

## **Corporate Governance Performance of Zimbabwean State Universities as a Basis of Quality Higher Education: The Student and Lecturer Perspective**

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**Abstract:** *The study focused on evaluating the corporate governance performance of Zimbabwean State universities. With state universities' councils given power to ensure that their institutions are observing basic corporate governance principles, stakeholders have shown some uncertainty on whether state universities are serving them adequately as outlined in their respective Acts of Parliament and other documents. These stakeholders include Zimche, Ministry, Parents, Industry, Students, Staff members and the general society. To solve this problem the research analysed the state universities' adherence to standards and statutory provisions and also their ranking in corporate governance performance. A cross-sectional survey with 47 students and 50 lecturers was used in the study. The study pointed out that labour act, taxation laws, and NSSA regulations are not followed. NUST, MSU and ZOU were found to be following corporate governance principles and the least universities were found to be BUSE and GZU. Frequent audits on universities' stakeholder satisfaction need to be carried out and make instant improvements.*

**Keywords:** *Corporate Governance, University Council, Stakeholder, Quality Education.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Corporate Governance is an important aspect of the management regime in any organization especially in public institutions, public universities included (Mallin, 2010). However, not much has been done locally to evaluate the extent to which principles of corporate governance have been implemented in public universities which are of interest to the researcher. It is on the basis of this observation that a study will be carried out to assess the application of corporate governance principles in the state universities and considers the extent to which those principles are reflected, by the nine state universities in Zimbabwe (Swansson, Mow and Bartos, 2005). Governance of an institution has a direct link to financing, accountability, responsiveness and academic autonomy, which together have an impact on the quality of learning (OECD, 2004). Corporate Governance has been defined by Coyle (2003) as "a system by which companies are directed and controlled". University governance is critical because it defines how issues of institutional identity and autonomy are dealt with (Konolo, 2012). The issues of corporate governance in both private and public sectors have become a very important discussion in the last two decades (De Silva, 2011). Zimbabwe has fifteen registered universities, (nine of which are public and six are private universities). There is also space for new state universities like the ones in Mashonaland East and Manicaland provinces. The key corporate governance issues involve the need to follow guidelines and statutory regulations and the rating of overall governance performance of state universities basing on the respondents' understanding of employee motivation, student welfare, number of doctors produced, utilization of resources, stakeholder satisfaction and participation in social activities (William and Lao, 2009).

Materu (2007) argued that poor governance is one of the several factors that have contributed to decline in quality of higher education in Africa. Abrahams and Akinsanmi (2012), concluded that there appears to be a wide recognition that governance and leadership of higher education needs an immediate revamp and continuing support and proposed that consideration be given to higher education governance. State universities should behave as 'state universities', not as privately owned personalized properties aimed at generating excessive profits from the hard pressed guardians and society. Though Board composition, and personal integrity and qualification of directors can be used to judge effectiveness of boards, the results and output of corporate performance in the eyes of key stakeholders could be used to rate governance seriousness of such institutions.

## **II. Statement Of The Problem**

There are questionable practices by state universities which include poor financial management, introducing unsanctioned programmes, charging exorbitant fees, failure to repair and improve infrastructure and digressing from their mandates. It is also perceived that there is bias by top management in favouring non-academic staff when it comes to allocation of resources. This gives the researcher a question on whether corporate governance principles are being applied by such state universities. The study focused on establishing the performance of state universities based on the basic corporate governance standards.

## **III. Research Objectives**

1. To determine whether state universities are meeting prescribed standards and statutory provisions.
2. To establish the overall corporate governance rating of Zimbabwean state universities.

