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Governance and Academic Performance of Public Universities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

In higher education institutions, sound governance fosters cooperation among the various stakeholders involved while ensuring that institutions meet established requirements, specifications, and quality benchmarks. This research examined how governance influences the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Specifically, the study sought to assess how accountability shapes the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC, and to determine how responsiveness affects the academic performance of these same institutions. The research was grounded in agency theory and stewardship theory. A positivist research philosophy guided the study, which followed a descriptive research design. The population under investigation consisted of 448 individuals drawn from boards of directors, university councils, management committees, faculty councils, and departmental councils. Applying the Yamane formula, the researcher arrived at a sample of 211 respondents, selected through a stratified random sampling approach. Data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire and processed using SPSS version 27. Results revealed a statistically significant positive association between accountability and the academic performance of Kinshasa's public universities. A further finding pointed to a positive relationship between responsiveness and academic performance. Based on these results, the study proposes that university management ensure strict adherence to existing policies so that procedures established by various entities are consistently followed, thereby strengthening academic performance. It is further recommended that management regularly review and update the curriculum so that course offerings remain aligned with evolving labour-market needs, ultimately improving academic outcomes.

Keywords: *Governance, Accountability, Responsiveness, Academic Performance*

1.0 Introduction

Public universities function within an environment shaped by multiple stakeholders as they carry out their mandates. Typically, each institution comprises numerous administrative units, faculties, and departments, and is also linked to external stakeholders, including the ministry of education, departments of education, other government bodies, and private agencies. There are also different players within the universities such as staff at different levels and students with each one of them fulfilling their various responsibilities and roles in an endeavor to enhance the academic performance (Supriadi et al., 2021). However, the highly complex environment of these public universities is characterized by low enrollment rates, increasing costs and reduced public funding which exposes the institutions to different risks and require an effective governance system to perform well academically (Hodgins & Lubelsky, 2020).

Globally, Abdelaziz (2022) found that governance enhances the performance of higher education institutions in the United States of America by promoting effective resource management, strengthening accountability, encouraging stakeholder participation in decision-making, and improving transparency. This in turn results to strong instructional delivery, supportive learning environments, and well-delivered educational services. In Jordan, Areiqat et al. (2020) posited that university governance plays a key role in enabling the institutions to deliver quality educational outcomes while carrying out their mission and vision in a competent and efficient manner. As such, the academic and administrative structures of universities need to be guided by the principles of accountability, transparency, integrity, participation, and performance monitoring so as to bring about a positive change. In Saudi Arabia, a study by Al-Otaibi (2018) noted that faculty members through transparency, accountability, organizational structure, laws, regulations and justice improve the performance of universities. Universities should therefore provide a technical guide to each department within the university and decisions of the university should be applied to everyone without exception so as to improve academic performance.

In China, Zhao and Wang (2020) posit that governance has a significant impact on academic performance. Governance in institutions can therefore be enhanced by expanding the autonomy of school management, establishing a new government-school relationship, giving priority to curriculum management, improving the accountability system and strengthening democratic management through participation of teachers in decision making. In Pakistan, Akram (2021) noted that governance in higher education has been faced by challenges such as scared accountability and examination system, unavailability of trained teachers, insufficient resources and unequal access to education. It is thus essential to take necessary action to uplift the quality of education through good governance in institutions. In Indonesia, a study by Supriadi et al. (2021) found that the governance principles of transparency, accountability, participation, fairness, autonomy and responsibility significantly influence academic performance. This is because sound institutional governance enhances the quality of decision-making through teacher empowerment, the delegation of authority, and the promotion of participatory decision-making.

Regionally, Agili, Onditi and Monari (2020) established that Kenyan universities have instituted various accountability, transparency, and ethics mechanisms aimed at embedding governance so as to drive effective institutional performance. This indicates that governance significantly influences academic performance and thus universities should improve governance by effectively implementing the various governance mechanisms established within institutions of higher learning. In Nigeria, Kadir (2019) postulated that there was a positive and significant relationship

between governance and academic performance. This had been achieved through resource management, accountability and participatory decision making. To enhance the academic performance of public institutions of learning, government should continue to ensure that governance practices are effectively implemented in institutions.

In Tanzania, Muyal and Tundui (2020) study on improving performance of higher learning institutions established that observance of ethics was the best strategy in universities as it had the potential to create a very strong reputation. According to Kikula and Makorere (2022) most of public universities in Tanzania are not financially stable hence limiting them to perform some of the duties properly. Several challenges, including a decline in government funding due to reduced budgetary allocations, decreasing student enrolment, and ineffective implementation of cost-cutting strategies, have adversely affected university operations. In addition, limited availability of well-funded projects, dwindling research grants, and a lack of international collaborations have further constrained the ability of universities to fulfil their core mandate as centres of academic excellence. Consequently, these constraints have negatively impacted institutional effectiveness, resulting in graduates who may lack adequate competencies in their respective fields of study.

Locally, a study by Bakamana (2021) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on governance in public institutions found that corruption, selfishness led to leaders not upholding the principles of good governance. Tshiunza (2019) on the other hand noted that there was a positive relationship between governance principles such as transparency and participation, and the performance of public universities. Further, Mmenge, et al. (2020) in their study on governance and performance of institutions found that the principals such as compliance, monitoring and evaluation, communication and involvement in decision making were important in governing institutions. A study by Risasi and Sabiti (2020) suggested the need for collaboration between higher education institutions and employers in order to design effective curricula and build up an educational environment so as to improve universities' performance.

