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Abstract

Public universities operate within a multi-stakeholder context while performing their responsibilities. In DRC, the lack of effectiveness in higher education system is particularly noticeable in public universities. This study sought to determine the influence of external factors on performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The study specifically sought to examine the influence of political factors, economic factors and technological factors on performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. This research was anchored on complexity theory. The study was based on positivist research philosophy and used descriptive research design and the explanatory cross-sectional research design. The target population comprised of 1059 academic staff, non-academic staff and student leaders from three public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The sample was 290 respondents obtained using Yamane formula. Sampling was done through stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The study used multiple regression analysis and Structural Equation Modeling. The results showed that political factors (PF) had a statistically significant influence on the performance of public universities. The path coefficient for political factors was 0.888, with a standard error of 0.144 and a critical ratio of 6.147, yielding a p-value of 0.001. This implied that the hypothesis related to political factors was rejected. Similarly, economic factors (ECF) also showed a positive and significant influence on performance. The path coefficient for economic factors was 0.447, with an S.E. of 0.121 and a C.R. of 3.699, significant at $p = 0.001$. This result implied that the hypothesis concerning economic factors was rejected. Further, the results showed that technological factors (TF) significantly and positively affected the performance of public universities in Kinshasa. The path coefficient for technological factors was 0.248, with a standard error of 0.127 and a critical ratio of 1.958, significant at $p=0.050$. Hence, the hypothesis concerning technological factors was rejected. The study concluded that external factors significantly influence performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The study recommends that the university management should strengthen institutional resilience by adopting proactive management strategies that reduce the effects of political instability and external interference on university operations. It is also recommended that given the dynamic external environment in which public universities operate, institutional strategic plans should incorporate environmental scanning, risk assessment, and scenario planning as integral management practices.

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Keywords: *External Factors, Political Factors, Economic Factors, Technological Factors, Performance of Public Universities*

1.0 Introduction

Institutions are distinguished by their long-lasting nature and their ability to shape social interactions inside and outside their operation zones. They encompass cultural, cognitive, normative, and regulative aspects. Both the external and internal environments have an influence on institutional decisions, including strategy (Munir, 2019). The business environment refers to a collection of elements that influence an organization's operations in various ways. Business managers are called to analyze carefully this environment to identify prospective changes and formulate plans in order to enhance operations (Kinange & Patil, 2020). Public universities are academic establishments controlled and managed by the government. They were founded to offer teaching beyond high schools (Ogunode, 2020). Public universities operate within a multi-stakeholder context while performing their responsibilities. Typically, a university is comprised of multiple administrative entities, faculties, and departments. The universities are also linked to external stakeholders, including the ministry of education, sponsors and other governmental as well as corporate agencies. Within universities, there are several participants, including staff members at different levels and students (Supriadi et al., 2021).

Globally, in their study on the performance of universities in Bangladesh, Islam and Tasnim (2021) concluded that diligent effort, unwavering commitment, and a strong belief in oneself were the key elements that improved performance. The study suggested that university management should formulate policies that are conducive to the education system so as to maximize performance. Chen et al. (2021) found that performance of Chinese public universities is influenced by both social and technical aspects. The study suggested that universities should include technology in teaching methods and online course platforms to enhance performance. According to Malaysian research by Nasser et al. (2023), poor entrance grades, family support, housing, student gender, internal evaluation grade, GPA, and e-learning activities are the main factors affecting academic achievement.

Regionally, Okeodion et al. (2019) study in Nigeria highlighted that the performance of universities was determined by student, lecturer, institutional and external related factors. The study noted that poor performance of Nigerian universities could be attributed jointly to these factors. In Ghana, Mensa et al. (2024) posited that personal factors, educational support systems, and access to resources were significant factors that affected performance of academic institutions. In Rwanda, Mugirase et al. (2025) established that various factors shape the institutional, financial and academic performance of universities. The study noted key factors such as cultural, national education policies and funding, labour market demands, industry linkages, and students' demographic backgrounds as some of the external factors.

Locally, Moukouyou-Kouaka and Awolusi (2020) in the DRC identified working environment, career development, and performance management as influential determinants on the performance of public universities. The report proposed that the public institutions of the DRC should be restructured so to ameliorate their performance. Bogren et al. (2021) observed that contextual factors have a positive effect on the functioning of public organizations. The study suggested that firms should engage local authorities, provide incentives to employees as a kind of encouragement, provide training to their staff, and ensure they have sufficient room to carry out various programs in order to enhance performance.

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Furthermore, Bitamba and An (2020) determined that the success of public organizations is influenced by financial considerations, quality factors, personnel factors, and management-related factors. The study advised that stakeholders in the public sector should possess a comprehensive understanding of university management so to boost the education quality. According to Brandt and Moshonas (2020), the proliferation of legal and institutional frameworks, regulatory ambiguity, arbitrary financial practices, and uncertainty have adversely influenced the performance of public universities, rendering fiscal problems seemingly inconsequential. Rurofum (2020) asserts that the underperformance of students is a significant issue for many higher education institutions in the DRC, resulting in a decline in graduate rates that has had a destabilizing effect on higher education in recent years. Strikes by students, instructors, and non-teaching personnel have frequently disrupted the academic years. The lack of effectiveness in higher education system is particularly noticeable in public universities in the DRC.

While public universities do have a greater number of scientists with PhD qualifications, only a small percentage of them are able to dedicate their time and resources to research. Furthermore, the lack of collaboration with industries and limited diversity in partnerships has been a persistent issue, primarily due to the inherent inadequate capabilities of higher education institutions (HEIs). Additionally, the prolonged period of instability has deterred potential donors, while the limited number of industries can be attributed to the prevailing tax regime and corruption among officials. Moreover, in the majority of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), government officials hire leaders based on their personal interests, disregarding ethical considerations. Consequently, this practice results in restricted academic autonomy when it comes to selecting leaders and establishing curricula (Bakamana, 2021).

The performance of an institution encompasses various factors which are either internal or external (Shahjahan, et al., 2021). The external factors include economic factors, social factors, competitive factors, global factors, demographic factors, political factors, legal factors and competitive factors (Masum & Ameen, 2023). By focusing on these aspects, institutions can enhance their ability to achieve their objectives, deliver value and thrive in a competitive environment (Parveen, 2023). External factors that influence the performance of universities include facilities, curriculum, extra-curricular activities and achievement (Chamidy et al., 2023). On the other hand, Al-Muslimawi and Hamid (2019) posit that external factors such as extra-curricular activities, family problems, social factors, and work and financial problems influence the performance of universities. According to Navarro et al. (2021), socio-economic factors, quality of teaching, quality of infrastructure, legal requirements are the key external factors that influence the performance of universities. Chen et al. (2023) notes that external factors such as personal attitude, motivations, learning environment and learning skills influence the performance of universities. In addition, Supe et al. (2018) postulate that political factors, economic factors, social factors and technological factors influence the performance of universities and other higher education institutions.

Performance is the process of generating value, and organizations generate value by utilizing their productive assets (Carini et al., 2019). Universities depend on their capacity to generate equal or more value that fulfils or surpasses their anticipated worth. Academic performance refers to the measurable and qualitative results achieved during the process of learning. These results are determined by instructor assessments conducted through standardized objective tests (Tadese et al., 2022). According to Mappadang et al. (2022), it is regarded as the focal point that the entire education system revolves around. How students' performance academically is important in understanding the overall success or failure of universities. As stated by Shahjahan et al. (2021),

performance encompasses the data acquired through a teacher's grading system or the educational objectives established by students and teachers to be accomplished within a specific timeframe.

In order to excel in the competitive university environment, academics must take on the responsibility of incorporating sustainability into its core principles (Simina, 2022). When evaluating the performance of universities, it is important to take into account both the sustainability of the universities themselves and their influence on society (Shawe, 2019). This is necessary in order to remain competitive in the education market (Shisia et al., 2019). The key performance indicators in this study included sustainability, efficiency, innovation, and customer satisfaction. (Simina, 2022; Shawe, 2019; Chukwemeka, 2020; Paudel, 2020; Yaakub & Mohamed, 2020; Tadesse et al., 2022; Mappadang et al., 2022; and Shahjahan et al., 2021; Shisia et al., 2019).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Rurofum (2020) highlights that underperformance is a significant issue for the majority of higher education institutions in the DRC. In addition, the DRC suffers from an inefficient administrative system in its public universities, where individuals selected to carry out policies are appointed based on political affiliations rather than their qualifications and expertise (Menga-Mokombi, 2020). The structural and governance issues faced by public universities have also contributed to a decline in the quality of teaching and research offered by these institutions (Risasi & Sabiti, 2020; Yoatile et al., 2021; Paluku, 2020). These phenomena 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; Vundu, 2022; Lofinda, 2019). Many studies have shown that the decline in teaching quality can be attributed to a decrease in the number of competent teaching personnel, academic ineffectiveness, and inefficiency among employees (Menga-Mokombi, 2020; Brandt & Moshonas, 2020; Bakamana, 2021; Tshiunza, 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 and academic effectiveness (Kabuya, 2022; Vundu, 2022; Yoatile et al., 2021). Between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020 only 717 theses were successfully defended in public universities (Ministère de l'Education de la RDC, 2022).

The reviewed studies were carried out in public institutions in DRC (Moukouyou-Awolusi & Awolusi, 2023; Bogren, et al., 2021; Bitamba & An, 2020; Yoatile, et al., 2021; Vundu, 2022; Lofinda, 2019; Paluku, 2020; & Mwamba, 2022). According to the reviewed studies, Yoatile et al. (2021) looked at the performance of scientific staff; Vundu (2022) looked at the performance of pedagogical institutes in University of Kisangani; Lofinda (2019) looked at the performance of students while Paluku (2020) looked at the performance of university institutions of far north DRC. Thus, none of the studies looked how public universities perform in Kinshasa where most of the public universities are located. The present study sought to address this deficiency on performance of public universities in Kinshasa by looking at the dimensions of sustainability, efficiency, innovation, and customer satisfaction.

Moreover, the examined research had investigated many factors that influence performance. The study conducted by Lofinda (2019) examined various aspects including time management, study methods, examination preparation, and teacher attitude. Paluku (2020) investigated on finance

capital, human capital, social capital, and teaching-research activities. Okoedion et al. (2022) analyzed students' factors, lecturers' factors and home environment factors in both private and public universities. Bitamba and An (2020) focused on financial factors, employee factors, and management-related factors. Asiedu et al. (2020) explored leadership factors, innovative factors, and knowledge management capabilities factors. Ernest and Wema (2020) focused on competence factors, knowledge and experience factors while Ghebreorgis (2020) investigated environmental factors, personal factors and socio-economic factors. The present research therefore strived to sort this deficiency on the external factors influencing the performance of public universities; specifically focusing on political factors, economic factors, and technological factors.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To investigate the influence of political factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.
- ii. To determine the influence of economic factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.
- iii. To examine the influence of technological factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

H₀1a: There is no statistically significant influence of political factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.

H₀1b: There is no statistically significant influence of economic factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.

H₀1c: There is no statistically significant influence of technological factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Complexity theory was introduced by (Rosser, 1999; and Beinhocker, 2006). The theory is based on four assumptions: an organization's inherent size is usually measured in terms of value, the degree of technical difficulty in creating outputs, the degree of uncertainty involved and the complexity of the relationships both within and the surrounding (Rosser, 1999). The theory therefore helps managers comprehend the social behaviours of their employees and how they network as they align with the various work processes. The theory also emphasizes interactions and the accompanying feedback loops that constantly change systems (Beinhocker, 2006).

It is necessary to understand the systems' environment before one can understand the systems themselves, according to complexity theory, which posits that complex systems are best understood as open structures that interact with their surroundings. The idea shows how institutions within organizations create patterns that might lead to strategic change via a myriad of tiny non-linear events at the organizational or departmental level. This is relevant to strategic management. As a result, the theory provides a more thorough understanding of how complex systems function, which improves our knowledge of the strategic context and our capacity to foresee sudden shifts (Turner & Baker, 2019).

The theory's explanation of the significance of knowing how to cope with the many stakeholders in the external environment surrounding a public university and their role in influencing its performance made it applicable to this research. The reason for this is because the success of public

universities may be influenced by political factors, such as the nomination of influential council members, the distribution of funds, and the admissions process. Public universities may also be influenced by political instability. The allocation of cash to public universities was, however, dictated by external economic factors; schools with weak economic standing would not get sufficient funding. The many technologies that public universities may use to improve their performance were defined by the technical environment.

When applied to economic and financial systems, complexity theory has the ability to improve monitoring and management, which in turn may aid in the prevention and mitigation of future crises. Complexity theory, as it pertains to education in the workplace, stresses the importance of collaborative learning and the potential for unexpected and fresh insights to emerge from classroom discussions. A non-linear, holistic, and systemic approach is provided by the theory, which may also be used to address issues (Turner & Baker, 2019).

Critics of complexity theory point out that the theory is not rigorous or innovative enough, and that its claimed benefits—such as multidisciplinary work, theoretical advancement, and empirical progress—are overblown and grounded in wishful thinking rather than reality. Some have also pointed out that the theory has substantial conceptual and theoretical hurdles that make it difficult to use as an explanatory model in the social sciences (Blackman, 2001). Some argue that the theory can't handle complicated events or outcomes, especially in rare or unexpected cases, and thus isn't useful for making predictions. On top of that, without checking its explaining power, complexity theory might be mistaken for an explanation tool, which could further impede research and comprehension of a particular context. Cairney (2017) notes that there are no concrete instances of its use in policy settings.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 External Factors and Performance

Chinese researchers Chen et al. (2023) examined the characteristics of extracurricular activities in developed countries. The data gathered from the questionnaire was analysed using regression and correlation analysis in the research. The findings demonstrated that students' ability to learn is influenced by their participation in extracurricular activities. In South Korea, Seo and Lee (2019) conducted a study on the effect of external factors on organizational performance. Community support and external partnerships were the primary research focus. Data was examined using structural equation modelling and the method adopted was survey research. According to the findings, external factors have a positive effect on organizational effectiveness.

An analysis of the external factors influencing building sector performance in developing country was carried out by Khalid (2020). The research employed a survey methodology and used PESTLE analysis. Structural equation modelling was used to examine the data. All of the PESTLE elements showed to significantly influence performance, but the influences of economic and technical factors were found to be the most pronounced. Sadiku (2022) examined the literature on external factors and organizational performance in Macedonia, taking a look at the measures of competitive, social, technical, economic, and environmental aspects. The research found that external factors and organizational performance had a favourable correlation. The research also found that management may reduce risks by being timely informed about changes that external factors are projected to bring.

Khotimah (2020) examined Indonesia's external factors through the lenses of environmental and infrastructural structures. A descriptive research approach was used in the study. Findings indicate that external factors may affect the learner final product. Workplace atmosphere, dynamism, autonomy, and vision were all evaluated by Barasa (2023). Regression analysis and a survey research approach were used in the study. Organizational performance was positively affected by external factors, according to the data.

The influence of the campus environment on performance at a state polytechnic university in Taiwan was the subject of research by Bustani and Tri (2022). The study analysed data using factor analysis and a survey research approach. According to the results, the attitude of the instructor has the greatest influence on the academic achievement of the students. Hussain et al. (2023) examined economic and political aspects in Pakistan. A quantitative research design was used in the investigation. Organizational performance is affected by political and economic issues, according to the findings. Incorporating technology into departmental operations boosts performance, according to the report.

The social, policy, and political context were examined by Guerra et al. (2022) in the Philippines. The study used a correlational analysis and survey research approach. Results demonstrated a positive relationship between external influences and the efficiency of educational institutions. The elements of extracurricular activities, family difficulties, employment and financial considerations, and social factors were the primary emphasis of a study by Al-Muslimawi and Hamid (2019) in Iraq. Finding the connection between external factors and university performance was achieved using ANOVA. While social issues may have a little influence on quality performance, they are simpler to overcome, according to the research, which found that extracurricular activities may aid boost academic achievement.

Engidaw (2021) investigated the influence of external factors on Ethiopian organizations performance by focusing on marketing, finance, infrastructure, trade fair, work premise, political, and legal aspects. A combination of descriptive and explanatory research methods was used in the study. Organizational performance is enhanced by reducing infrastructure difficulties and establishing an appealing atmosphere, according to the research. Additionally, the research found that external factors had a positive correlation with organizational success.

From the empirical studies, emerging nations in Asia, in particular, had done more research on how external factors affect university performance. The majority of the researchers also used a survey study method, according to the studies. Public university performance was not negatively correlated with external factors, according to the studies.

2.2.2.1 Political Factors and Performance

The relationship between political factors and the performance of China's public universities was investigated by Yang et al. (2018). Structural equation modelling was used in the investigation. Public universities perform better when their political environment is stable, according to the results. Public university performance was positively correlated with political factors. Papanikolaou et al. (2020) examined a research on the relationship between public university performance and political factors in Greece. The research used a case study methodology. According to the results, political power and ideology have a significant influence on the performance of higher education. Additionally, the research discovered that HEIs are mainly influenced by political factors that affect negatively or positively the execution of national goals for higher education.

Research on the influence of political factors on the efficiency of Nigerian public universities was carried out by Ogunode and Musa (2022). The research used survey approaches. The results demonstrated that the performance of public universities is influenced by political factors. Public university recruiting, administrator appointments, site selection, growth, council membership, and student admissions were all shown to be politically influenced, according to the report. Corruption, ineffective leadership, wrong rankings, and unequal progress were the results. Shamaki et al. (2020) assessed the influence of politics on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools. The study adopted descriptive research design and was carried out in 20 schools. Data was analyzed using regression analysis. The results indicated that political systems promote the attainment of educational goals. Politics also contributes to educational inequality, according to another report.

Furthermore, the research on political issues and organizational performance in SMEs was conducted by Onoriode et al. (2020). The research used a descriptive survey approach and analysed correlations. According to the results, a company's productivity is affected by the political aspects. Customer happiness is influenced by a stable political business activity. In Ivory Coast, Ouedraogo et al. (2020) explored the link between political factors of organizational performance. The study reviewed existing data. It was proved that Organizational performance is adversely influenced by political uncertainty, according to the data.

The influence of political factors on organizational performance was studied by Chege et al. (2020) in Kenya. The analysis used a descriptive methodology and included 118 registered business process outsourcing firms. According to the results, the political environment has an effect on performance and is critical to a company's success. Organizational performance is improved by factors that provide a positive political environment, according to the research.

Although more studies had been carried out in developing countries, research had been carried out in both developed and developing countries, as seen in the literature review. Although the studies had employed a variety of approaches, the most common ones included descriptive study designs and regression analyses. While research had shown that political instability negatively influences organizational performance, it had also shown that political considerations positively affect performance.

2.2.2.2 Economic Factors and Performance

Dvorsky et al. (2020) looked at the monetary aspects influencing the efficiency of Polish organizations. The research was conducted in a few nations in Eastern Europe. The research used statistical methods including regression and correlation analysis. Based on the results, the quality of the business environment is affected by interest rates, monetary policy, and the macroeconomic environment. Economic factors were also shown to positively correlate with organizational effectiveness, according to the research.

Reddy et al. (2023) investigated the relationship between economic factors and event management performance in India. A descriptive research approach was used in the study. The findings demonstrated that organizational performance is affected by economic issues. Hussain et al. (2023) investigated the correlation between financial factors and business output in Pakistan. A quantitative research design was used in the investigation. The findings demonstrated that organizational effectiveness is affected by economic factors. It was also determined that a company may achieve its objectives with the support of smart investments that boost resources.

Organizational performance in Nigeria's industrial sector was studied by Oga and Onouha (2020) in relation to economic factors. The study used correlation analysis and a quasi-experimental research approach. Economic factors and organizational performance were shown to be positively correlated, according to the findings. The research also discovered that interest and inflation rates had an effect on how well organizations performed. Additionally, the research found that keeping an eye on the economy's predicted movements helps businesses make better judgments. Ojimba et al. (2023) focused on the constructs of interest rate, inflation rate and exchange rate and how the factors affect organizational performance in the pharmaceutical sector. The study used regression analysis. The results showed that financial considerations had a detrimental effect on business performance. Organizations may protect themselves from potential dangers, according to the report, by studying economic trends and formulating policies.

Economic factors on academic achievement in elementary schools were studied by Ndemwa and Ngesu (2021) in Kenya. The research used regression analysis. According to the findings, parental income significantly affects their children's academic achievement. Mutisya and Mutilu (2024) looked at how financial circumstances influence students' grades in Kenya. A descriptive survey research approach was used in the study. Academic performance might be influenced when parents' income is insufficient. Finding ways to make the most of one's income is another way to improve performance, according to the research.

Research on the influence of economic factors on organizational performance was more prevalent in developing countries, according to the evaluated empirical studies. There was a lack of information on economic factors and public university performance in the education industry. Research had shown that economic factors might either improve or worsen an organization's performance, while the majority of research had shown a positive correlation.

2.2.2.3 Technological Factors and Performance

Resuli (2022) looked at how technological factors affect university performance. Research confirmed that new methods of technology in teaching inspire the creation of effective pedagogical practices. The study also found that there was a positive relationship between technological factors and performance of higher education institutions. In the Paraguay, Ferres-Davalos (2023) assessed the influence of technological factors on organizational performance. The study adopted exploratory research design. Technology improves jobs and processes, leading to faster, more precise, and more efficient work overall, according to the research.

Al-Rahmi et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between technological factors and the efficiency of Saudi Arabian universities. Data was gathered from students and analysed using structural equation modelling. The findings demonstrated that technological factors improve performance by facilitating the sharing of information and expertise within organizations. In 2018, Mullakhmetov surveyed the research on the topic of technological factors and organizational performance. Because they improve procedures and communication, new technologies boost performance, according to the research.

Ismail and Mahmood (2018) investigated the correlation between technological factors and academic excellence in Malaysian universities. A survey research design was used for the investigation. The results showed that technological factors enhance performance as they enable blended learning. In Ghana, Amaniampong and Hartman (2023) examined the technological factors influencing the performance of colleges. The study adopted descriptive research design. The study noted that technology enhances content management, lesson presentation, curriculum

design, competences development and assessment. In addition, the research found that technological factors had a favourable influence on the performance of universities.

According to the reviewed studies, technological factors have a positive effect on universities performance. The studies also show that more studies have been undertaken in emerging economies than in advanced economies. In addition, most of the studies collected primary data and the outcome was similar to those studies that reviewed existing data.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by the following conceptual framework.

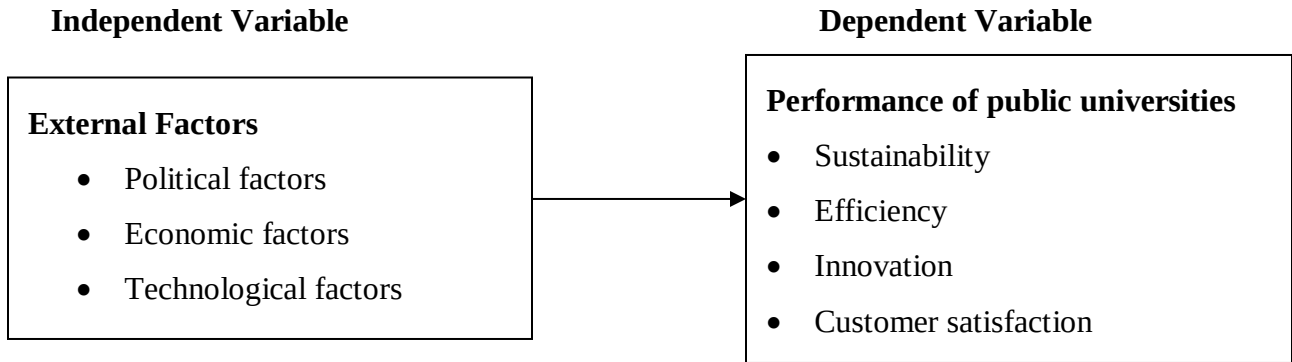


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

According to the conceptual framework, external factors under the constructs of political factors, economic factors and technological factors influence the performance of public universities under the dimensions of sustainability, efficiency, innovation and customer satisfaction.

3.0 Methodology

A research philosophy lays forth the ground rules for doing research in accordance with preconceived notions about what constitutes knowledge and the nature of reality (Ramsberg, 2018). The study adopted the positivism paradigm which adheres to the view that only factual knowledge gained through observation, including measurement, is trustworthy. In addition, descriptive research design and the explanatory cross-sectional research design. Descriptive research design enabled the study to get precise answers to who, what, when, where, and how questions related to a given topic (Pawar, 2020). Information about the factors and public universities performance in Kinshasa, DRC was gathered using the descriptive research design. On the other hand, the explanatory cross-sectional research design enabled the study to collect data from the public universities at a specific point in time to explain the how and why behind the institutional factors influencing performance.

The target population comprised of board of directors of university, university council, faculty council, and departmental council members. The unit of observation comprised of 1059 board of directors, university council, faculty council, and departmental council members, while the three public universities in Kinshasa, DRC, served as units of analysis. This study used Yamane formula to determine the sample size of 211 respondents. Due to the hierarchical nature of the public universities included in this study, stratified random sampling was used. These included board of directors, university council, faculty council and departmental council. Researchers used simple

random selection to choose participants from each of the study's strata, which represented the hierarchy of the respondents. This study used a structured questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. Analysis of data gathered was realized through the use of the Software Package for Social Science (SPSS Version 27.0). Descriptive statistics were produced in terms of percentages, means and standard deviations and presented in terms of graphs, charts and tables while for the inferential statistics, structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the relationship among the variables. Thereafter, simple tabulation and arrangement of responses in frequency tables was utilized to present the research findings while different charts were also used to show distributions.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Influence of External Factors on Performance of Public Universities

The researcher used mean scores and standard deviation to rank the items under each variable. According to Oxford (1990), mean scores fall into three categories: low, medium and high as a likelihood of a particular response or event. The ranges for high incidence are 3.5 - 5.0, medium incidence range is 2.5 - 3.4 and low incidence range is 1.0 - 2.4. The results for the descriptive results are presented in the following subsection.

The objective of this study was to determine the influence of external factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The external factors variable was measured using items that were categorized into political factors, economic factors and technological factors. The results on the extent to which the respondents agreed/disagreed with the statements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: External Factors and Performance of Public Universities

	Mean	Std. Deviation (%)
Political instability has affected the performance of the university	3.66	1.383
Political interference has influenced the appointment of staff members	4.23	1.097
Political interference has influenced the placement of students in the university	4.08	1.125
Political interference has influenced the expansion of the university	3.13	1.624
Political interference has influenced allocation of resources for the university	3.27	1.555
The economic status of the country has affected the allocation of resources for the university	4.12	1.105
The interest rate has affected the running of the university	4.15	1.045
The inflation rate has affected the running of the university	4.22	0.871
The income level of the parents and guardians has affected the admission of students in the university	4.24	0.931
The monetary policy of the country has affected the running of the university	4.26	0.992
Technology has enabled the university to enhance lesson presentation	2.90	1.490
Technology has enabled the university to improve its work processes	2.88	1.463
Technology has enabled the university to collaborate with other universities	2.87	1.498
Technology has enabled the university to improve the quality of research output	2.84	1.488
Technology has enabled the university to develop competences for its employees	2.79	1.437
Total	3.58	1.274

Table 1 presents the respondents’ perceptions regarding the influence of external factors on performance of public universities in Kinshasa. An evaluation of external factors reveals a pronounced recognition of macro-environmental influences, indicated by a composite mean of 3.58. This suggests that public universities do not operate in a vacuum; rather, their performance is heavily shaped by external political, economic, and technological dynamics. Nevertheless, the substantial standard deviation (SD = 1.274) signals that these external pressures are not felt uniformly. Institutional differences - such as geographical location, financial resilience, or technological infrastructure - likely dictate how moderately a specific university is influenced by shifting external landscapes.

The analysis also suggests that under political factors, political dynamics exert a highly influential, and potentially disruptive, role in institutional operations. This systemic influence is evidenced by the high mean scores recorded for the statements that political interference dictates the appointment of staff members (M = 4.23, SD = 1.097) and heavily influences the placement of students within the universities (M = 4.08, SD = 1.125). Despite the strong agreement on these points, the relatively high standard deviations indicate that the intensity of this political encroachment is not experienced uniformly, suggesting that certain institutions or faculties may face higher degrees of administrative penetration than others. The findings further reveal a more moderate, yet highly volatile, political influence over long-term strategic and structural outcomes.

This is demonstrated by the moderate-to-high mean scores regarding the influence of political instability and interference on overall institutional performance ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.383$), the physical or academic expansion of the university ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.624$), and the strategic allocation of resources ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.555$). While these averages denote moderate agreement, the exceptionally high standard deviations highlight significant variation in respondents' viewpoints. This divergence implies that the ramifications of political instability and skewed resource allocation fluctuate dramatically across the academic landscape. Consequently, these findings imply that while political factors heavily compromise foundational personnel and enrollment decisions, their broader influence creates evident operational instability. As a result, the capacity of public universities to realize their full academic and development potential is significantly restricted by the unpredictable nature of external political interference.

The outcomes are consistent with other research including Yang et al. (2018) which showed that political efficacy enhances the performance of public universities. In addition, Papanikolaou et al. (2020) findings showed that there is a strong link between political power and ideology, and determination of quality higher education. The study also found that political factors influenced the implementation of national strategies for higher education which strongly affects HEI's in all aspects. The results are also in tandem with those of Ogunode and Musa (2022) who found that the recruitment, appointment of school administrators, location, expansion, council members and admission of students were all politically influenced in public universities. This led to corruption, poor leadership, poor ranking and uneven development. Another study by Shamaki et al. (2020) also established that politics create inequalities in the education sector. The discoveries are further corroborated by those of Onoriode et al. (2020) which showed that efficiency of an organization is dependent on the political environment. Therefore, the high levels of political interference suggest that public universities in Kinshasa may not independently implement their strategies.

Regarding economic factors, the analysis suggests that macroeconomic dynamics exert a highly noticeable and pervasive influence on institutional viability and operations. This acute sensitivity is evidenced by the high mean scores recorded for the statements that the economic status of the country directly compromises the allocation of resources ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.105$), and that both fluctuating interest rates ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.045$) and rising inflation rates ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.871$) heavily disrupt the daily running of the universities. While the low standard deviation for inflation indicates a tight consensus on its damaging effects, the larger standard deviations for resource allocation and interest rates suggest that the severity of these fiscal pressures varies across different institutions, resulting in uneven operational strain. Beyond immediate operational hurdles, external economic conditions significantly dictate institutional access and broader financial administration. This is demonstrated by the exceptionally high mean scores regarding the statements that the income levels of parents and guardians heavily dictate student admission trends ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.931$) and that national monetary policies deeply affect overall university management ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.992$). Although there is overarching agreement on these constraints, the standard deviations across these items indicate that the localized influences of parental poverty and shifting monetary frameworks are felt with varying degrees of severity among the institutions. Consequently, these findings imply that public universities are highly vulnerable to macroeconomic instability, which simultaneously restricts student enrollment due to affordability barriers and diminishes institutional purchasing power. As a result, the capacity of these universities to maintain steady academic calendars and stable operations remains largely contingent upon an unpredictable and volatile national economic climate.

The present results mirrors with those of Dvorsky et al (2020) which showed that macroeconomic environment, monetary policy and interest rates affect the quality of business environment. The study by Hussain et al. (2023) also established that making strategic investments to increase resources helps an organization to meet its goals. The findings also align with those of Oga and Onouha (2020) which showed that inflation rate, interest rate affected organizational performance. The study also revealed that monitoring the likely changes in the economy can enable an organization make right decisions for better performance. In addition, Ndemwa and Ngesu (2021) results showed that the economic status of parents has a significant influence on academic performance. Another study by Mutisya and Mutilu (2024) corroborated this as it showed that when the level of parents' income if inadequate it can affect academic performance. Therefore, the high ratings on economic-related factors suggest that public universities in Kinshasa may not fully implement their strategies for enhancing performance.

On the role of technological factors in public universities in Kinshasa, the results indicate that technological integration remains at a moderate and largely inadequate level across these institutions. This deficit is evidenced by the low-to-moderate mean scores, with respondents moderately disagreeing with the statements that technology has enabled the enhancement of lesson presentations ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.490$), the improvement of operational work processes ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.463$), and effective academic collaboration with other universities ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.498$). Furthermore, the high standard deviations associated with these items imply significant polarization in opinions among the respondents. This widespread divergence suggests significant inconsistencies in technological infrastructure, meaning that while minor digital tools may exist in isolated pockets, automated work processes and collaborative networks are not standardized across the institutions. The results further reveal critical weaknesses in leveraging technology for core academic advancements and human capital growth. This is demonstrated by the low mean scores regarding the statements that technology has enabled universities to improve the quality of research output ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.488$) and supported the continuous development of staff competencies ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.437$). The high standard deviations for both items underscore substantial disagreement among the respondents, implying localized discrepancies in how relevant technology is acquired, distributed, and utilized. Consequently, these findings imply that despite the global necessity for digital transformation, public universities in Kinshasa have not sufficiently institutionalized modern technological practices. Without uniform access to digital platforms, adequate training, and robust IT infrastructure, these universities remain restricted in their ability to elevate research quality, modernize instruction, and optimize institutional efficiency.

These findings imply that although public universities recognize the importance of technology, the mechanisms used to acquire the right technologies for lesson presentations, work processes, collaborations, research and staff development are only moderately implemented. The results concur with those of Amaniampong and Hartman (2023) which noted that technology enhances content management, lesson presentation, curriculum design, competences development and assessment. Resuli (2022) also established that innovation in technology encourages development of new teaching methods which improved performance. Another study by Ferres-Davalos (2023) revealed that technology leads to improvement in tasks and processes making overall work more efficient, more accurate and with greater speed. The outcomes are also supported by those of Al-Rahmi et al. (2020) which showed that technological factors enhance exchange of knowledge and information in institutions which boosts performance. Further, Mullakhmetov (2018) established that new technologies enhance performance as they improve processes and communication in the

organization. The results are also aligned to those of Ismail and Mahmood (2018) which showed that technological factors enhance performance as they enable blended learning. Consequently, the potential benefits of using advanced technology may not be fully realized due to limited acquisition and use.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

4.2.1 External Factors and Performance

The hypothesis of the study was that “there is no statistical influence of external factors on performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC”. External factors were subdivided into political factors, economic factors and technological factors while performance was subdivided into sustainability, efficiency, innovation and customer satisfaction. Table 2 showed structural path coefficients.

Table 2: Structural Path Coefficients for External Factors and Performance

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Performance	<---	PF	.888	.144	6.147	***
Performance	<---	ECF	.447	.121	3.699	***
Performance	<---	TF	.248	.127	1.958	.050

The results showed that political factors (PF) had a statistically significant influence on the performance of public universities. The path coefficient for political factors was 0.888, with a standard error of 0.144 and a critical ratio of 6.147, yielding a p-value of 0.001. This implied that the hypothesis related to political factors was rejected. The coefficient of 0.888 indicated that for every unit increase in political factors, the performance of public universities increases 0.888. These results highlighted that political factors played a meaningful role in boosting universities performance. Previous studies such those of Yang et al. (2018), Ogunode and Musa (2022), Chege et al. (2020) support these findings as they noted that political factors had a positive relationship with performance of public universities. This is an indication that the political environment of country has a significant role in the strategic implementation in public universities and this affects performance.

Similarly, economic factors (ECF) also showed a positive and significant influence on performance. The path coefficient for economic factors was 0.447, with an S.E. of 0.121 and a C.R. of 3.699, significant at $p = 0.001$. This result implied that the hypothesis concerning economic factors was rejected, suggesting that a unit increase in economic factors leads to a 0.447 increase in performance. Therefore, the influence of economic factors still played a meaningful role in improving performance. The findings mirror those of Dvorsky et al (2020), Reddy et al. (2023), Hussain et al. (2023) and Oga and Onouha (2020) who established that economic factors had a positive relationship with organizational performance. This is an affirmation that economic factors such as the inflation rate and monetary policy can significantly influence the performance of public universities.

In addition, the results showed that technological factors (TF) significantly and positively affected the performance of public universities in Kinshasa. The path coefficient for technological factors

was 0.248, with a standard error of 0.127 and a critical ratio of 1.958, significant at $p=0.050$. Hence, the hypothesis concerning technological factors was rejected. This suggested that a unit increase of 0.248 in technological factors leads to a 0.248 increase in the performance of public universities. This was an indication that technological factors were crucial in enhancing the performance of public universities in Kinshasa. According to Resuli (2022) and Amaniampong and Hartman (2023), there is a positive relationship between technological factors and performance of higher education institutions. They therefore corroborate these study findings that technological factors adopted in teaching and research initiatives in public universities influence performance of higher education institutions.

The results suggested that political factors, economic factors and technological factors significantly and positively affect the performance of public universities in Kinshasa. These findings highlight the importance of focusing on certain aspects of external factors to enhance the outcomes of public universities.

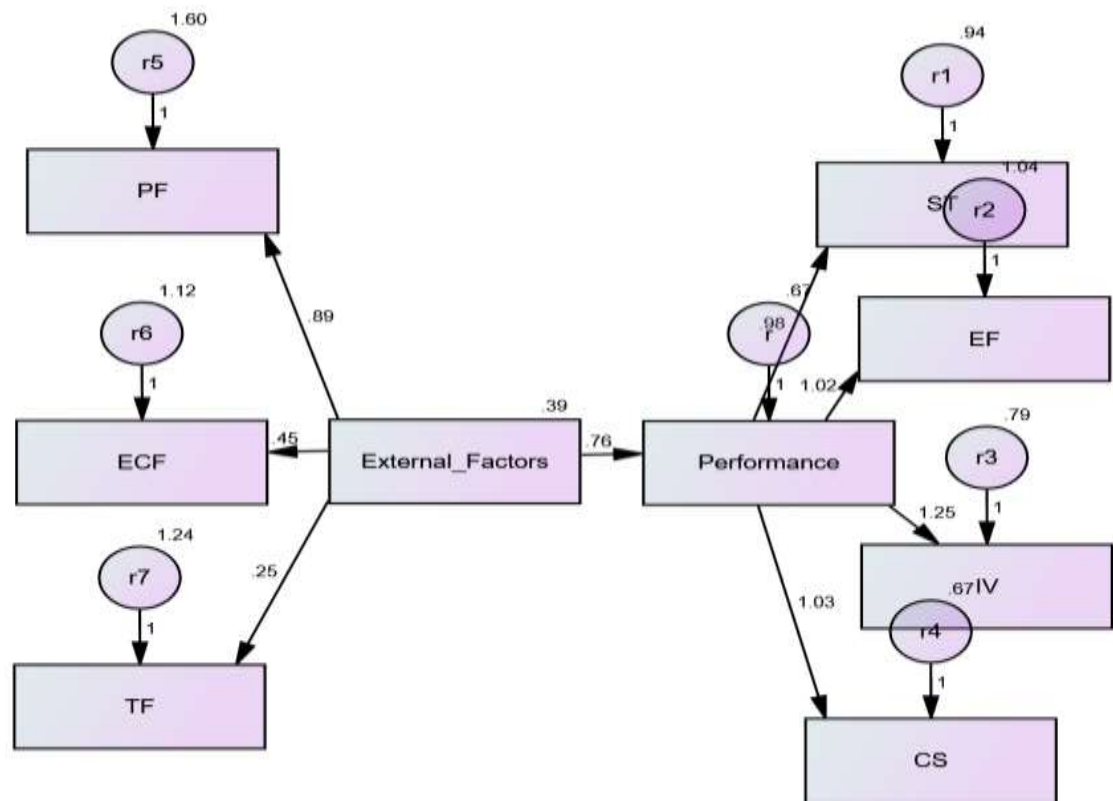


Figure 2: SEM on External Factors and Performance

Figure 2 presents the Structural Equation Model (SEM) examining the influence of external factors on the performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The findings indicate that external factors had a strong positive effect on performance. This is evidenced by the path coefficient of 0.76 between external factors and performance, suggesting that improvements in external-related factors were associated with enhanced performance of public universities. The high coefficient demonstrates that external factors are important determinants of performance of institutions.

The results further show that political factors were the strongest indicator of external factors, with a factor loading of 0.89, followed by economic factors (0.45) and technological factors (0.25).

These findings imply that political factors contribute most significantly to the formation of the external factors dimension. The loadings for all three indicators indicate that they adequately represent the latent construct of external factors. This suggests that universities that effectively accommodate political factors, economic factors and technological factors are likely to experience improved institutional outcomes.

The findings also reveal that performance was effectively measured through sustainability, efficiency, innovation, and customer satisfaction. Among these dimensions, customer satisfaction exhibited the highest factor loading (1.03), followed by efficiency (1.02), sustainability (1.00), and innovation (0.67). This indicates that customer satisfaction and efficiency were the most prominent manifestations of performance within the public universities, while innovation, although important, contributed relatively less to the overall performance construct.

These findings imply that improvements in political factors, economic factors and technological factors are likely to enhance university performance through increased sustainability, operational efficiency, innovation, and customer satisfaction. The strong relationship between economic factors and performance further demonstrates the importance of aligning with external factors as a strategic approach to improving the effectiveness and competitiveness of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.

The regression model therefore became;

Performance = 0.888 political factors + 0.447 economic factors + 0.248 technological factors

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results indicate that the measurement model for external factors achieved an acceptable fit to the observed data. This is evidenced by the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) of 0.946, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.90, and the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) of 0.002, which indicates minimal discrepancy between the observed and estimated covariance matrices. These results suggest that the measurement model adequately represents the underlying structure of external factors.

The factor loadings further demonstrate that political factors, economic factors and technological factors are appropriate indicators of the external factors parameter. Specifically, political factors recorded the highest factor loading ($\lambda = 0.89$), followed by economic factors ($\lambda = 0.45$) and technological factors ($\lambda = 0.25$). Since only the factor loading for political factors exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, it satisfactorily exhibited satisfactory convergent validity and adequately measured the latent construct, while economic factors and technological factors were not quite satisfactory.

The findings further suggest that political factors contribute most strongly to the measurement of external factors, followed by economic factors and technological factors. The factor loadings indicate that the indicators share a substantial proportion of variance with the underlying construct and therefore provide reliable measures of external factors. This confirms that the selected dimensions adequately capture the concept of external factors within public universities in Kinshasa, DRC.

Based on the model fit statistics and factor loadings, the measurement model for external factors was deemed satisfactory and retained for subsequent structural analysis. The results therefore provide evidence that political factors, economic factors and technological factors are valid and reliable indicators for measuring external factors in the context of public university performance.

The RMSEA value of 0.069, which is less than 0.08, indicated that the model provided a close approximation to the observed data, suggesting a good fit. The 90% confidence interval values (LO 90: 0.049, HI 90: 0.088) supported this conclusion by showing that the RMSEA estimate fell within an acceptable range. Additionally, the PCLOSE value of 0.750, being greater than 0.05, supported the hypothesis of close fit.

The positive influence of external factors on organizational performance were corroborated by Chen et al. (2023), Seo and Lee (2019), Khalid (2020) and Sadiku (2022). These studies also showed that extracurricular studies affect learning effectiveness of students. In addition, all the PESTLE factors were noted to have a significant effect on performance with economic and technological factors having larger effects.

As the findings revealed that political factors, economic factors and technological factors significantly and positively influence. Therefore, the hypothesis H₀₁ “There is no statistical influence of external factors on performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC” was rejected.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that external factors significantly but negatively influence performance of public universities in Kinshasa, DRC. The study also concluded that political factors, economic factors and technological factors significantly and positively affect the performance. Moreover, in terms of political factors, political instability highly affected performance, influenced appointment of employees, and placement of students. The study also concluded that expansion of public universities was partially influenced by political interference. In terms of economic factors, the study concluded that the country’s interest rate, inflation rate and monetary policy highly affected the running of public universities. The study also concludes that the income level of parents/guardians highly affected the admission of students. In terms of technological factors, the study concludes that there was moderation in uptake of technology in the public universities in Kinshasa, which partially affected the enhancement of lesson presentations, work processes, collaboration, research output and competencies development.

6.0 Recommendations

University management should strengthen institutional resilience by adopting proactive management strategies that reduce the effects of political instability and external interference on university operations. This can be achieved by promoting transparent governance, merit-based recruitment and promotion practices, strengthening internal accountability mechanisms, and ensuring that strategic decisions are guided by institutional priorities rather than external influences. Such managerial practices will safeguard institutional autonomy, promote fairness, and enhance organizational stability and performance.

Additionally, university managers should develop adaptive financial management practices that enable institutions to respond effectively to changing economic conditions. Strategic budgeting, prudent financial planning, cost optimization, and diversification of internally generated revenue should become integral components of institutional management. Expanding partnerships, consultancy services, research commercialization, alumni engagement, and other income-generating initiatives will strengthen financial sustainability and reduce the influence of inflation, fluctuating interest rates, and other economic pressures on university operations.

Moreover, university management should adopt student-centred financial support strategies that improve access and retention despite economic challenges faced by parents and guardians. Strengthening scholarship schemes, flexible tuition payment arrangements, work-study opportunities, and partnerships with funding organizations can help minimize financial barriers to higher education while maintaining stable student enrolment and improving institutional performance.

Furthermore, university leaders should accelerate digital transformation by embedding technology into every aspect of teaching, learning, research, and administration. Greater investment in digital infrastructure, learning management systems, research technologies, and administrative information systems should be complemented by continuous training that equips employees with the digital competencies required to operate effectively in an increasingly technology-driven higher education environment.

Finally, management should cultivate an organizational culture that embraces technological innovation and continuous improvement. Employees should be encouraged to adopt new digital tools, share innovative practices, and participate in collaborative problem-solving initiatives that improve teaching quality, research productivity, administrative efficiency, and service delivery. Creating innovation platforms and recognizing technology-driven initiatives will encourage continuous modernization across the institution.

Given the dynamic external environment in which public universities operate, institutional strategic plans should incorporate environmental scanning, risk assessment, and scenario planning as integral management practices. Regular analysis of political, economic, technological, and social developments should inform strategic decision-making and enable universities to anticipate change rather than merely respond to it. Strategic plans should also promote institutional resilience by encouraging revenue diversification, strategic partnerships, innovation, research commercialization, and investment in digital technologies that strengthen the universities' competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

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