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**HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN
DEVELOPING ECONOMIES: THE CASE OF SIERRA LEONE**

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ABSTRACT

While the literature is replete with studies of Higher Education (HE) governance and accountability in developed economies, remarkably little is known about HE contexts, governance systems and accountability processes in developing economies. Yet the latter may differ from developed country settings quite significantly, reflecting a wide diversity of institutional, socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts. In an African context case study, this chapter offers an examination of HE governance and accountability processes in The University of Sierra Leone, in Sierra Leone on the West Coast of Africa. It examines university governance structures, coalface governance processes, and the accompanying accountability implications. The pervasive social, institutional, political, economic, cultural and regulatory environmental influences in Sierra Leone are also considered. Based on the case of Sierra Leone, the chapter reveals implications for African and developing country HE governance and accountability in general. In doing so, it offers a specific analysis of governance and accountability challenges in a crucial national sector, set in the context of the developing African continent.

KEY WORDS

Governance, accountability, university, government, political, local.

INTRODUCTION

The research literature and knowledge regarding the state of and trends in Higher Education (HE) governance and accountability in the developed economies has exhibited a significant corpus of work and attention (e.g., Capano and Pritoni, 2020; Magalhaes et al. 2013; Harman and Treadgold, 2007). The same cannot be said of university corporate governance and accountability in developing countries. Indeed, what is available sometimes tends towards a presumptive importation of developed economy approaches or globally based prescriptions that pay limited attention to local national cultures and practices. Just as international accounting standards advocates have presumed international standardisation and comparability is both desirable and achievable, so corporate governance research has tended towards similar presumptions regarding developed country system transferability into unique developing country settings. The risk is that even when attempts are made to import global governance systems into developing country universities, apparent compliance may mask governance and accountability approaches that instead are decoupled from the presumed western model.

This chapter presents a case study of the structures and processes of university governance and accountability in the context of the major public university in the African country of Sierra Leone. This is being offered as a reflection upon the issues of governance and accountability implementation in a specific developing country with a view to penetrating beneath the surface of more generalised literature on HE corporate governance in both developed and developing countries (Carnegie and Tuck, 2010). It allows us to engage with the particulars of social, political, economic and educational national context: both past and present. It is only in this way that researchers and policymakers can hope to understand and plan for effective university

governance and accountability in the developing country environment. While these institutions sit within a global HE context, nonetheless they are subject to powerful national and local level influences and challenges that have hitherto been little understood or accounted for in the literature.

The sources for this case study have been drawn from prior published literature on higher education governance in the African and developing country context, as well as published literature on the history and legal/institutional structures in both Sierra Leone and the University of Sierra Leone (USL). Exploratory evidence regarding governance and accountability structures and processes within the case study university has been garnered from interviews with a small selection of six senior academics and administrators ranging across roles of dean, department head, senior academic and specialist administrators in the case study organisation. The sample size of interviewees reflects the limitations of access in a developing country context during the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic. This included the inability of researchers to travel to Sierra Leone, the inadequacy of national internet access to facilitate online interviews, and significant cultural reluctance to engage in phone interviews. Nonetheless the depth of interview data, the correlating views expressed, and the correspondence of interviewee data with published literature has supported authentic and credible observations and conclusions regarding university governance and accountability in this developing country context.

The chapter commences with a brief review of recent prior research and commentaries on developing country corporate governance and its import within universities. The Sierra Leone context surrounding HE will then be outlined, and the general research design for this case study will also be explained. Observations on the Sierra Leone universities' case will then be outlined, and on that basis, the implications for HE governance across the African continent will then be discussed. Our conclusions regarding the forward trajectory of developing country HE governance and accountability will finally be provided.

A PRIOR RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Brennan and Solomon (2008) have signalled the need for closer examination of corporate governance and accountability systems and approaches in developing country contexts. As Parker (2012) found, regardless of differences across nations and regions, both developed and developing country universities have joined a global trend towards a marketized, commercial orientation in strategy and management. Western derived New Public Management philosophies have become endemic in university missions and strategies, driven by a strong financial resourcing imperative. In both developed and developing countries, this trend has been exacerbated by restricted government higher education funding and the emergence of competing private sector educational institutions (Parker, 2012).

In the South African context for example, Luescher-Mamashela (2010) recognises the penetration of neoliberalism and the associated arrival of European university ideas of universities, led by a business focussed management offering services in a competitive market. Varghese (2016) has also observed public universities in Africa being either permitted or effectively forced to enter the private student market to fund their operations.

This global university trend towards educational massification and international revenue generation has driven competition between and within countries for students, staff, research funds and new technologies (Christopher, 2012; Parker, 2013). From a South African perspective, Veldman (2018) sees higher education institutions as attempting survival and renewal by joining 'the global project'. Imitating private sector business, Vice chancellors

have been rebadged as CEOs, Deans have become directors, staff are assets, and university outputs are commercialised. Even in a developing country context, Abubakar (2016) recommends that Nigerian universities adopt ‘good governance’ and collaborative strategies to concentrate resources, become market competitive, and achieve global recognition and ranking.

Global and local environments

The pursuit of resources can lead developing country universities down the same paths as developed country counterparts, especially as poor governance and economic pressures can produce major disparities between universities even within the same country (Veldman, 2018). This poses challenges to the balance between authority-based governance (with its recourse to centralisation, formalisation, and standardisation) and autonomy-based governance (with its emphasis on decentralisation, flexibility and enterprise) (Macheridis, 2015). In a developing country environment, local context can play a major role. A conservative university culture can produce university governance that is largely authority based with power concentrated at the top of the governance structure. Governance and accountability processes become largely opaque and focussed on governance and strategic status quo (Griffin, 2018). As Letza (2017) has argued, this emanates from national and cultural African history where the colonial ruling classes were often replaced with an indigenous ruling class.

This new ruling class inherited the colonial economy and instead of transforming it, employed it to the advantage of their own networks, so that the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ were defined in terms of being ‘connected’ or ‘not connected’. The resulting clan control and opaque governance (Letza, 2017) has been reinforced by cultural tools such as social networks as observed in Sierra Leone by O’Kane (2017), whereby individuals, groups and institutions become connected and bound together, significantly influencing the nature and implementation of policies determined. For example in their Sub-Saharan Africa study with reference to Nigeria, Nakpodia et al (2019) identified the failure of imported corporate governance codes being due to the failure to integrate them with a country’s own national culture. Maassen (2017) argues that any governance reform must also consider a university’s historical and structural characteristics, balancing university management’s governance and control role and academics’ creativity and productivity.

Government and governance

In most cases public universities are to some degree funded by government and subject to (in)direct supervision, so that any governance actions are subject to approval, delay or disapproval as cited in the case of Ghanaian universities (Abugre, 2018). Government influence over university objectives, impinging on their autonomy by means of regulatory, funding and accountability instruments is on the increase (Bleikle and Kogan, 2007). In Nigeria, Etejere et al (2017) report that university council members are appointed by the government in power which thereby can exercise a steering influence over university governance and strategic direction. So in the West African context government intervention has negatively affected both effective university governance and institutional quality.

At the same time, developing country governments, as reported by Jackson (2015) in the case of Sierra Leone, are often unable to supply sufficient resourcing for universities who then seek private sector partners and markets. Yet despite such funding limitations, governments still demand control and accountability over university strategy and operations. University management responds by driving staff towards the government’s economic and other goals (Bleikle and Kogan, 2007; Christopher, 2012; Abugre, 2018). Hlatshwayo and Fomunyan (2018) contend that in the African context, universities have at times been effectively captured

by the state and poorly governed, leading to a general mistrust in the relationship between higher education and the State.

University councils or boards may formally have power to shape governance but are themselves shaped and constrained by the very university structures of which they are a part (Kretek et al, 2013). The balance of any power within the university council has swung in favour of external rather than internal members (Larsen et al, 2009). Hence, the corporate managerial model, distanced from the university's academics, governed by the CEO in concert with the board chair, has become pervasive (Brown, 2011). This trend has also become evident in the African universities' setting, with diminished collegiality and faculty and student participation in governance becoming evident (Sall and Oanda; 2016).

Rarely do councils challenge their CEO and his or her executive prerogatives (Shattock, 2012). Decision making power and accountability has been centralised under the purview of the CEO (Larsen et al, 2009; Rytmeister, 2009). Thus, any potential university council influence over policy and strategy or ability to extract accountability appears subject to the wishes of the board chair (chancellor) and CEO (vice-chancellor) (Rytmeister, 2009). This raises all sorts of questions, including to whom university boards are accountable and for what, how and by whom board members are selected, to whom board chairs and CEOs are really accountable, whether they are effectively held accountable, what philosophies and factors drive university governance structures, and to what extent are governance and accountability approaches and outcomes driven by global trends versus local institutions and cultures (Bleikle and Kogan, 2007; Brown, 2011).

Implementing policy

Researchers have also pointed to the potentially tense relationship between university and academics' governance, accountability and autonomy (Carnegie and Tuck, 2010). National governments can influence right down to the level of individual academics with potential consequences for their autonomy, creativity and innovation (Pandey, 2004; Hlatshwayo and Fomunyan, 2018). The performance management, control and approval systems applied to universities by governments can both directly and through university managements' performance and control systems, be applied to individual academics (Christensen, 2011; Christopher, 2012; Abugre, 2018). While arguably this may enhance academics' and universities' accountability, it may simultaneously erode their autonomy with dysfunctional consequences for both productivity and achievement of strategic objectives, both at university and national levels.

The further problem this can pose, is the breakdown of trust between universities and their national governments, and between university management and academic staff who may feel their autonomy threatened by government agendas and university management intervention (Larsen et al, 2009; Madikizela-Madiya, 2018; Hlatshwayo and Fomunyan, 2018; Xiao and Chan, 2020). This is also pointed to by Sall and Oanda (2016), who observe that in the African context, university shared governance, strategic planning, consultation, transparency and accountability to stakeholders (students, staff, parents and community) is receding under pressure from government and national priorities.

Local adaptation

Returning to the relationship between developed country and developing country approaches to corporate governance and accountability, it is evident that researchers are, on balance, beginning to recognise the cultural and institutional necessity and possibility of different or unique approaches that may be required for effective implementation in developing country settings. Furthermore, there are particular situational factors in African countries such as limited government funding for public universities and the resort to growth of private

universities to fill the gap. This may at first sight allow universities more autonomy *if* they can tap into alternative non-government sources of funding, but severely limit their autonomy and self-governance if they cannot (Abugre, 2018).

Recommendations to adopt developed country corporate governance models in such as the varied African environment, are now being countered by alternative diagnoses that recognise the need for adaptation to local contexts if any effective governance and accountability implementation in both national and transnational organisations is to be achieved (Ekakitie Emonena, 2018; Halter and de Arruda, 2010). No longer can it be assumed that a European or Anglo-American governance system can be simply transplanted into the highly diverse African environment (Clarke, 2015). Instead, for universities as for other organisations, the challenge is to identify and incorporate recognition of the pervasive national, cultural and institutional histories and present traditions, the often complex network of stakeholders, and the values and networks that permeate national life (Nakpodia et al, 2018).

AFRICA AND SIERRA-LEONE

Historical Context

As a former British colony, Sierra-Leone gained independence in 1961 under the premiership of Sir Margai and experienced a few years of functioning democracy. The election of an opposition party in 1967, the ‘All Peoples Congress’ (APC) led by Siaka Stevens, heralded a long era of political unrest. Stevens, government declared the country a republic in 1971 and won the 1973 general elections by a landslide which effectively transformed the country into a *de facto* ‘one party’ state under the APC. A single-party constitution was adopted after a referendum in 1978 which made the APC the only legal party in the country (Kandeh, 1992; Bellows and Miguel, 2006, 2009).

In 1991, SL descended into a decade-long civil war (1991-2002), perpetrated by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). In 1992, a group of young army officers led by Captain Strasser ousted the APC government and promised a return to multiparty democracy (Zack-Williams, 1999; Bellows and Miguel, 2006). The civil war emaciated the country’s economy, institutions, and physical infrastructure. It has been estimated that around 50,000 Sierra Leoneans lost their lives during the conflict; more than half of the population was internally displaced, while 250,000 women became victims of rape and 100,000 (men, women and children) brutally amputated (Wang, et al., 2007). The brutal attack on the capital by the RUF in January 1999 engendered the intervention of a large deployment of UK and UN military troops that finally brought an end to the war in 2002 (Bellows and Miguel, 2009).

Since 2002, SL has enjoyed a relatively stable socio-political landscape with a growing economy until mid-2014 when the outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) was first reported. This became the deadliest outbreak of the disease since its discovery in 1976 (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that between May 2014 and December 2015, Sierra Leone reported a total of 14,122 cases of EVD infection and 3,955 deaths as a result. The country was declared EVD free in late 2015 (WHO, 2016).

Socio-political Context

The Republic of Sierra Leone is a developing country situated on the west coast of Africa, with a population of 7.8 million¹ (World Bank, 2021a), comprising 18 ethnic groups including Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio. Mende and Temne are the largest ethnic groups although

¹ 2019 population estimates by the World Bank.

Krio (an indigenous language which emerged as a hybrid of English and local dialects initially introduced by freed slaves) is widely spoken and/or understood by almost everyone in the country irrespective of tribe or ethnicity (Visit Sierra Leone, 2021). Unsurprisingly, however, English is the official language for parliamentary and legal proceedings, business, education, and the professions, given its British colonial heritage. The social context of Sierra Leone is represented by the extended family, tribe, village and religion. Islam and Christianity are its major religions with a following of 60% and 30% of the population respectively (Visit Sierra Leone, 2021).

SL is a constitutional multi-party democracy with an executive president and a unicameral parliament of 124 seats. Both President and Parliament serve five-year terms. The parliament comprises 112 elected members and 12 paramount chiefs (elected separately), representing each district in the country. The governance system is divided into three separate arms: Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. The current President, Retired Brigadier Bio was elected in 2018.

Economic Context

The SL economy is largely based on agriculture and mining. Of total land area, 75% is arable, of which 10% is cultivated mainly for food crops such as rice, cassava and yam (Turnbull et al. 2008). A large proportion of the population is engaged in subsistence farming which accounts for 54% of GDP (World Bank, 2021b). The country is endowed with diverse mineral resources including diamond, bauxite, iron ore, rutile, zircon and petroleum, hence once nicknamed the “Land of iron and diamonds” (Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2016). However, despite its significant resource bequest, the post-independence economy has suffered prolonged deterioration with accompanying low standards of living for most of the population.

The decade-long civil war and the resultant general insecurity caused the economy to shrink substantially in the 1990s as major economic activities, including agriculture, mining, and service-related sectors were disrupted. However, the economy showed signs of recovery immediately after the end of the war with annual GDP growth rate of 8.1% in 2007. This gradually fluctuated over the years to 2011, rising to 15.3% in 2012 and then recording the highest GDP growth in 2013 of 20.9%. However, GDP growth fell significantly during the EVD outbreak to 4.6% in 2014 (World Bank, 2021b). A World Bank (2015) report on socio-economic impacts of EVD in SL suggests that agricultural and business activities now show increasingly positive signs of improvement. Recent macro-economic data shows a 3.3% growth in GDP despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2021b).

Higher Education Context

Kandeh (1992) has claimed that historically, the standard of education in SL was globally competitive. The country played an important role in the training of the first corps of administrators, doctors, and teachers in English-speaking West Africa in the first half of the nineteenth century (Wang, et al., 2007; Turnbull, et al., 2008). The first Higher Education Institution (HEI) in SL – the Fourah Bay College’ (FBC) –was founded in 1827 by the Church Missionary Society primarily to train teachers and missionaries to educate and spread Christianity in West Africa. In 1876, FBC became a degree granting institution with an affiliation to the University of Durham, England, and since then has maintained a reputable tradition of higher education in Africa. To expand provision for higher education in the country, FBC was dissolved in 1950, reconstituted, and renamed Fourah Bay College – The University College of Sierra Leone (FBC-UCSL) and was then granted Royal Charter of incorporation (Fourah Bay College Ordinance, 1950). Table one provides a summary of legislation relating to the establishment, (re)constitution, governance, and administration of HEIs in SL.

The second HEI – Njala University College (NUC) – was founded in 1964, shortly after independence by an act of Parliament (Njala University College Act, 1964). In 1967, the FBC-UCSL and NUC were merged to establish the USL with a federal governance system that allowed the constituent colleges to operate independently (University of Sierra Leone Act 1967). A unitary governance structure replaced the federal system in 1972 (University of Sierra Leone Act, 1972). The USL was further restructured by the Universities Act, 2005 to produce two mutually exclusive universities:

1. Njala University, incorporating:
 - a. Njala University College
 - b. Bo Campus, consisting of Bo Teachers' College and School of Health Sciences, constituted from the School of Hygiene and Paramedical School
 - c. Bonthe Technical Institute as an affiliate institution.
2. USL, incorporating:
 - a. Fourah Bay College
 - b. College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (COMAS), incorporating the National School of Nursing and the Pharmacy Technicians School, and
 - c. The Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM).

The Universities Act, 2005 also made provision for the establishment of other universities (public and private) in the country, giving rise to a new private university - the University of Makeni – which was initially established in 2005 as The Fatima Institute and was granted university status in 2009. Further establishment of new universities was provided for by the Universities Amendment Act, 2014 which led to the emergence of another public university – the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST).

As noted elsewhere by Abugre (2018) and Etejere et al (2017) in the case of Ghana and Nigeria respectively, university governance and accountability processes in SL has been variously influenced by the State throughout its post-independence history. The extent of government influence ranges from the legal requirement for the serving president to act as Chancellor of all public universities, through to the appointment by government of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, as well as appointment of key members to university Court and Senate (see table two for a summary of the governance structure of public universities in SL). However, years of post-independence political instability, sustained corruption and mismanagement, which was further compounded by the decade long civil war have punctuated the quality of higher education in the country. Wang, et al., (2007: 15), for example, describe the effect of the civil war on the country's educational landscape in the following way:

It left a multitude of scars in the education sector: devastated school infrastructure, severe shortages of teaching materials, overcrowding in many classrooms in safer areas, displacement of teachers and delay in paying their salaries, frequent disruptions of schooling, disorientation and psychological trauma among children, poor learning outcomes, weakened institutional capacity to manage the system, and a serious lack of information and data to plan service provision.

SIERRA LEONE UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

As explained by interviewees, under the Universities Acts of 2005 and 2013, USL has its three affiliate institutions governed by a university secretariat responsible for managing the affairs of all three universities combined. These Acts specify the university governance structure, with the country's president holding the role of USL chancellor. The chancellor appoints the USL

Vice-chancellor who supervises three deputy vice-chancellors, one controlling each affiliated institution (campus). Each affiliated institutional deputy vice-chancellor supervises deans of schools who in turn, supervise their school's department heads. The UAL secretariat has a finance director who manages the finances of all three affiliated institutions which in turn each have a senior assistant finance officer who manages the finances of their own institution with reporting responsibility to the secretariat finance director. Each affiliated institution deposits a predetermined percentage of their revenues into a secretariat pool account managed by the finance director for addressing university level requirements. Hence, at first sight, the governance structure follows a conventional university hierarchy of authority and accountability.

Relationship Based Governance

Interviewees, however, point out that how governance and accountability processes occur in practice differs markedly from the formal structure projected by the university and its governing legislation.

“However, the part that is problematic, is how governance is implemented and how things get done across the university.....”

(Interviewee 1)

Interviewees report that at the highest level of governance, while the university senate is empowered to make crucial governance decisions, the effective power lies with the vice-chancellor who is indebted to the country's president for his appointment. Indeed, as with the vice-chancellor position, appointments to the senate are influenced by the country's president who is also the university's chancellor. Thus, decisions of the Senate are not made independently of the university's senior line management. With respect to the accountability and control exercised by university line managers below the USL vice-chancellor, it is repeatedly observed by interviewees that personal relationships with the vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellors are crucial determinants of any actions that deans and department heads wish to take. Interviewees report varying circumstances where no governance and accountability systems exist, or where such systems appear to formally exist but, in practice, are ignored or subverted. This they argue is the product of both a cultural inclination to preserve the *status quo*, and the dominance of personal relationships as the pathway to eliciting the attention and decisions of senior management.

Multiple interviewees report that while the governance structure lays down formal hierarchical channels and accountabilities within the university for decision-making, exercising control and delivering accountability, in reality, personal relationships (either present or historical) with and access to the vice-chancellor or deputy vice-chancellors are the media for securing effective action. This state of play, therefore, requires line managers to circumvent formal protocols and employ their personal reputation and relationship to secure direct access to the vice-chancellor or a deputy vice-chancellor to lobby for action on a specific issue. Such managers avoid working through the formal hierarchy of authority in the organisational structure, instead appealing directly to top management.

“You have to know people high up in the governance chain for you to be taken seriously. Those who have that connection are usually listened to.”

(Interviewee 4)

“...you have to have that personal rapport.....for somebody like me, absolutely yes, if I call, he'll answer my call, ask what's your problem, and discuss. But unfortunately, not everybody has that level of rapport or network with the powers that be.”

(Interviewee 1)

This is recognised as being a potentially transient strategy, however, since when the identity of the vice-chancellor (and possibly deputy vice-chancellors) changes, then some managers will lose their relationship and communication pathway to top management, while others may gain previously unavailable access through their personal connections to the new vice-chancellor. Personal relationships also even affect internal performance reviews and promotion at most levels of the hierarchy since the university follows civil service promotion tradition based on years of service provided, while supervisors are also reluctant to be seen to limit their subordinates' upward career progression.

Political Accountability

Government and political influence are therefore a key player in university governance, as interviewees attested at length. