

Constituents' Participation and Commitment to the Governance Process of Universities in Ghana

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Abstract. This study investigated the governance system of universities in Ghana. Emphasis was put on constituents' participation and commitment to the governance process. The explanatory sequential mixed method approach informed the study. Using questionnaire and interview, data was collected from 35 leaders and 465 members of various constituencies who were drawn from four public and two private universities in the country. The data was analysed using hierarchical multiple regression. The study revealed that whenever constituencies participate in the governance system of the university, it influences their satisfaction with and commitment to the university. Therefore, it is recommended that university managers ensure a congenial participatory governance environment—to motivate constituents to be committed to their universities.

Keywords: Governance; Participation; Reform.

1 Introduction

Participation in university governance has become a popular debate in the last two decades (Carey, 2013). As a result, policy makers in most countries are ensuring that they improve their governance system through equal representation and fair participation. Countries have formulated and implemented some legislative changes and provisions on public and private universities with the aim of improving governance in these institutions (Bratianu & Pinzaru, 2015). Particularly in Ghana, governance issues such as; size and composition of university councils/governing bodies and their roles, responsibilities and financing have been discussed in several higher education policy reports (National Accreditation Board [NAB], 2015). These



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reports have laid much emphasis on the decision making structures and processes within these institutions. The structures and processes give fair representation and participation to all stakeholders (NAB, 2015). However, there is perceived unfairness in the decision making process, with regard to participation, at the detriment of junior staff and members of the universities (Saani, 2015).

According to Elele and Fields (2010), the responsibility for decision-making in universities has traditionally been in the hands of mainly senior members, both academic and non-academic. However, the complexities of tasks performed by universities require full participation and interdependence among the various constituencies within the institution. These constituencies include; administrators, faculty members, students, and members of the support staff. As beneficiaries of campus services, constituencies must become actively involved in university governance system, since their involvement and participation in the system can help boost their satisfaction and commitment to the universities (Carey, 2013; Dela Cruz & Jimenez, 2015).

In recent times, there has been some level of attention given to students and faculty with regard to their involvement and participation in university governance (Akomolafe & Ibijola, 2014). As a result, constituencies' participation and involvement in the governance system of universities has, therefore, become an institutionalised and expected right. Even though research supports the value of constituencies' participation in governance, on-going participation of constituencies is acknowledged as problematic in that it simultaneously offers benefits and challenges (Ibijola, 2014; Saani, 2015; Wainaina, 2015). Therefore, a better examination of the consequences of constituencies' participation in university governance is required if we are to take full advantage of its potential value within the Ghanaian cultural context.

Most medium and long term development policies of Ghana, with regard to education, aimed at expanding access to university education with an emphasis on science and technology courses (NAB, 2015). This target will be attained through the contribution of constituents within both public and private universities. Therefore, research on constituents' commitment to the university is essential. According to Elele and Fields (2010), committed constituents are predicted to be high performers, register less absenteeism and turnover. Going by the rising rate of university enrolment, the diverse nature of the courses being offered, and the programmes adapted by the universities in Ghana (NAB, 2015), a committed constituent is needed if the universities are to accomplish their goals.

The need to ensure that there are committed constituents in the various universities in Ghana has gingered the rising debate on constituencies' participation in the governance system of these institutions. Researchers are of the view that the more constituents perceived their participation in the governance system of universities as vital, the higher their level of commitment to the institutions (Akomolafe & Ibijola, 2014; Alhassan, 2015).

The few studies that were carried out in this area focused on governance policy, institution management, and student participation (Akomolafe & Ibijola, 2014; Carey, 2013; Dela Cruz & Jimenez, 2015; Ibijola, 2014). Specifically, it has been observed that these studies did not address issues in both private and public universities with regard to the effect of constituencies' participation in the governance system on constituents' commitment. In addition, these studies mainly relied on quantitative data from the respondents. This situation has created a gap in the literature, which current researchers in the area of Sociology of Education and higher education need to look at empirically in order to narrow or close the gap. Therefore, there is the need to subject constituencies' participation in university governance into empirical-based research in order to enhance its practice and appreciate its relevance to the universities.

Examining constituencies' participation in university governance and their commitment to the universities empirically will help meet the goals of higher education, which are to provide in-depth knowledge, seek academic development, educate students as well as coordinate national development demands. This is so because, none of these goals can be accomplished efficiently if constituents within universities are poorly committed to the institutions. This study, therefore, makes an original contribution to the literature, since it is one of the few comprehensive investigations into constituencies' participation in university governance and its effect on constituents' commitment to the universities in Ghana.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of constituencies' participation in university governance on constituents' commitment.

