

In answering research question two, how are staff content with the CGPs of the universities in Ghana? The main theme of staff contentment with CGPs in universities emerged. Participants believed that CGPs such as council size and council composition play a critical role in the governance of the universities. This is because a well-composed council with the appropriate size ensures that staff are fairly represented on the governing councils of the universities. Two sub-themes emerged from the study. These are council size and council composition.

#### **Council size**

Participants maintained that they are less content with the council size because they think some members of the university are not represented.

*I am less content with the university council size because the number of Alumnae, SRC and GRASAG should be increased because of the large size of the people they represent on the council.*

*The university council is okay, but some members of the university feel discontented because they think they are not represented.*

#### **Council composition**

The study showed that the governing council of the university should be well-composed to ensure its proper governance.

*Largely, the current composition allows us to do what we want to do to meet the needs of everyone. We are less contented because we wish other professionals were made to serve on the council.*

*I am not contented with the council composition because it does not ensure that professionals or practitioners from the corporate world are included. A blend of academics and professionals as it is done in the U. S, A. will ensure good governance.*

In answering research question 3, what are the weaknesses in the corporate governance of the universities? The main theme of weaknesses in the corporate governance of the university emerged. This theme revealed that some weaknesses exist regarding the corporate governance of the university. Some of the participants believed that the appointment of deans instead of election and institutionalising training programmes for senior members would ensure that competent people are selected to occupy managerial or leadership positions in the university. The two sub-themes that emerged from the data include the appointment of deans instead of election and institutionalising training programmes for senior members.

### **Appointment of Deans Instead of Election**

Some participants opined that the appointment of deans based on merit will ensure that competent people are selected to occupy such a position in the university.

*The deans of faculties should be appointed instead of being elected. This is because when deans are elected, they owe allegiance to those who elected them instead of focusing on the development of the faculty. When this is done, all positions in the university will be by interview and appointment. The interview panel usually comprises external members who will ensure that there is objectivity in the appointment of deans of faculties just like other positions in the institution.*

*For me, appointing deans based on their vision for the faculty or school in the university is the best way to go. The younger universities are appointing deans based on merit to occupy positions and so the older universities can take a cue from that. There are World Bank Projects which demand the competitive appointment of people and not an election in the university. They will give you money for the projects if you indicate that competent people are appointed to occupy positions in the university based on their vision and not voting. It has become the accepted norm now in the corporate world. If the university wants to benefit from these projects, that is the practice it needs to adopt.*

### **Institutionalising Training Programme for Senior Members**

The majority of participants affirmed the need for universities to institutionalise training programmes in leadership for all lecturers. This is because it will prepare them adequately with the requisite knowledge and experience to occupy leadership and management positions in the future.

*The one-day orientation programme does not adequately prepare Heads of Departments and Deans of Faculties for the administrative positions they occupy. When a well-structured programme is instituted by the university to train senior lecturers, I think it will equip them with the needed knowledge and competencies to perform excellently when given a management position in the future. This is because an Assistant Lecturer appointed today is a potential Vice-Chancellor in the future.*

*Academics are usually bad managers. Senior lecturers who occupy managerial positions should add value to themselves by pursuing short courses in higher education administration, or governance. This will equip them with the needed knowledge and skills to be able to better govern and manage the university.*

*This is because administrators of universities are given administrative training. Besides, when one is recruited as an administrative staff, that person is mentored administratively to occupy a higher administrative position. This, therefore, prepares administrators who occupy senior administrative positions with administrative acumen. Unlike the faculty, senior lecturers who are promoted to professorial*

*rank without any leadership or managerial training and administrative experience are appointed deans of schools or faculties. I support the view that there should be an institutionalised training programme for academics who become administrators i.e. Heads of Departments, Deans, Directors, Pro Vice-Chancellors and Vice Chancellors. When this is done it will make academics good administrators.*

## DISCUSSION

The research discovered that the universities have elaborate governance structures and incorporate CGPs inspired by the corporate sector. This observation aligns with the assertion made by Ramirez and Tejada (2018), who contend that modern universities are embracing novel strategies, including optimizing board composition and size, fostering board independence, promoting accountability, and enhancing transparency. These initiatives are all directed at enhancing the governance of academic institutions in the twenty-first century.

Furthermore, the study highlighted that university staff expressed dissatisfaction with the size and composition of the council, perceiving inadequate representation. This underscores the impact of an ineffective organisational structure, including a poorly composed governing board or council, on diminishing employee job satisfaction levels (Nene & Pillay, 2019).

Conversely, the study's findings align with Herzberg's two-factor theory and are consistent with empirical evidence indicating that the adoption of effective CGPs, such as appropriate size and composition, positively influences employee well-being, fostering job satisfaction and commitment (Sukdeo et al., 2017; Batugal & Tindowen, 2019).

Additionally, the study's findings demonstrate that participants endorse the appointment of deans based on qualifications and the implementation of training programmes aimed at enhancing the leadership skills of senior staff members. This aligns with the viewpoints presented by Zhu and Zayim-Kurtay (2018) and Gorenak et al. (2019), who argue that improving the leadership and managerial competencies of staff in key positions enhances institutional governance, including within universities, and contributes to staff satisfaction. Similarly, Creek et al. (2017), drawing on organisational support and social exchange theories, argue that organisations fostering a progressive corporate culture valued by employees tend to experience higher levels of staff contentment.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of the study was to explore staff perception of the corporate governance practices of the university. According to the analysis, it can be realised that universities are adopting CGPs from the corporate world. It can also be concluded that the majority of Ghanaian university staff are discontented with the makeup of their councils, particularly in terms of their size and composition as a result of non-representation. Some staff dislike the idea of the deans being voted for instead of being appointed and also advocate the institutionalisation of training programmes for staff.

The study's conclusion yields the following succinct implications for practice and research in universities. Staff discontentedness with the current council composition highlights the need for the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) and university councils, to revise existing legislation. The goal is to guarantee adequate representation of staff categories on the council through their respective unions or constituencies.

In line with the finding that some staff prefer Deans to be appointed rather than elected, it is recommended



that GTEC through the councils of the various universities revise their dean selection policy to align with best practices from the corporate world which is giving room to the heads of institutions (Vice Chancellors/ Presidents) to appoint persons who will help them achieve their objectives.

The council through the Vice Chancellor should strengthen the training and development unit to organise a certificate programme on the best university corporate governance practices in the modern world. This programme should be organised bi-annually so that it will equip staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to assume leadership and management roles within the university.

### Limitation of the study

The demanding schedules of study participants may have impacted the consistency of their thought processes, as there are instances when interviews are interrupted or rescheduled to accommodate various meetings and commitments. This interruption or rescheduling could potentially disrupt the flow of their thoughts and affect the findings of the study.

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