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Addressing Managerial Behaviours and Governance Challenges in Public Universities in Emerging Economies


iCAD25 Conference Presentation

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Introduction

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- Governance is central to performance in public universities (PU) (Birbirs et al., 2015; Gollagari, Birega & Mishra, 2024).
 - Addresses agency problems, managerial control & monitoring costs.
 - Crucial for emerging economies & national development (Arslan et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2023).
 - Strengthening governance is vital for PU to fulfil their national transformation agenda, including global goals:
 - SDG 4 – Quality Education
 - SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

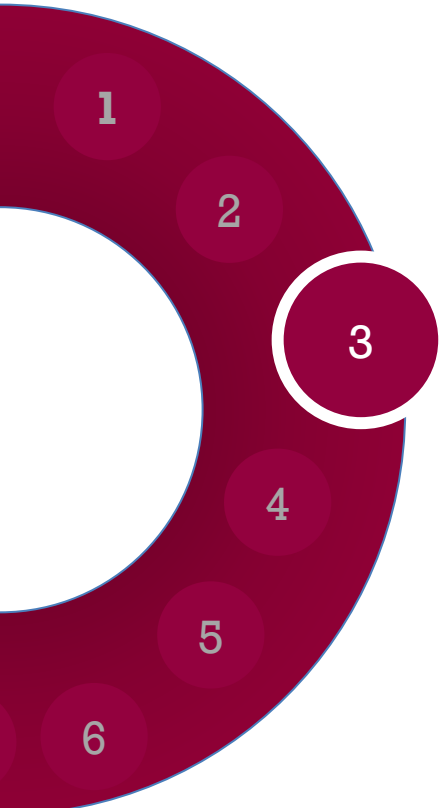


Research Problem and Gaps

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- Despite the foundational works of Jensen & Meckling (1976) and Fama & Jensen (1983) over four decades ago, governance in public universities remains complex and unclear.
 - Key challenges include:
 - Governance inefficiencies & behavioral misalignments
 - Limited empirical research
 - Inadequacies in traditional agency
 - Lack of integration with exemplification & heuristic reasoning
 - Institutional constraints undermining accountability



Theoretical Framework

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- A decorative circular graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a dark red ring with six white circles containing the numbers 1 through 6. The circle with the number 3 is highlighted with a white border.
- Governance inefficiencies, & behavioral misalignments,
 - Inadequacies in traditional agency and the lack of integration with exemplification & heuristic reasoning (Cooper & Grubnic, 2025),
 - Institutional constraints and accountability issues are well rooted in:
 - Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976)
 - Exemplification Theory (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985)
 - Heuristic Reasoning (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973)

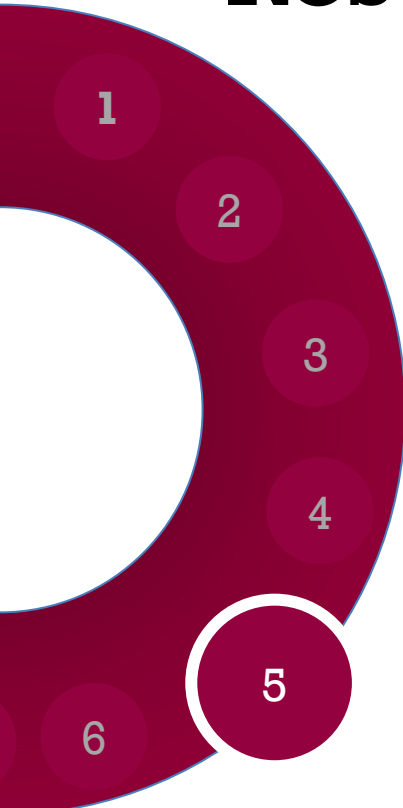


Empirical Literature Review

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- Studies highlight governance failures in public sector institutions (Otley & Pollanen, 2000; Li, 2021).
 - Higher education institutions face unique agency dilemmas due to decentralized governance (see Arslan et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022; Ntim et al., 2017; Yi et al., 2023).
 - Recent research efforts points to inefficiencies in university councils and managerial oversight (Abor, 2007; Carvalho et al., 2020; Fulop, 2013; Njuguna & Ithinji, 2020; Ntim, Soobaroyen, & Broad, 2017; Osei-Assibey, 2019).
 - Research lacks integration of behavioral monitoring frameworks in academic settings.