## **IV. Hypotheses**

1. State universities are meeting prescribed standards and statutory provisions.
2. There is a strong correlation between lecturers' and students' evaluation on state university performance on the basic governance standards and statutory provisions.
3. There is a strong correlation between lecturers' and students' ranking of state universities on corporate governance

## **V. Literature Review**

### **5.1 Overall Function of Corporate Governance in Institutions.**

According to Mayer (2013) said "The corporation is one of the most important and remarkable institutions in the world, affecting all of us, all the time-feeding us, entertaining us and employing us. But corporations are also the cause of immense suffering, instruments of poverty, pollution, and financial crisis. And these problems are on the increase with no exception of state universities".

According to Johnson et al, (2011), governance has become an increasingly important issue for organizations for three main reasons which include the separation of ownership and management control of organizations which means that most organizations have to operate within a hierarchy, corporate failures and scandals such as that of Enron in 2001 and Lehman Brothers and the Royal Bank of Scotland in 2008, increased accountability to wider stakeholder interests which in some cases are legislated on (e.g. Manpower Planning and Development Act for Zimbabwe).

While the management's role is primarily perceived to be running the business operations efficiently and effectively which include producing quality graduates, quality programmes, procurement, personnel, management, lecturing and finance functions within the boundaries of the institutions under which it trades (Mayer, 2013), the governance role is concerned with directors giving overall direction to the institutions, with overseeing and controlling the executive actions of management and with satisfying legitimate expectations for accountability and regulation by interests beyond corporate boundaries. Thus, if management is about running the business, governance is about seeing that it is run properly (Johnson et al, 2011).

### **5.2 Board Role and Responsibilities and Process**

The roles of the board should be spelt out clearly in order to assess if the board is performing effectively. In some literature on role and responsibilities of directors, they noticed that a board has 3 key roles which include monitoring management, providing advice and links to external resources and setting overall corporate strategy. Zahra and Peace (1989) set out "an integrative model of board attributes and roles which demonstrated how board attributes that embodies board composition, director characteristics, Board structure and board process. each contribute towards the board achieving the above three main roles. Henry Bosch (1995:93) explained that the first responsibility of the board is to ensure that organizations has clearly established goals, objectives and strategies for achieving them, and that they are appropriate and understood by the management.

The second responsibility for the board is to establish performance indicators with management and to monitor actual results against them. All these responsibilities were encapsulated in Garratt (2003)'s overview of how boards and directors should behave through an emphasis on the duties each director must have including duties of care, legitimacy upholding governance values, trust, loyalty, critical review and independent thought. Some boards fail, not only because of problems of abuse of power and conflicts of interest but due to laziness and cowardice (Garratt, 2003:117). He also introduced the concept of "Directorial dashboards" to help board focus their attention on key business performance indicators. All this is useful in the governance of state universities in Zimbabwe. It is similar to Forbes and Milliken (1999)'s model that looks at two criteria of board effectiveness, namely; board task performance defined as the board's ability to perform its control and service tasks effectively, the board's ability to continue working together as evidenced by the cohesiveness of the board.

On the other hand, Sonnenfeld (2002) in his article “What makes great boards great”, argues that it is not the rules and regulations but the way people work together on boards that makes them great. Daily and Dalton (2003:43) stated that the board effectiveness is a matter of integrity. This means that the university council members should be of high caliber, high integrity and full of the willingness to serve the society. Trying to control a council member with poor corporate governance is more expensive than recruiting or appointing a new ethically committed one, since no structural remedy can overcome poor judgment or apathy (Cadbury, 1992; Daily and Dalton, 2003).

### **5.3 Corporate Governance and Quality of University Management**

Akodo and Moya (2011) discovered that political interference in Ugandan state universities’ decision-making negatively affected their corporate performance. Their research paper titled “Political interference and corporate performance of public universities in Uganda” examined the relationship between political interference, corporate governance and corporate performance in four public universities in Uganda. The study was prompted by institutional turbulences as a result of political interference in public universities. The findings further revealed that corporate governance variables were significant in this study, specifically, the board size had a negative effect on corporate performance while policy and decision making had a significant positive relationship with corporate performance (Leblanc and Gillies, 2003). As a result of this, there is an ongoing need for public universities to formulate policies and make decisions that can improve the overall operations, systemically; namely, in the areas of constituting manageable council and senate committees and minimal political appointees to realize improved corporate performance (Nicholson and Kiel, 2004).

In addition to the above, key obstacles to university governance in Uganda were identified as government interference, bureaucracy, lack of commitment, conflicting values, inadequate funding and poor remuneration. This came out of the research paper titled ‘Obstacles Hindering the Effective Governance of Universities in Uganda’ by Asiimwe and Steyn (2013). They further recommended that universities should be given more operational autonomy and be more accountable within the Ugandan policy framework. Governance challenges should be reduced by maximizing delegation and decision-making and that, increasing governance financing and balancing bureaucracy in management, appropriate structures, systems, processes and procedures for decision-making and implementation are required and finally that a mechanism for funding universities should be developed both internally and externally.

Kinyanjui (2007) stated that visionary and creative leadership is critical to the transformation of higher education. He noted that restructuring of the leadership, governance and management systems of each institution should be a priority. He recommended that administrative and management structures of the public universities should be analyzed and streamlined to create efficient, effective, responsive and lean structures to avoid wastage of resources, duplicated responsibilities and overlapping mandates where members of different levels are members at next level and to institute checks and balances (Maunde, 2006). Gudo et al (2011) raised a critical question on the fact that, since Vice Chancellors are chosen to deliver against performance indicators: Is institutional performance related in any way to the characteristics of the Vice Chancellors?

According to the 1988 White Paper (Dawkins, 1988) the forms of governance in Australian universities were obsolete and had to make way for more efficient and effective corporate models. Furthermore the White Paper (Dawkins, 1988) recommended a change in university council structure. Vice-Chancellors were to assume the additional title of Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and universities were to become more ‘business-like’ and entrepreneurial with smaller council size (10 - 15 members) (Dawkins, 1988; Harman, G 2003; Harman & Treadgold 2007). The most significant review of university governance and management, The Higher Education Management Review by David Hoare was conducted in 1995. The Hoare Review (1995) identified shortcomings in university governance arrangements and recommended clarification of the role of the governing bodies, and changes to the size, composition and methods of appointments of members to the governing bodies (De Silva 2011). King III (2009) listed the following as corporate sins starting with greed (self interest), fear (self concern), sloth (imbalance, laziness), pride (egg on face) and arrogance (we are right). These same sins have been committed in many organizations with no exception of state universities. When evaluating state universities, we need to consider their attitudes to various stakeholders and how they follow the internal institutional policy documents and external stakeholder guidelines and statutory provisions. The sins are committed as they deviate from the norms, customs and traditional objectives and goals of state university education policy and those documents above (Materu, 2007; Kariwo, 2007; Nadler, Behan and Nadler, 2006).

### **5.4 Application of corporate governance principles in state universities**

Like other governing bodies, university councils are subject to standards of corporate governance; standards which govern the way university organizations are managed and structured and in which they deal with their various stakeholders (Ellison, 2010). In a research paper titled ‘Political interference and corporate performance of public universities in Uganda’ which sought to examine the relationship between political

interference, corporate governance and corporate performance in four public universities in Uganda by Moya and Akodo (2011), it was reviewed that political interference in these universities influenced decision-making and negatively affected their corporate performance. Political interference had a significant negative effect on corporate performance. The following guidelines shows how state university boards are structured and constituted(Sundaramarthy and Lewis, 2003). This influence the level of professionalism likely to be attracted into the higher learning institutions' governance processes(Short, Keasey, Wright and Hull, 1999).

**Term of Office for Council Members**

According to the Acts of State universities the council members have a term of 3 years in office and will be evaluated before end of the tenure, which evaluation may be used for consideration for reappointment. At the first appointment of the council it is recommended that a third of the members be appointed for the 3 years another third for 2 years and the remainder third for 1 year. The rationale been, such practice is that it allows for continuity by avoiding a situation where all members' term of office expires at once(The Manpower Planning and Development Act 1994; Van den Berghe and Baelden, 2005).