In addition, Brandt and Moshonas (2020) noted that the educational decentralization has resulted in an expansion of educational government units and offices in the light of a poorly funded education system. The access to education in public universities has thus been affected as institutions increase funds in an endeavor to fund their activities. Further, the multiplication of legal and institutional frameworks, regulatory confusion, arbitrariness in financial matters and uncertainty have had a negative effect on academic performance of public universities as the budgetary concerns appear irrelevant. According to Rurofum (2020), failure to perform well is a major concern for most higher education institutions in DRC which has led to the low success rates that have shaken higher education in recent years. The academic years have also been regularly interrupted by strikes by students, teachers and non-teaching staff. In DRC, the inefficiency of higher education is much more evident in public universities.

Menga-Mokombi (2020) posited that in DRC, the dysfunctional governance system, lack of networking and inter-sectoral cooperation, limited influence of academic and professional associations and lack of public resources allocated to research and development (R & D) as the main challenges affecting performance in public universities. The budget allocated to education amounts to only 1.8% of national GDP, a mere 10.9% share of public spending, which is insufficient to support the operations of public universities and improve their performance. Moreover, since most online learning resources are produced predominantly in English, DR Congo's public universities incur an added financial burden when developing French-language

course content and materials for their students. Likewise, R&D funding in the DRC remains critically inadequate, being tightly bound to public budgets that discourage staff and stifle progress within the system.

Although a considerably larger share of academic staff in public universities hold PhDs, most lack the time and resources needed to engage seriously in research. Collaboration with industry and partnership diversity also remain weak, a situation rooted in the limited institutional capacity of higher education institutions (HEIs), prolonged instability that has discouraged many donors, and a shrinking industrial base caused by an unfavourable tax regime and official corruption. Furthermore, in many HEIs, leadership shortcomings undermine institutional governance, restricting the autonomy these institutions have over selecting their leaders and shaping their curricula. Public HEIs likewise lack control over the programmes they offer and, to some degree, over student admissions. Academic freedom can be further curtailed by wider political constraints on free expression, including the government's tendency to marginalize, detain, or intimidate critics of the regime, all of which negatively affect academic performance.

Performance is fundamentally about value creation, and organizations generate value through their productive assets (Carini et al., 2019). For universities, this translates into the capacity to produce outcomes that match or surpass what is expected of them. Academic performance is the qualitative and quantitative outcome produced during the learning process, based on instructor evaluations through mandated objective tests (Sanz, 2017). It is widely regarded as the core around which the entire education system turns (Abaidoo, 2018). Indeed, how well students perform academically can determine whether an institution succeeds or fails. Narad and Abdullah (2016) define academic performance as the information obtained from measuring a learner's progress, whether through a teacher's grading or through educational targets that students and teachers aim to reach within a given timeframe.

Within universities, academic performance spans several dimensions, including student affairs and learning, research, community service, financial service, innovation and development (Chukwemeka, 2020). Acevedo-de-los-Rios and Rondinel-Oviedo (2021) similarly describe the individual performance of stakeholders in higher education institutions as a collection of behaviours that either advance or hinder the achievement of institutional goals. Therefore, governance affects performance by influencing the behavior of institutional processes and systems that are directly involved in transforming the organization in terms of service delivery (Donina & Hasanendenc, 2018). The key academic performance indicators to be adopted in this study include efficiency in teaching, research and scientific publication, enrolment rates, and the number of programs offered in the public universities.

Governance is defined as the processes and structures involved in decision-making about significant issues affecting stakeholders (Kadir, 2019). It is a vital element in universities because higher education institutions are complex organizations and this requires effective governance to address the needs of diverse stakeholders (Ochara, 2021). The provision of quality education relies on the governance of institutions because effective governance is required to ensure that processes, practices, and roles are aligned toward achieving the intended objectives (Abdelaziz, 2022). Therefore, governance lies at the heart of higher education institutions, serving as an essential condition for engaging the range of stakeholders involved including academic staff, non-academic staff, and administrators in institutional decision-making. Universities must adopt and implement

professional and evidence-based governance approaches so as to enhance their performance (Ochara, 2021).

In universities, sound governance fosters cooperation among the diverse parties and stakeholders involved while ensuring that institutions meet established requirements, specifications, and quality standards. Given the growing global demand for higher education, institutions are compelled to strengthen their governance, as doing so enables universities to attain their goals. Universities therefore need to put in place governance structures that keep institutional leadership focused on its objectives while remaining adaptable to a changing environment. This is an indication that governance in universities is characterized by asymmetrical and mutual dependence between agents and principals and between agents and other agents (Rathod, 2020). According to Donohue (2022), the nine major principles of good governance are participation, consensus-oriented, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and inclusiveness, rule of law and strategic vision. As noted by Bevins et al. (2020), governance in higher education institutions focuses on core functions such as monitoring the set objectives, conducting governance performance evaluations, recruiting and hiring staff, and determining transition and succession. These tasks are closely interlinked and call for a well-defined allocation of duties and responsibilities among the board of directors, leadership, faculties, and departments. Because universities tend to be large and complex, robust governance systems need to be put in place to ensure that the various actors involved carry out their roles effectively. Good governance can therefore be leveraged within academic institutions to enhance performance through effective communication, definition of good risk management strategy, investment in the right technology and paying attention to the customers (Donohue, 2022).