Research Design and Methodology

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- A decorative circular graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a dark red ring with six white circles containing the numbers 1 through 6. The number 5 is highlighted with a white border.
- Mixed-methods approach
 - 77 governance participants in Ghanaian public universities
 - Factor and thematic analysis used



Key Findings

- Agency problems persist due to weak governance and misaligned incentives
- Two key governance factors identified:
 1. Operational efficiency mechanisms
 2. Behavioural monitoring mechanisms
- These factors explain 65.027% of the variance in:
 - Agency problems
 - Monitoring mechanisms
 - Related costs



Key Findings (Con't)

- Highlights the strategic importance of targeted governance reforms
- Strong link between governance mechanisms and institutional performance
- Promotes the case for:
 - Responsible management
 - Sustainable governance in public universities
 - Alignment with developmental priorities



Conceptual Framework

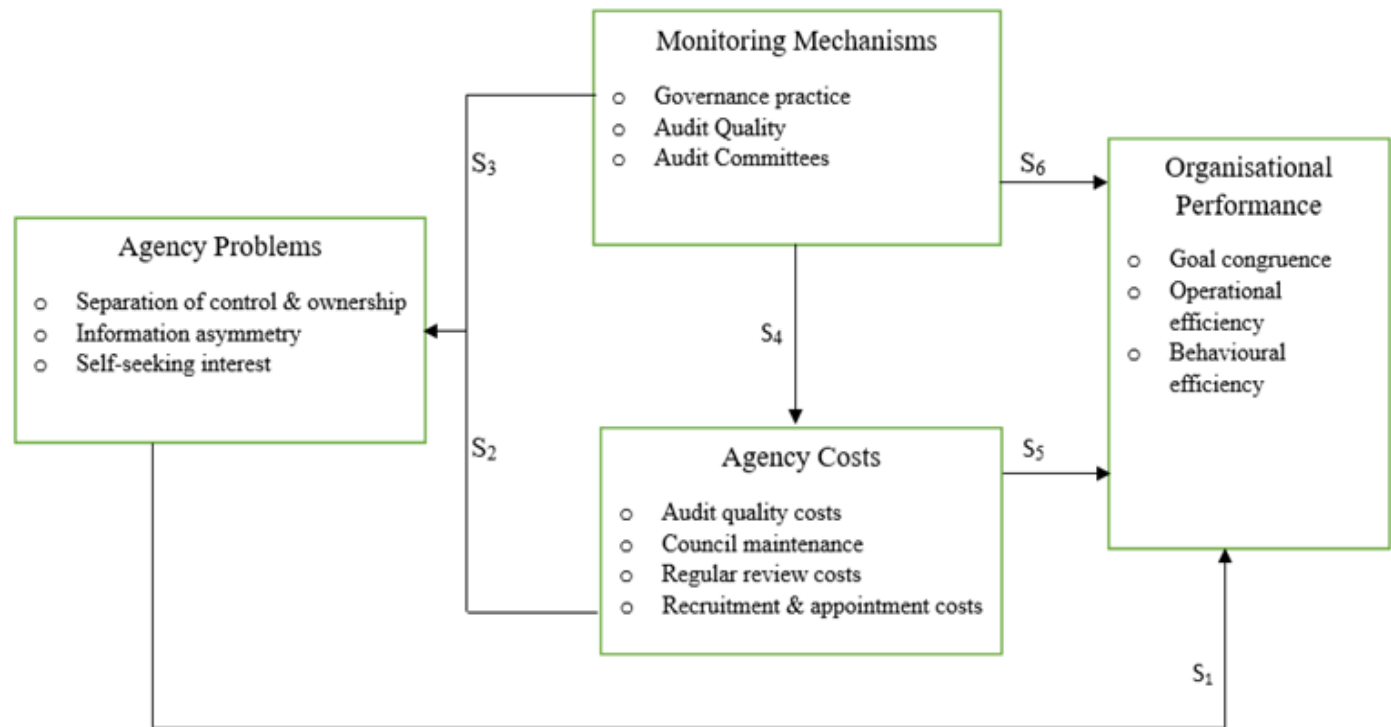
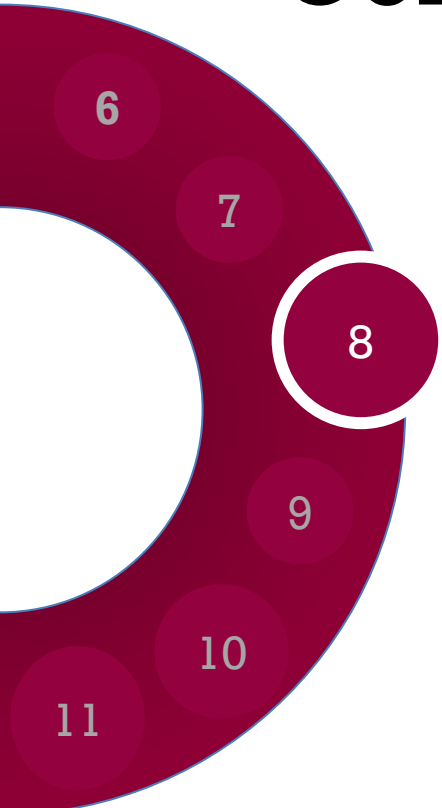


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of agency problem, monitoring mechanisms and costs

Source: Author's Own Conceptualization based on Extant Literature



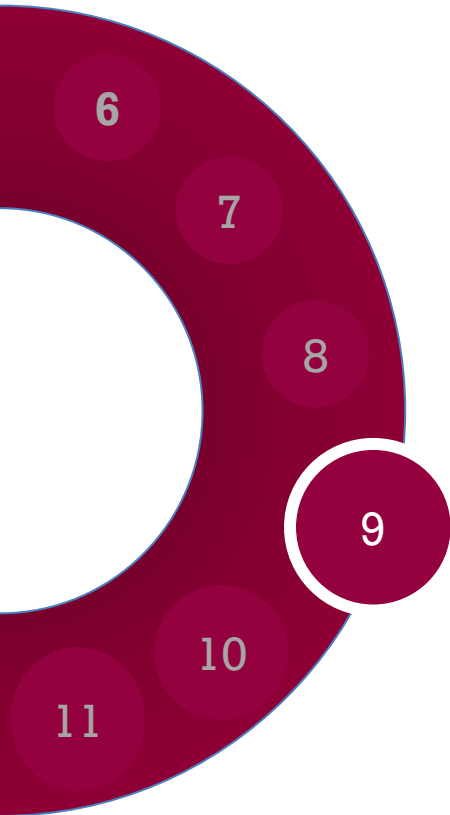
Conceptual Framework Summary

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- Agency problems induce monitoring mechanisms and costs
 - These shape performance via operational and behavioral efficiencies
 - Focused governance reforms can mitigate risks and enhance performance



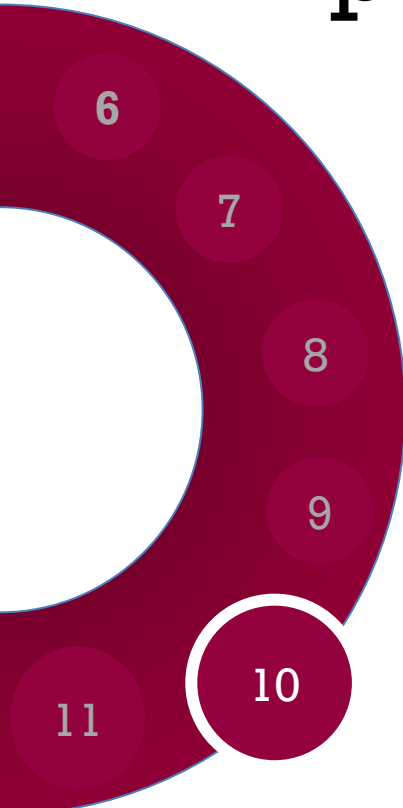
Conclusion

- Study provides a governance framework tailored to public universities
- Demonstrates relevance of agency, exemplification & heuristic theories in higher education governance
- Emphasizes operational efficiency and behavioral alignment



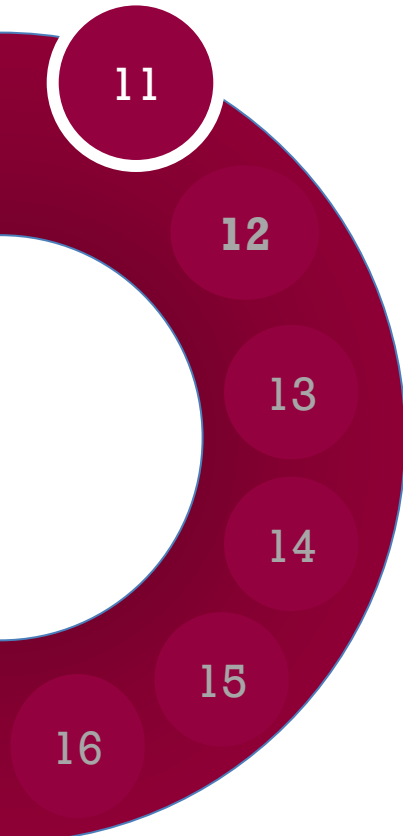


Implications for Practice and Society

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- Need for performance-based governance
 - Transparent, accountable, and inclusive systems
 - Reforms can build public trust and support SDGs 4 (quality education) & 8 (decent work and economic growth)

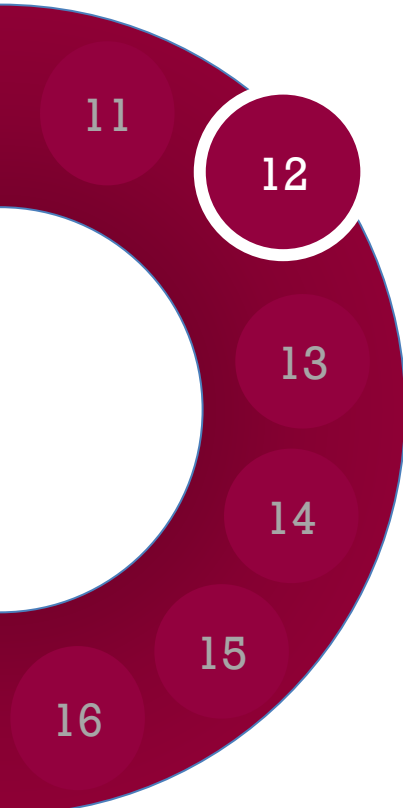


Recommendations

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- Implement regular audits, performance-based reviews, and staff rotation
 - Strengthen governance councils and management oversight
 - Build institutional capacity through training and policy reforms



Contributions of the Study

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- A decorative circular graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a dark red ring with six smaller circles inside, numbered 11 through 16. The circle with the number 12 is highlighted with a white border.
- Provides an empirical model linking agency problems to governance performance
 - Introduces a hybrid governance-performance framework suitable for public universities
 - Contributes to theory by integrating agency theory with heuristic and exemplification reasoning
 - Offers policy-relevant insights for enhancing transparency and efficiency in university governance



Future Research Agenda

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- Examine post-reform governance models and their impact on learning outcomes.
 - Explore comparative governance dynamics across different African public universities
 - Study the role of digital transformation in enhancing governance and accountability
 - Investigate the influence of political economy on public university governance reforms



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