**Appointment of Council Members:** The Manpower Planning and development Act (1994) and the University Acts provide for the Appointment of University Councils for public or state universities, with membership drawn from a wide stakeholder representation. There are executive committees the vice-chancellors and their management committee responsible for the running of the institutions.

**Official Documents that Guide the University**

The state universities should have official documents that guide them in their operation. The following documents are mainly used by state universities in Zimbabwe. These include Act of Parliament (to serve the society), ZIMCHE guidelines on registration and accreditation, strategic plans for each universities, ordinances and regulations of each university , and contract documents with stakeholders for example Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The documents are important because universities had been established through act of parliament and to make sure that the structures are in place for the relevant authorities to monitor performance(Kinyajui, 2007).

**VI. Research Methodology**

In consistency with the objective of the study, the chosen paradigm for this research was positivism and we used the cross-sectional survey method. This approach enabled creation of models basing on statistical calculations. The descriptive and comparative study was used as specific designs.

A survey questionnaire that contained questions on demographics, meeting prescribed standards and statutory provisions, and overall rating of corporate governance performance of state universities was used. The questionnaire was written in English. The common, 5 point Likert scale starting with 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree was used for rating. The mean values used in the study ranged from 1-5. The population comprises of all state university lecturers and students in Zimbabwe. A sample of 50 lecturers and 47 students was used. The study used 70% of lecturers who had Masters degrees and 28% with D Phils. On the students side, 46.8% were pursuing their Masters programmes, while 8.5% were P HD candidates. The 47 students had at least 2 years of university experience in the various institutions. Majority had first degrees and pursuing masters degrees and D Phils.

This ensured that respondents' competence was generally high. Quota sampling was used for establishing the respondents from each university to ensure some minimum representation in the total sample(Creswell, 2009). The quota was constructed by ensuring that at least 2 lecturers and at least 3 students at each institution were interviewed. The reliability and validity were generally high since the measures were closely related and results are likely to be replicated. The analysis and discussion of data was done basing on the 2.50 mean benchmark, where any mean value below 2.50 shows agreement and any mean value above 2.50 shows disagreement.

**VII. Key Findings Of The Study**

**7.1 Performance of State Universities on the Corporate Governance Standards and Statutory Provisions**

**Table I** shows the corporate governance standards and statutory provisions

	University regulations and Procedures	University Act	Zimche Guidelines	Labour Act	Taxation Laws	NSSA
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Students	2.00	2.28	2.40	2.72	2.45	2.77
Lecturers	2.54	2.32	2.56	2.82	2.68	2.54
Mean of Mean	2.27	2.30	2.48	2.77	2.57	2.66

**Note: Grand Mean=2.51**

**7.7.1 University regulations and procedures(Mean=2.27)**

The students(mean= 2.00) felt that the universities judiciously follow the procedures and regulations in executing their activities. Lecturers(mean=2.54) also agreed that universities follow procedures and regulations. This reduces conflicts among various units and stakeholders.

**7.1.2 University Act(Mean=2.30)**

Majority of the respondent both lecturers (mean =2.32) and students (mean= 2.28) had agreed that the universities are trying to comply with their acts. The universities need to follow the Manpower Planning and Development Act (1994) and the University Acts which provide for the appointment of University Councils for public universities (Sarua Report 2013).

**7.1.3 Zimche Guidelines(M=2.48)**

Lecturers (m= 2.56) had the different sentiments as that of students (m =2.40) who felt the universities were meeting Zimche guidelines. The purpose of the Zimche Act is to register and accredit universities and monitor quality assurance (Zimche Act Chapter 25:27). The fact that the nine universities were operating means they were following basic Zimche guidelines.