According to Sujana (2022), accountability is the process whereby organizations, and the individuals within them, take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Even though boards occupy a senior position within an organization, this does not exempt them from oversight or give them unchecked authority; instead, they remain answerable to everyone affected by their decisions, shareholders, stakeholders, vendors, employees, and the wider public since these decisions directly shape the company's integrity. Accountability can be classified into two types: vertical and horizontal accountability. Vertical accountability refers to being answerable for the handling of funds to higher-level authorities, such as when university management accounts for resources to the government. Horizontal accountability is the responsibility of the management to the university fraternity and the wider community (McDonald, 2022). Institutional leadership should therefore remain committed, given the importance of overseeing how the mission is carried out in an accountable manner. Equally, mechanisms must exist to guarantee that resources are used in line with relevant laws and regulations, and integrity must be maintained, particularly in reporting on accountability. Leaders must also be oriented towards achieving the vision and mission and the results and benefits obtained (Sujana, 2022).

According to Mansoor (2021), responsiveness involves how institutions respond to their stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. Corporate attention can quickly be diverted by unexpected crises and controversies, making a prompt reaction to such events essential. Institutions with good governance practices in place are well-positioned to maintain open and honest communication with shareholders and stakeholders. This is essential as the result of good governance is making better decisions faster (Donohue, 2022). Responsiveness is therefore considered a central tenet of good governance, helping organizations remain resilient amid volatile economic and corporate conditions. Organizations equipped with sound governance frameworks

are able to react to change promptly and effectively, all while keeping every key stakeholder engaged and informed throughout the process (Linder & Peters, 2020).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

According to Supriadi, et al. (2021), governance in higher education is meant to ensure that the processes and operations in use enable the institution to achieve its set objectives by involving different stakeholders for enhanced performance. However, in DRC, there is a dysfunctional governance system in public universities (Menga-Mokombi, 2020). The higher education institutions structural and governance challenges also threaten to compromise the quality of teaching and research provided by the institutions (Risasi & Sabiti, 2020). Rurofum (2020) notes that failure to perform well is a major concern for most higher education institutions in DRC. This could be attributed to the use of outdated curriculum and inherent policies which do not provide graduates with necessary skills and knowledge for the current labour market (Bakamana, 2021). It has also been noted that the problem of deterioration in teaching is due to the reduced number of qualified teaching staff (Menga-Mokombi, 2020; Brandt & Moshonas, 2020; Bakamana, 2021; Tshionza, 2019; and Risasi & Sabiti, 2020).

According to statistics by the Ministry of Education, between 2012 and 2020, the number of professors increased by only 6.4%. As for academic supervision, the ratio of supervisor to student is one to 65, which is a major challenge in producing quality scientific research (Kabuya, 2022). Between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020 only 717 theses were approximately defended in public universities (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et Universitaire, RDC, 2022). Despite enrolling many students in public universities in the DRC, statistics show that those who graduate are only 17%, which is a high dropout rate (Enguta, 2020). Research also shows that out of the 9,000 students who graduate yearly from the public universities, only less than 100 manage to get employment (Sumata, 2020). This has been attributed to the academic programs which do not expose the students to internship opportunities which are crucial for professional experience (Balemba, 2020).

Although studies on governance and academic performance have been undertaken, Abdelaziz (2022) was in USA, Agili et al. (2020) in Kenya and Chukwemeka (2020) in Nigeria, there was scarcity of documented studies of such a study having been carried out among public universities especially in Kinshasa, DRC which this study sought to fill. The study by Nfunkwa and Mwenzi (2023) was carried out in the Department of Psychology in University of Kinshasa and the study by Mwenzi (2022) was a comparative study between three private and public universities in Kinshasa. According to the reviewed studies, researchers have looked at various dimensions of academic performance: The study by Nfunkwa and Mwenzi (2023) focused on teaching quality and the study by Mwenzi (2022) focused on student creativity. The current study sought to bridge the gap on academic performance by looking at the dimensions of efficiency in teaching, research and scientific publication, enrollment rates and number of programs offered in the public universities.

Further, the reviewed studies looked at various dimensions of governance: Abdelaziz (2022) looked at the dimension of implementing good governance, Agili, et al. (2020) focused on the dimensions of transparency and ethics, while Mmenge, et al. (2020) looked at compliance, monitoring and evaluation, communication and involvement in decision making. The current study therefore sought to fill the gap on governance in public universities by looking at the dimensions of accountability and responsiveness.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To determine the influence of accountability on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.
- ii. To establish the influence of responsiveness on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What is the influence of accountability on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC?
- ii. How does responsiveness influence the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC?

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Agency Theory

The Agency Theory was developed by Ross and Mitnick (1973); Jensen and Meckling (1976). An agency relationship arises when one party, the principal, delegates authority to another party, the agent, to act on the principal's behalf. In this relationship, principals occupy the role of owners while agents serve as managers. This dynamic carries the risk that the agent may act in their own interest rather than in the best interest of the principal, leading to potential conflict. The theory, therefore, serves as a framework for understanding and resolving such conflicts arising in the relationship between principals and their agents. Under the theory, principals depend on agents to carry out specific transactions, which can give rise to disagreements over priorities and methods. The extent to which an agent acts in line with the principal's best interest is referred to as the standard of agency loss, while the process of narrowing these differences in expectations is known as reducing the agency loss (O'Donnell & Sanders, 2003).

Agency loss drops when various situations occur. One is where the agent and the principal share similar interests and pursue the same outcome, and the other is where the principal closely monitors the agent's activities and is thus well informed about the quality of service being delivered. When neither of these conditions is met, agency loss tends to rise; the central challenge, therefore, lies in motivating agents to place the principal's interests ahead of their own. When this balance is achieved, the agent ends up safeguarding the principal's wealth while, in the process, also improving their own outcomes.

In public higher education institutions, the state funds the institutions in order to give its citizens access to quality education at reduced tuition costs, which establishes a principal-agent relationship between each country and its respective public universities. Public universities, in turn, act on the state's behalf by providing citizens with quality education at a cost lower than that charged by private colleges and universities. In some instances, the state appropriation declines and public universities begin to act less as agents for the state and focus on the interests of the institutions (Bennet & Law, 2008). Applying the agency theory to public higher education suggests that conflicts of interest may arise because the interests of the institutions may not align with its state's interests of providing low-cost, high-quality education to its citizens (Bryant & Davis, 2012).

This theory was important in this study as it explained how the management of public universities in Kinshasa, as agents appointed by the DRC government, should manage the institutions with transparency and become accountable for all the transactions taking place. Through accountability,

they will ensure that the processes adopted, the policies put in place, and the programmes being undertaken in the public universities are market-oriented and are geared towards enhancing academic performance.

2.1.2 Stewardship Theory

The Stewardship Theory was developed by Davis, Schoormann, and Donalson (1997). The theory holds that individuals are driven to satisfy higher-order needs through behavior that benefits the organization, which leads them to naturally align their own interests with those of the organization and its principals. It further suggests that people are inherently driven to work on behalf of others or organizations to fulfil the duties assigned to them. The theory portrays individuals as collectively oriented and organization-focused rather than self-serving, pursuing organizational, group, or societal goals because doing so brings them greater fulfilment. Stewardship Theory thus offers a framework for understanding what drives managerial behavior across different types of organizations.

Accordingly, the theory is geared toward fostering effective and efficient management within the organization, while also encouraging ethical conduct among management and shareholders alike. It further promotes sound ethical judgment and responsible behavior among managers as they work to serve the organization's best interests, which in turn allows the organization to prioritize its long-term success and stay focused on its goals. Stewardship Theory also holds that when stakeholders view managers as responsible stewards, confidence and trust in the organization grow. Beyond this, the theory tends to boost employee engagement and commitment, as staff come to regard their leaders as trustworthy and committed to shared success. It further offers employees a sense of moral backing and strengthens management by clarifying their respective rights and responsibilities.

In the context of corporate governance, Stewardship Theory underpins ethical governance practices within organizations, helping to align management's interests with those of shareholders while fostering critical thinking among them. Stewards are thus expected to safeguard and grow shareholder wealth through strong firm performance, and they tend to feel a sense of satisfaction and motivation whenever the organization succeeds. The theory also emphasizes granting employees greater autonomy in their roles so that returns to shareholders can be maximized, prompting employees to take ownership of their work and carry it out conscientiously. This theory was relevant to the study because it clarified why it is important for the management of public universities in Kinshasa to remain responsive and effective in taking the necessary action, communicating with stakeholders about the universities' current status, reviewing the curriculum in line with market trends, and integrating technology into teaching and learning to enhance academic performance.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Accountability and Academic Performance

Choi and Chun (2021) examined how accountability relates to organizational performance within Korea's higher education institutions. The study looked at the dimensions of legal accountability, professional accountability, political accountability and hierarchical accountability. The study, which sampled 138 public and private institutions, used ordinary least squares multiple regression analysis. The findings indicated that stronger accountability tends to produce more favourable organizational outcomes. The study also found that legal accountability had a positive relationship

with organizational performance, although the connection between legal accountability and procedural transparency was less straightforward. The study also established that hierarchical accountability, political accountability and professional accountability had a positive relationship with organizational performance, whereas a greater degree of political oversight within internal management correlated negatively with student satisfaction. The research recommended that higher institutions of education uphold stronger legal and political accountability, since these forms of oversight can limit an organization's freedom to make autonomous decisions. It was further recommended that administrative procedures be standardized and formalized, as doing so could strengthen procedural transparency by narrowing the scope for corruption and unfair practices. Whereas that study was conducted across both public and private institutions of higher learning in Korea, the present study was conducted within public universities in DR Congo, a difference that points to a contextual gap. In addition, whereas that earlier study examined the dimensions of legal accountability, professional accountability, political accountability and hierarchical accountability, the current study looked at process accountability, policy accountability and financial accountability and this highlighted a conceptual gap.

Winstone and Carless (2021) carried out a study on the influence of accountability on academic performance of UK universities. The study specifically looked at the feedback processes dimension. The study, conducted across nine different universities, used semi-structured interviews with 28 educators. Findings revealed that educators frequently encountered a professional tension, in which the demands of perceived quality assurance clashed with their own conviction that student learning should remain central to feedback processes. The research also found that feedback serves a dual purpose, since it must simultaneously address the needs of multiple, sometimes competing, audiences. The study recommended revisiting how feedback quality is approached in order to strengthen accountability, suggesting that institutions could benefit from placing less emphasis on teacher input and more on evidence drawn from how students actually respond to feedback. Whereas that study was conducted in UK universities, the current study will be carried out in public universities in DRC, a difference that points to a contextual gap. Likewise, while that study examined the dimension of feedback processes, the current study looked at process accountability, policy accountability and financial accountability, which highlighted a conceptual gap.