1.2 Hypothesis

It was hypothesised that constituents' participation in university governance has no direct effect on their commitment to their universities.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

The study's framework was based on constituencies' participation in governance, which comprised of four dimensions. These dimensions were adapted from the work of Dela Cruz and Jimenez (2015). The dimensions are academic, political, financial, and economic governance. They represent the independent variables. Level of constituents' commitment to the universities was the dependent variable, which was influenced by Allen and Meyer's theory of commitment (as cited in Redman & Snape, 2014). In this theory three dimensions of commitment were specified: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Constituents' level of satisfaction was considered as a mediating variable. The conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.

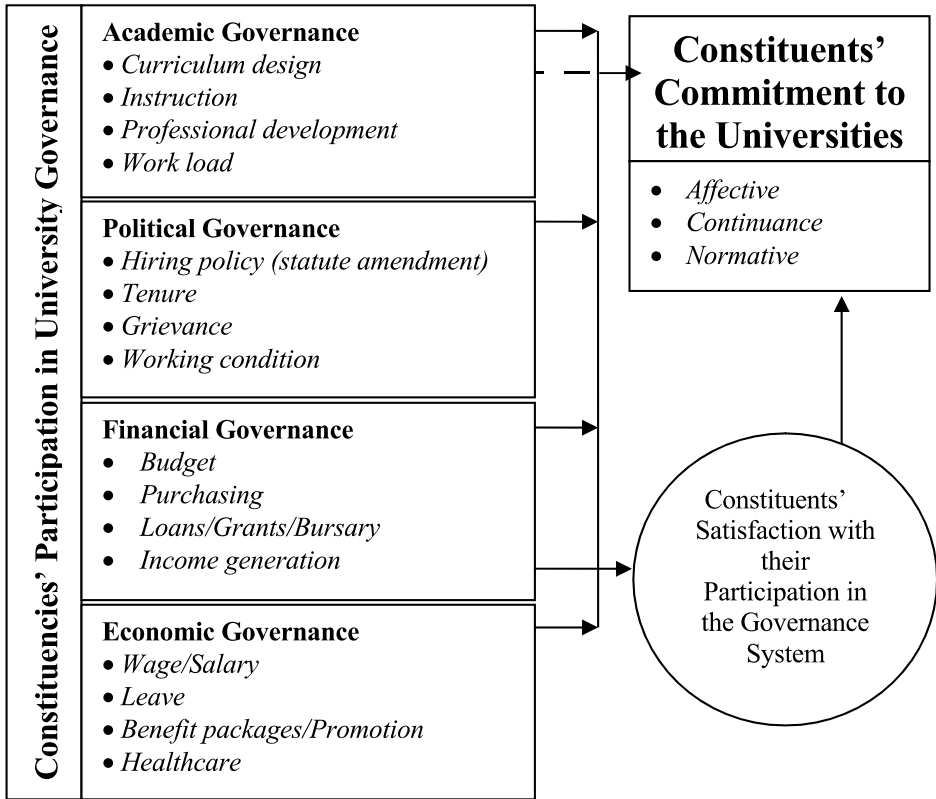


Figure 1. Model on Constituencies’ Participation in University Governance and its Effect on Constituents’ Commitment to the Universities

Source: Adapted from Dela Cruz and Jimenez (2015)

The argument of the study is that constituencies’ participation in university governance influences constituents’ commitment to the universities. However, this influence becomes stronger and more potent when constituents’ satisfaction with the governance system that arises as a result of their perceived satisfaction with the various forms of participation in the governance of the universities is considered. The study therefore, hypothesised that the independent variables have effect on the dependent variable indirectly. In other words, if the universities expose constituencies to academic, financial, economic and political governance of the university as expected it would help enhance constituents’ commitment to the universities. However, constituents’ commitment to the universities becomes stronger and more positive when constituents are satisfied with their constituencies’ participation in the governance system.

2 Methodology

The study adopted the explanatory sequential mixed method approach. Since the study entailed a survey of constituents' perception of the issues, situations and processes, the descriptive survey design was used. The accessible population was all the 196897 constituents in the six selected universities as at the end of first semester of 2016/2017 academic year (National Accreditation Board [NAB], 2016).

2.1 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 500 was used. The studied institutions were four public and two private autonomous universities in Ghana. Out of the 500 constituents sampled, 35 were selected purposively (as key informants) for interview, while 465 were selected randomly (as constituents) (See Table 1). The 465 constituents were registered members of the various constituencies, while the 35 constituents were the presidents or leaders of these constituencies within the selected universities. The presidents were selected for the in-depth interview because they represent the constituencies in most of the meetings that the constituencies participate, and have relatively adequate knowledge regarding their respective constituencies' participation in university governance as compared to other registered members of the constituencies. The sample size of 500 was based on Krejcie and Morgan's sample size estimation method.

Table 1. Population and Sample

Universities	Population	Respondents		
		Constituents	Key informants	Total
<i>Northern zone</i>				
University for Development Studies (UDS)	36819	88	6	94
Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)	49815	120	7	127
<i>Southern zone</i>				
University of Ghana (UG)	52965	127	8	135
University of Education, Winneba (UEW)	32094	74	6	80
Valley View University (VVU)	6893	14	4	18
Central University (CU)	18311	42	4	46
Total	196897	465	35	500

Source: NAB (2016)

Table 1 shows the distributions of the number of universities selected and the population and sample distribution of the respondents and participants selected. Six universities were selected from the 12 autonomous universities in Ghana. In selecting these universities, one-stage cluster random sampling procedure was used.

Ghana as a country was first divided into two zones: Northern zone and Southern zone. The Northern zone comprised Upper East, Upper West, Northern, Brong-Ahafo and Ashanti regions while the Southern zone comprised Central, Western, Eastern, Greater-Accra and Volta regions. Two public universities were selected randomly from each of the zones using the lottery method of simple random sampling techniques. The universities selected were UEW and UG for Southern zone and KNUST and UDS for Northern zone. For example, in the southern zone, the names of the seven autonomous and accredited public universities were written and put into an opaque polythene bag and mixed thoroughly before picking one of the public universities at a time. The picking was done without looking to ensure objectivity. Similarly, with regards to the northern zone, the same procedure was done for the three autonomous and accredited public universities in that zone.

In relation to private universities with similar governance structure like that of the public universities, there were only two of them with presidential charters. These institutions were CU and VVU. Unfortunately, these two universities were all located in the southern zone, and were selected purposively. With the exception of the 35 presidents or leaders of the various constituencies who were also selected purposively, the lottery method of simple random sampling technique was used again to select all the 465 constituents of the constituencies. The various constituents within the six selected universities were the unit of analysis for the study.

2.2 Data Collection Instruments, Procedures and Analysis

A well-structured questionnaire for constituents and an interview guide for the presidents/leaders of the various constituencies were the research instruments used in collecting data. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient obtained from the questionnaire was 0.857. With the help of professionals and academics in the area of sociology of education and higher education, colleague constituents, and other members of the university communities, the researchers ensured that the items on the instruments covered the domain that they purport to measure. The factor analysis was also performed to ensure construct validity of the questionnaire. Variables with eigen values greater than one were extracted and items with correlation coefficient below ± 0.3 were also erased on the grounds that they were thought to have low commitment to the elements extricated. The extracted items were pool together to form each of the variables using average responses since the responses were measured using unilinear scale.

The printed questionnaires were administered by the researcher personally with the support of four principal research assistants, one from each of the selected public universities, who served as field assistants. The data collection procedures were carried out in four stages. The first stage was the collection of list of constituencies and constituents from the data management units of the selected universities. The second stage was the distribution of the questionnaire, while the

third stage focused on retrieving the questionnaires administered. The fourth stage involved the conduct of interviews. The interview process started immediately after analysing the quantitative data. At the end of data collection, the researcher was able to collect completed and accurate data from 491 constituents (465 respondents and 26 participants) out of the 500 administered, representing 98.2 percent response/participation rate. After establishing the normality of the distribution, the hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to analyse the data in order to test the hypothesis. In relation to the qualitative data, the axial coding system was used in analysing the data. This was done manually based on the themes that emerged from the field.

2.3 Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited to public and private universities that were autonomous in Ghana. With regard to respondents, the study was delimited to the various recognised constituencies such as junior staff, senior staff, senior members and junior members within the autonomous public and private universities in Ghana. With regard to variables, the study was delimited to the academic, political, financial and economic governance systems of the universities, constituents' level of satisfaction with the system and their commitment to the universities. However, participation in university governance is very complicated and includes more than those facets or dimensions investigated.

The limitations include generalizability, subject and situational characteristics of governance and constituents' commitment to the universities. The sample was limited to six autonomous universities in Ghana. The result may have restricted generalizability to constituents outside the six selected universities. The degree to which the results were representative of the population again could reduce the validity of the conclusions drawn from the results of the instruments as they apply to the entire population. Furthermore, it was assumed that the selected constituents had sufficient knowledge and understanding of their satisfaction with the governance system, commitment to the university and the governance system of their university to answer the items in the instruments accurately and truthfully, but this could not be verified.

3 Findings and Discussion

Numerous statements or questions were used to collect data on the independent, mediating and dependent variables. These items were measured numerically using unilinear scale. The items were combined using the pooling system to form the individual variables. Using the hierarchical linear multiple regression analysis, a diagnostic test was first conducted to check for multicollinearity among the independent and mediating variables. This was used to examine the possible

undesirable situations where the correlations among the variables are strong. The preliminary analysis established that the contribution of the independent and mediating variables were not as a result of the strong association between them. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Effect of Constituencies' Participation in University Governance on Constituents' Commitment to the Universities ($N = 465$)

Variable	Model One				Model Two			
	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	
	B	SE	Beta (β)	Sig.	B	SE	Beta (β)	Sig.
Academic governance	0.089	0.072	0.087	0.218	0.081	0.040	0.079*	0.043
Political governance	0.115	0.066	0.117	0.084	0.065	0.023	0.066**	0.005
Financial governance	0.116	0.041	0.124*	0.011	0.037	0.013	0.040**	0.004
Economic governance	0.294	0.078	0.342**	0.000	0.141	0.037	0.164**	0.001
Satisfaction with the level of participation in the governance system					0.376	0.037	0.548**	0.000
Constant			1.151				0.905	
R			0.562				0.795	
R Square			0.314				0.654	
Adjusted R Square			0.307				0.647	

Source: Field survey, 2016. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ Dependent Variable: Commitment to the university

The multiple regression analysis involved testing of two models. As depicted in Table 2, in the first model, the variables that predicted constituents' commitment to the university significantly were economic governance [$\beta = 0.342$ (0.078), $p < 0.01$] and financial governance [$\beta = 0.124$ (0.041), $p < 0.05$]. Academic governance and political governance contributions to constituents' commitment to the university were non-significant. The findings show that constituents become more committed to their respective universities when their constituencies participate in the governance system of the university with regard to issues relating to budget, purchasing, loans/grants, income generation, wage/salary, leave, promotion and healthcare.

Participatory university governance explained 31.4 percent of the variance in the commitment level of constituents within the various public and private universities in Ghana. The quantitative results are in line with the views of the participants. For example, during the in-depth interview, a senior staff from a public university reported as follows:

Participating in financial issues in this university will make us happier and more committed to this institution. Especially, financial related issues that affect our working life directly. If my constituency is given opportunity to participate in finance committee, appointment and promotion, and tender board meetings, I think we will be more committed to this university. Opportunities relating to promotion, leave and other benefit packages are important aspects of a worker's career and life. Therefore, they are significant factors that can influence our levels of satisfaction and commitment. Extrinsic benefit packages such as promotion, salary, leave and loan facility are factors that when we are involved in them, I think we will be more committed (President of FUSSAG).

Hypothetically, the study asserted that the independent variables did not directly predict constituents' commitment to the universities, they did so indirectly. The study, therefore, introduced constituents' satisfaction with the system as a mediating variable into the model to create a second model. Therefore, in the second model, constituents' satisfaction with their constituency's participation in the governance system was entered into the model to serve as a mediating variable. When it was entered into the first model, the beta coefficients of all the independent variables shrank. However, academic governance [$\beta = 0.079$ (0.040), $p < 0.05$] and political governance [$\beta = 0.066$ (0.023), $p < 0.01$], which were non-significant in the first model, became significant when the mediating variable was introduced. This implies that within the context of public and private universities in Ghana, constituencies' participation in the governance system of the university is not the main issue that contributes to constituents' commitment to the university, but rather there is the need for constituents to be satisfied with their constituencies' level of participation in the governance system.

Constituents' satisfaction contributed 54.8 percent to constituents' commitment. The explanatory powers of the independent variables are shared largely with the

mediating variable. The total contribution (R^2) of the variables when constituents' satisfaction was introduced into the first model increased from 0.314 to 0.654, while the adjusted R^2 increased to 0.647. The results further showed that when constituents' satisfaction with their constituency's participation in the governance system entered the equation in the second model, the rate of increase of the R^2 was 108.3 percent. This means that the percentage increase was more than 100 percent, that is, more than twice the initial rate of contribution. This finding reinforces the argument of social exchange theory, which posits that all human relationships are formed by a personal cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. Therefore, as constituents became satisfied with their constituencies' participation in the governance system of the university, they became more committed to the university in order to contribute more than what they have been contributing to the university initially. The result suggests that constituents' satisfaction with their constituencies' participation in the governance system of the university is an important factor in boosting constituents' levels of commitment to the universities.

The study therefore, fails to reject the hypothesis that constituencies' participation in university governance has no direct effect on constituents' commitment to the universities because the influence is indirect. This means, participation in the governance system of the university by all constituencies will help develop constituents' sense of belongingness and their feeling of importance in the universities. This will enhance and also boost constituents' commitment to the universities. Constituents' perceived satisfaction could influence them to feel indebted to the university and will fulfil this through greater commitment to the university.

A participant who was a junior member from a public university during the in-depth interview said that:

In my view, our satisfaction in the governance system of the university is boosted when we are given much opportunity to participate fully. As we participate, we begin to feel that we matter in this university, which I think will help enhance our satisfaction and commitment to the university in the long run. Therefore, participation and satisfaction are crucial in determining our commitment level to this university. In most instances, when we are satisfied with the system we begin to work with little or no supervision and we tend to be productive at the work place (President of SRC).

What all the resultant shrinkages and statistical significance mean is that the independent variables did not have a significant effect on constituents' commitment to the universities. They did so only when constituents' were satisfied with their constituency's level of participation in the university's governance system.

The findings show that constituents' satisfaction with the governance system of the university is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Therefore, investment in employee participation in an organisation showed better results, high employees' commitment and productivity, development of desired knowledge,

skills, attitudes and other behaviours which result in higher satisfaction and performance (Carey, 2013). The findings are congruent with the submissions of Akomolafe and Ibijola (2014) who found out that participation of staff and students constituencies in the governance of the university influences significantly the commitment level of staff and students. This shows that constituents' satisfaction with the institution as a result of shared governance and fair participation helped in motivating them to be more committed and also feel that they belong to the institution, which in the long run helps in improving the performance of the institution.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate with assertions of Dela Cruz and Jimenez (2015) who posit that constituent's direct involvement in the governance system of universities with regard to receipt of information and adequate notice before implementing decisions can influence their perceived organisational support positively leading to increase in their commitment to the institution. Constituents who are cared for, participate in decision making process, and valued by their organisations will be committed to their organisation in affective way. Employees who are committed to their organisation show better performance and more meaningful contributions (Wainaina, 2015). This show that universities can therefore, involves constituencies in the governance system of the universities through supportive activities to boost constituent commitment. The findings support the call that constituents should be involved in making decisions especially those that affect their working life.

3.1 Conclusions

Though the subject of constituencies' participation in university governance has received some empirical attention, more research is needed to complete the higher education community's understanding of this complex and multifaceted area especially in developing countries such as Ghana. As this empirical study has indicated, the more constituencies are allowed to participate in the governance system of the university, the more they become satisfied in the system and also become committed to the university as a whole. That is, whenever constituencies' participate in the governance system of the university, it influences their respective constituents to be satisfied with the system which in turn makes them more committed to what the universities stand for. When that happens, it will translate into general commitment to the universities in the long run.

3.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, it is recommended to management of the universities to create and sustain a congenial participatory governance environment in the institutions to motivate constituents to be committed to the universities. In order to achieve this, universities must ensure that there is fairness and equality in the

number of members that represent each constituency in the various statutory university committees. Furthermore, it is recommended to management of the universities to ensure that the provision of quality information is guaranteed. This can be achieved by providing clear information with regards to the rules and regulations of all statutory committees, boards and governing bodies involved in the functioning of the university, and providing more and better information on the rights of constituencies. Management of the universities should also ensure that they give more voice and vote to certain committees and governing organs, particularly those in the lower strata of the university system, junior and senior staff, and junior members, whilst also making the functioning and decision-making of these bodies more transparent and democratic.

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