**7.1.4 Labour Act(M=2.77)**

Both students (m=2.72) and lecturers (mean= 2.82) had the same sentiments that the universities are not complying to the Labour Act provisions. This will have a negative effect on the performance of the institution by spending a lot of money in labour courts with employees. State universities should try by all means to comply with the labour laws of the country in which they are operating in.

**7.1.5 Taxation Laws(M=2.57)**

Students (m=2.45) and lecturers (m=2.68) were generally not in agreement that the universities are complying in paying the taxation laws which is a good sign of compliance. Students were happy while lecturers disagreed. Lecturers, with a mean above 2.50, had some reservations on whether they did it correctly.

**7.1.6 NSSA Regulations(Mean=2.66)**

The general comment was that universities were not complying fully to the corporate governance issues on the basic regulations and statutory provisions. Students (mean=2.77) felt that NSSA regulations are not followed by state universities, while lecturers (mean=2.45) felt that universities are complying with basic human resources and NSSA provisions.

**7.1.7: Hypothesis testing**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** State universities are meeting the requirement of the prescribed standards and statutory provisions.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** mean ≤ 2.50

**H<sub>a</sub> :** mean > 2.50

We carried out a one tailed t-distribution test at 5% significance level and set to reject H<sub>0</sub> if T<sub>cal</sub> > T<sub>crit</sub>. Since t<sub>cal</sub> value of +0.14 is less than 2.02, we conclude that universities are generally following and meeting prescribed standards and statutory provisions set to them by the stakeholders. This means universities might need to ensure that the documents used are not contradicting with stakeholder expectations. There is also need to follow the Labour Act, Taxation Laws and NSSA provisions.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a strong correlation between lecturers and students' evaluation on state university performance on the basic governance standards and statutory provisions.

**Table II Results: Paired Samples Correlations**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Lecturers & Students	7	.524	.227

Since r = 0.52 at P values of 0.23, we conclude that the correlation is large enough between lecturers and students. The disparities could be caused by different needs of the two respondent groups. There is an average or marginal level of correlation.

**Decision:** We accept H<sub>2</sub> and conclude that students and lecturers show some similarities in rating universities on their adherence to standards and statutory provisions. However, there could be some reservations for blind acceptance since the p-value of 0.23 was above the 0.05 test level. There could be need to calculate the R<sup>2</sup> and discover the factors explained and those unexplained by the model.

7.2 Corporate Governance Ranking on State Universities

Table III Showing Corporate Governance Ranking on State Universities

	BUSE	HIT	CUT	GZU	LSU	MSU	NUST	UZ	ZOU
STUDENTS	5.68	4.04	5.36	6.78	3.53	3.23	3.60	6.58	2.32
Stds Rank	7	5	6	9	3	2	4	8	1
LECTURERS	5.33	5.30	4.09	5.89	6.44	2.98	2.40	3.20	6.74
Lect Rank	6	5	4	7	8	2	1	3	9
OVERALL	11.01	9.34	9.45	12.67	9.97	6.21	6	9.78	9.06
Over Rank	8	4	5	9	7	2	1	6	3

Source: Research Survey 2014

7.2.1 Performance of Top 5 universities

The top five universities are as follows when we consider the distinctive features:

**Rank 1:** National University of Science and Technology (total mean 6). NUST has Harare Campus and is assisting schools with ‘O’Level Mathematics revision in Matebeleland Provinces. The weakness is however, on incomplete buildings and lack of clear off campus student accommodation.

**Rank 2:** Midlands State University (total mean =6.21). MSU has vibrant information technology, national recruitment and has Harare Campus. The weakness is on some negative reputation on HIV exposure to students.

**Rank 3:** Zimbabwe Open University (total mean= 9.06) ZOU has 10 Geographical Regional Centers and one Virtual Center, It has powerful modules which are used by every other universities. ZOU does not have governance pride. ZOU has however, some suspended programmes and some falling enrolment.

**Rank 4:** Harare Institute of Technology (total mean =9.45) . HIT had advanced technology and has shown consistent in performance. It has a minimum number of board of directors( De Silva, 2011). HIT, however, needs more machinery for on campus technical learning.

**Rank 5:** Chinhoyi University of Technology (total mean 9.78). CUT has Director of Off-Campus for student accommodation. It was popularised by MSC Strategic Management Programme. Given the above ranking the top five universities might need to improve on student accommodation, allow academic freedom of lecturers and students, continue to comply with ZIMCHE and Ministry of Higher and Tertiary, Science and Technology ‘s regulations and provision, to take into consideration a wider stakeholder consultation and involvements for the betterment of their graduates’ job opportunities. Finally the council members should be of sound personalities, qualifications and experience(Jackson, 1998).

7.7.2 Performance of the last 4 State Universities

The bottom 4 universities

**Rank 6:** University of Zimbabwe (total mean= 9.78).UZ is mother of the universities contributing in the area of Law, Education, Agriculture and Health, has a total average mean of 9.06. Weakness is on high governance pride, no respect of lecturers and students and poor information technology.

**Rank 7:** Lupane State University (total mean= 9.97).LSU its strength is on Agriculture but it delayed in building a campus and has a total average mean of 9.97. It also has a low growth on graduation statistics. Need more machinery for practicals.

**Rank 8:** Bindura University of Science and Education (total mean= 11.01). BUSE It does not protect students on their academic freedom, not yet fully embedded in the society and has a total average mean of 11.01.

**Rank 9:** Great Zimbabwe University (total mean= 12.67). GZU delayed in building its main campus and had a total average mean of 12.67. It experienced controversy with RCZ and is not yet fully integrated into the society. It can do well with the introduction of Mashava Campus.

**H<sub>3</sub>: There is a strong correlation between lecturers' and students' ranking of state universities on corporate governance**

**Table IV Results: Paired Samples Correlations**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Lecturers & Students	9	-.117	.764

The correlation coefficient of  $r = -0,117$  at  $p$  – value of 0.76 shows that a statistically insignificant relationship between lecturers' rating and students' rating exist. Different knowledge levels and perceptions could be behind that. The decision was to reject  $H_3$  and concluded a weak negative correlation at statistically insignificant  $p$ - value of 0.764 . The differences could have been caused by situations where students ranked ZOU as number 1, NUST number 4 and UZ as number with lecturers rating ZOU as number 9, NUST as number 1 and UZ as number 3. The overall ratings become more important when respondents classes differ so sharply.

**VIII. Conclusions**

Given that both students and lecturers respondents were averagely satisfied with how universities applied the regulatory documents, we conclude that state universities follows statutory and standard guides in their governance. It is also concluded that they pursue and meet needs of internal documents and less on the outside orientated documents. The study also conclude that universities that are hard working and less talkative got some higher positions. The universities that are run on pride, arrogance, fear, sloth and greed got lower ranking. The top university is NUST and the least is Great Zimbabwe University in this study.

**IX. Recommendations**

There should be a strong compliancy in terms of University Act, Zimche Act and other laws so as to ensure there is efficient and effective management of quality education in state universities. University Councils should make sure that there is a strong budget on lecturing and research for lecturers and should wield enough power to influence Vice Chancellors to reduce greed, fear, sloth, pride and arrogance in state university. The University Councils need to respect the students' rights through taking positive suggestions from student unions and avoid being arrogant and cause fear to students. University councils should put in place incentive schemes that provide rewards for outstanding performance and should reinstate the allowances offered to university staff with immediate effect. For example rewards for best employees, rewards for best students and provision of interest free loan to its staff. Top management of the state universities should be evaluated thoroughly by the council members. University Alumni should evaluate performance of university council members so as to have an effective board. Non-Executive members to be appointed by the Minister should have their names forwarded to University Alumni, lecturers' and students' representatives for character and personality verification. This encourages transparency in recruiting the right person as the board member. University councils should respect all stakeholders' views and create a good relationship with the industry.

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