Han and Hong (2019) explored the link between accountability and organizational performance in the US federal government organizations. The research focused specifically on staffing, performance valuation, and compensation as key dimensions. Drawing on census data, the study found a positive and statistically significant association between accountability and organizational performance. It recommended that organizations strengthen their accountability mechanisms to boost performance, and further suggested that organizational systems be granted a meaningful degree of autonomy to support better outcomes. Whereas that study was conducted within US federal government organizations, the present study was carried out in public universities in DRC, revealing a contextual gap. Likewise, while the earlier study examined staffing, performance valuation, and compensation, the current study examined process accountability, policy accountability, and financial accountability, pointing to a conceptual gap. Moreover, whereas that study relied on census data, the present study drew its sample from employees of public universities in Kinshasa, highlighting a methodological gap.

Hengevoss (2023) assessed the effect of accountability and organizational performance of international non-governmental organizations. The research specifically examined resource

accountability, outcome assessment accountability, and discursive accountability. The study, which used structural equation modeling, collected data via an international survey, finding that comprehensive accountability strengthens organizational performance. It recommended that managers implement comprehensive accountability, given its strategic advantage in reinforcing the perceived achievement of an organization's mission. While that research was conducted among international non-governmental organizations, the present study was carried out in public universities in DRC, revealing a contextual gap. Similarly, whereas the earlier study focused on resource accountability, outcome assessment accountability, and discursive accountability, the current study examined process accountability, policy accountability, and financial accountability, pointing to a conceptual gap.

Ordofa and Asgedom (2022) examined the link between accountability and academic performance. The study, which systematically reviewed existing data, established that school accountability influenced aspects of decision making, classroom assessment, and teacher evaluation. It further found that accountability was positively related to academic performance, and proposed that improving learning outcomes in schools calls for a new accountability framework aligned with learning outcomes, including delegation, finance, information and motivation. While this study used secondary data, the current study collected primary data from public universities in Kinshasa and this highlighted a methodological gap.

Omenda and Agili (2019) examined the influence of accountability on academic performance in public and private universities in Kenya using an explanatory survey research design involving senior management, academic staff, university governing board members, and student leaders. The findings indicated that public universities possessed stronger accountability frameworks than their private counterparts and that accountability was significantly associated with academic performance. The authors concluded that accountability is a critical element of corporate governance that contributes to the achievement of quality education in universities. Consequently, they recommended that institutions of higher learning prioritize accountability in their daily operations and continually strengthen accountability systems to enhance institutional performance. However, unlike the previous study, which investigated both public and private universities in Kenya using an explanatory survey design, the present study focused exclusively on public universities in the Democratic Republic of Congo and adopted a descriptive research design, thereby addressing both contextual and methodological gaps.

Falisse et al. (2023) investigated the influence of accountability on organizational performance in publicly funded health facilities in Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi. The study found that management primarily concentrated on staff recruitment and engagement in basic construction and maintenance activities. In addition, the findings demonstrated that accountability positively influenced the perceived quality and accessibility of services. The researchers further recommended that organizations reassess the conditions under which bottom-up accountability mechanisms, such as citizen committees, can be effectively implemented, particularly in fragile settings. Nevertheless, because the study was conducted in publicly funded health facilities in Kivu and Burundi rather than public universities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, it differs contextually from the current study.

2.2.2 Responsiveness and Academic Performance

Sharma and Sinavi (2021) examined the influence of responsiveness on the academic performance of public universities in Malaysia. The researchers employed an exploratory research design,

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collected data from international students across three universities, and analyzed the data using correlation and multiple regression techniques. Their findings revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between responsiveness and academic performance. Based on these results, the study recommended that institutions of higher learning respond proactively to changing market demands by enhancing lecturers' competencies and promoting continuous skills development to improve academic performance. In contrast, the present study adopted a descriptive research design rather than an exploratory approach, thereby addressing a methodological gap.

Zhang et al. (2022) explored the connection between responsiveness and academic success in Chinese universities. The research focused on parental responsiveness, teaching responsiveness, and creativity. It employed a convenience sampling technique to gather data from college students. The analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM. Findings indicated that responsiveness had a positive and significant correlation with academic achievement. Additionally, the research showed that both parental and teacher responsiveness significantly contributed to students' creativity. The authors suggested that educators and parents should promote creativity by offering supportive and encouraging responses to students' creative needs to enhance academic performance. While this research was conducted in Chinese colleges, the present study took place in public universities in the DRC, highlighting a contextual gap. Furthermore, although this study employed a convenience sampling approach, the current research utilized a stratified sampling method, revealing a methodological shortcoming. While this study examined the aspects of parent responsiveness, teacher responsiveness, and creativity, the current research concentrated on curriculum flexibility, operational flexibility, and structural flexibility, thereby indicating a conceptual gap.

Kahne et al. (2023) investigated the impact of institutional responsiveness on academic outcomes within the Chicago public school system, analyzing historical data spanning from 2017 to 2018. Their findings indicated that schools perceived by students as highly receptive to their feedback and critiques achieved superior academic marks, enhanced daily attendance records, and significantly lower rates of chronic absenteeism. Consequently, the authors argued that prioritizing student voice is essential, as it simultaneously cultivates democratic values, fosters mutual respect, and optimizes scholastic achievement. While Kahne et al. (2023) offer valuable insights into administrative and instructional receptivity, a comparison with the present inquiry underscores distinct conceptual and methodological gaps. Mathematically, if we denote institutional agility as a function of multiple dimensions, the prior study focused exclusively on interpersonal variables, whereas the current research pivots toward systemic parameters, evaluating curriculum, operational, and structural flexibility. Furthermore, a methodological divergence is evident; while the antecedent study relied on a systematic review of secondary data, the current investigation collects fresh, primary data to address these objectives.

Sari et al. (2020) conducted a study to determine the influence of responsiveness on organizational performance. The study specifically looked at employee's responsiveness. The study was an empirical review of existing data. The study used correlation, multiple regression, path analysis and t-tests to analyze data collected through questionnaires. The study found that employees' responsiveness had a positive but not significant effect on organizational performance. The study recommended that organizations should adopt a leadership style that encourages employees to be innovative and respond to the current market needs as this will improve organizational performance. While this study looked at the dimension of employee's responsiveness, the current study focused on curriculum flexibility, operational flexibility and structural flexibility and this

highlighted a conceptual gap. In addition, while this study systematically reviewed existing data, the current study collected primary data and this highlighted a methodological gap.

Georgewill (2021) examined the influence of responsiveness on organizational performance in Nigeria. The study looked at the dimensions of structural flexibility in terms of adherence, promptness and market intelligence. The investigated research was anchored on dynamic capability theory, demonstrating that structural flexibility plays an inestimable role in facilitating corporate responsiveness when adapting to shifting business environments. Furthermore, empirical evidence established that institutional responsiveness exerts a statistically significant impact on overall organizational performance. Based on these findings, the study recommended that organizational management prioritize the systematic reconfiguration of operational systems to cultivate capabilities that foster both flexibility and seamless workflows. Additionally, the authors emphasized the necessity of providing strategic leadership tailored to motivate employees to develop and sustain the adaptive skillsets required to facilitate timely, responsive actions. While this study only looked at structural flexibility, the current study also focused on curriculum and operational flexibility and this highlighted a conceptual gap.

Kathanya et al. (2020) examined the relationship between organizational responsiveness and performance among public universities in Kenya. The study focused on three key dimensions of responsiveness: technology adoption, market expansion, and cost-reduction strategies. Using a descriptive research design, the researchers analyzed data through regression analysis and established a positive association between responsiveness and organizational performance. Based on these findings, the study recommended that higher education institutions implement suitable strategic responses, including divestment, downsizing, and product innovation, to improve organizational outcomes.

Despite its contribution, the study presents both contextual and conceptual gaps in relation to the current research. Contextually, the investigation was conducted in public universities in Kenya, whereas the present study is situated in public universities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), thereby necessitating further inquiry within a different geographical and institutional setting. Conceptually, the previous study assessed responsiveness through technology adoption, market expansion, and cost-cutting strategies, while the current study examines organizational flexibility through the dimensions of curriculum flexibility, operational flexibility, and structural flexibility. This difference in the conceptualization of the key variables underscores a significant conceptual gap.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by the following conceptual framework.

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

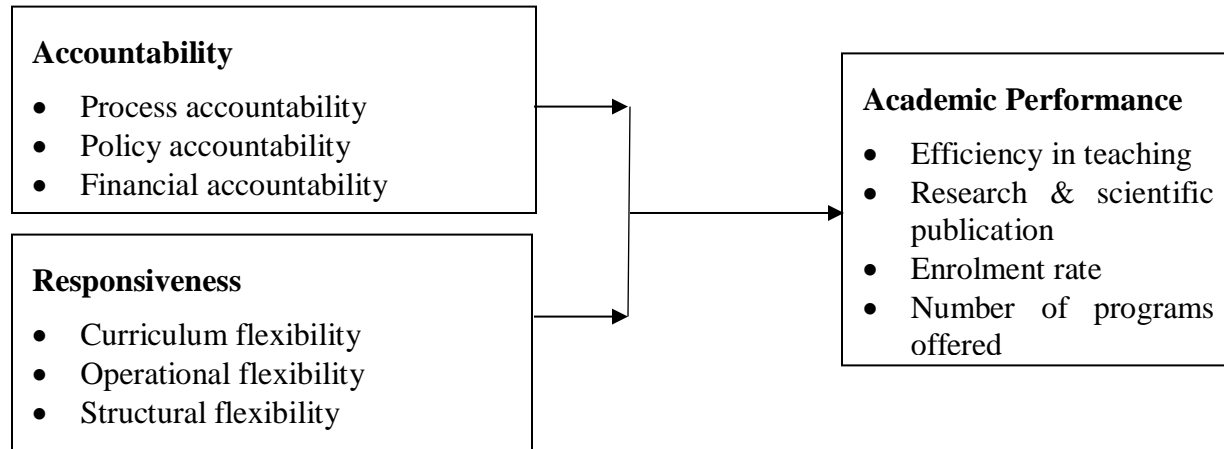


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

According to the conceptual framework, governance under the constructs of accountability and responsiveness can influence academic performance under the dimensions of efficiency in teaching, research and scientific publications, enrollment rate and the number of programs offered.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted the positivism paradigm which adheres to the view that only factual knowledge gained through observation, including measurement, is trustworthy. Positivism research philosophy also posits that the researcher is limited to data collection and interpretation in an objective way, and that research findings are usually observable and quantifiable (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2020). In addition, the descriptive research design was used for this study. The researcher was also able to pinpoint traits, frequencies, trends, and categories pertinent to the study via a descriptive research design. The design also permitted the use of various data collection techniques, such as questionnaires and interview techniques. Additionally, standardized tests are used to gauge the validity of the items (Ramsberg, 2018). The target population for this study comprised members of the boards of directors of universities, boards of directors of higher technical, artistic, and technological institutes, university councils, management committees, faculty councils, and departmental councils.

The unit of analysis was the 13 public universities located in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), while the unit of observation consisted of 448 individuals drawn from the boards of directors, university councils, management committees, faculty councils, and departmental councils. The sample size of 211 respondents was determined using the Yamane formula. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of the various categories of respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to the selected participants. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0. Descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies, were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and regression analyses, were employed to examine the relationships among the study variables. The findings were subsequently presented through frequency tables, supplemented by

charts and graphs to illustrate the distribution of responses and facilitate interpretation of the results.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Influence of Accountability on the Academic Performance of Public Universities

The first objective of this study was to determine the influence of accountability on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Accountability and Academic Performance of Public Universities

Statement	Mean	Std Dev
The management is accountable for developing the procedures used in performing tasks	4.03	0.563
The management ensures that the various processes are adhered to step-by-step in decision making	4.07	0.605
The management ensures that the policies developed are adopted	4.16	0.622
The management ensures that the policies address coordination among different organizational entities to ensure compliance with established procedures	3.26	0.928
The management ensures that departments adhere to established financial spending guidelines	3.70	0.755
The management has built internal financial controls to prevent errors	3.63	0.726
Composite Mean	3.81	0.699

From the analysis of the study, accountability and academic performance of public universities had a composite mean of 3.81 and standard deviation of 0.699. The respondents indicated that the management was accountable for developing the procedures used in performing tasks to a high extent (M=4.03, SD=0.563). In addition, the management ensured that the various tasks were adhered to step-by-step during decision making to a high extent (M=4.07, SD=0.605). The respondents also indicated that the management ensured that the policies developed were adopted to a high extent (M=4.16, SD=0.622). However, the respondents indicated that there was moderation in the management ensuring that the policies addressed coordination among different organizational entities to ensure compliance with established procedures (M=3.26, SD=0.928). Further, the respondents indicated that the management ensured that departments moderately adhered to established financial spending guidelines (M=3.70, SD=0.755). The respondents also indicated that the management has built internal financial controls to prevent errors to a moderate extent (M=3.63, SD=0.726). There was therefore a moderation in the accountability aspect in public universities especially in terms of processes, policies and financial. These findings are supported by those of Omenda and Agili (2019) who suggested that institutions of higher learning should place the need for accountability in their day-to-day operations as top priority and continuously invest in building accountable systems for improved performance.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between accountability and academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Accountability and Academic Performance

		Academic Performance	Accountability
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.217**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	211	211
Accountability	Pearson Correlation	.217**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	211	211

A correlation revealed that a positive significant correlation between accountability and academic performance of public universities ($r=0.217$, $p=0.000<0.05$). This indicates a statistically significant positive association between the two variables, suggesting that as accountability increases, academic performance of public universities also increases.

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

The researcher used multiple regression analysis to establish the relationship between accountability and academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.

Table 3: Model Summary between Accountability and Academic Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.217a	0.047	0.042	0.73616

a. Predictors: (Constant) Accountability

The results revealed an R-value of 0.217, indicating a positive relationship between accountability and the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.047, implying that accountability accounted for 4.7% of the variation in academic performance among public universities. This suggests that accountability is a determinant of academic performance. However, the remaining 95.3% of the variation in academic performance can be attributed to other factors not included in the present study, indicating the existence of additional variables that influence academic outcomes in public universities in Kinshasa. The ANOVA results between accountability and academic performance of public universities are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: ANOVA Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.588	1	5.588	10.311	.002 ^a
	Residual	113.263	209	0.542		
	Total	118.850	210			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), accountability

The ANOVA results revealed that accountability was a significant predictor of the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa. The F-statistic of 10.311 was statistically significant, indicating that accountability explained a substantial proportion of the variation in academic performance. Moreover, the p-value of 0.002 was considerably lower than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, providing strong evidence against the null hypothesis. Therefore, the findings support the conclusion that accountability has a significant influence on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa. The coefficient results are presented below.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients for Accountability

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.130	0.274		7.786	0.000
	Accountability	0.230	0.072	0.217	3.211	0.002

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance

The results indicated that the constant term was 2.130 ($p = 0.000$), signifying that the baseline level of academic performance was statistically significant. Furthermore, accountability exerted a positive and statistically significant influence on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa ($\beta = 0.217$, $t = 3.211$, $p = 0.002$). This implies that a one-unit increase in accountability is associated with a 0.217-unit increase in academic performance among public universities in Kinshasa. These findings are consistent with those of Ordofa and Asgedom (2022), who established that accountability was positively related to academic performance.

Influence of Responsiveness on the Academic Performance of Public Universities

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

The second objective of this study was to establish the influence of responsiveness on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Responsiveness and Academic Performance

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
The university is able to review its current curriculum to offer courses relevant to the market needs	3.76	0.650
The curriculum flexibility helps the university maintain continuity across various levels	4.47	0.646
The management ensures that the systems are reviewed on needs basis	4.10	0.631
Operational flexibility increases the interaction between lecturers and students	4.19	0.549
A flexible structure ensures that the university makes any required adjustments to its organization structure	3.98	0.678
A flexible structure enables the university to modify timelines and revisit strategy	4.55	0.670
Composite mean	4.16	0.637

From the analysis of the study, the influence of responsiveness on the academic performance of public universities had a composite of 4.16 and standard deviation of 0.637. Most of the respondents indicated that the university was able to review its current curriculum to offer courses relevant to the market needs to a moderate extent (M=3.76, SD=0.650). The respondents also indicated that the curriculum flexibility helped the university maintain continuity across various levels to a high extent (M=4.47, SD=0.646). In addition, the respondents indicated that the management ensured that the systems were reviewed on needs basis to a high extent (M=4.10, SD=0.631). It was further established that operational flexibility increased the interaction between lecturers and students to a high extent (M=4.19, SD=0.549). However, the respondents indicated that there was moderation in the flexibility of the structure for the university to make any required adjustments (M=3.98, SD=0.678). The respondents also indicated that a flexible structure enabled the university to modify timelines and revisit strategy to a high extent (M=4.55, SD=0.670).

4.5 Correlation Analysis

The Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to assess the influence of responsiveness on academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa.

Table 7: Correlation between Responsiveness and Academic Performance

		Academic Performance	Responsiveness
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.554**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	211	211
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.544**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	211	211

A correlation revealed that a positive significant correlation between responsiveness and academic performance ($r=0.544$, $p=0.000<0.05$). This indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables, suggesting that as responsiveness improves, the academic performance of public universities also increases.

4.6 Multiple Regression Analysis

The researcher used multiple regression analysis to establish the relationship between responsiveness and academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa.

Table 8: Model Summary between Responsiveness and Academic Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.544a	0.307	0.303	0.62788

a. Predictors: (Constant) Responsiveness

The results showed that the R-value of 0.544 highlighted that there a strong relationship between responsiveness and academic performance of public universities. The R^2 value of 0.307 indicated that 30.7% of the variation in the academic performance can be explained by responsiveness. This implied that the responsiveness significantly improved the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa. The remaining 69.3% of the variation in the academic performance was attributed to other factors not covered by this study. The ANOVA results between responsiveness and academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa are presented below.

Table 9: ANOVA Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.457	1	36.457	92.476	.000 ^a
	Residual	82.394	209	0.394		
	Total	118.850	210			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Responsiveness

The ANOVA results indicated that responsiveness was a significant predictor of the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa. The calculated F-statistic of 92.476 was statistically significant, demonstrating that responsiveness contributed meaningfully to variations in academic performance. Additionally, the p-value of 0.000 was lower than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, providing sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. These findings suggest that responsiveness exerts a significant influence on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa. The coefficient results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Regression Coefficients for Responsiveness

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.279	0.183		6.976	0.000
	Resource mobilization	0.520	0.054	0.554	9.616	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance

The results revealed that the constant term was 1.279 ($p = 0.000$), indicating that the baseline level of academic performance was statistically significant. Furthermore, responsiveness had a positive and statistically significant effect on the academic performance of public universities in Kinshasa ($\beta = 0.554$, $t = 9.616$, $p = 0.000$). This implies that a one-unit increase in responsiveness is associated with a 0.544-unit increase in academic performance among public universities in Kinshasa. These findings are consistent with those reported by Sharma and Sinawi (2021), who established a positive and significant relationship between responsiveness and academic performance.

5.0 Conclusion

This study concludes that the management is highly accountable for developing the procedures used in performing tasks and ensures that the various processes are adhered to during decision making. The study also concludes that the management ensures that the policies developed are adopted but there is moderation in ensuring they address coordination among different organizational entities to ensure compliance with established procedures. Another conclusion is that there is moderation in ensuring that departments adhere to established financial spending guidelines and in ensuring that they have built internal financial controls to prevent errors.

This study concludes that the public universities are able to review its current curriculum to offer courses relevant to the market needs to a moderate extent. It is also concluded that curriculum flexibility helps the university maintain continuity across various levels to a high extent. In addition, the study concludes that the management ensures that the systems are reviewed on needs basis to a high extent. It is further concluded that operational flexibility increases the interaction between lecturers and students to a high extent. Another conclusion is that there is moderation in the flexibility of the structure for the university to make any required adjustments. It is also concluded that a flexible structure has enabled the university to modify timelines and revisit strategy to a high extent.

6.0 Recommendations

The management of public universities should ensure that policies are effectively followed to ensure compliance with the established procedures by different entities for enhanced academic performance. The management of public universities should ensure that departments adhere to established financial spending guidelines for improved academic performance. The management of public universities should ensure that they have built strong internal financial controls to prevent errors as this will in turn boost academic performance. The management of public universities should continuously review its current curriculum to offer courses relevant in response to the market needs for better academic performance. The stakeholders of public universities should

ensure that the organization structure is flexible for the university to make any required adjustments for enhanced performance.

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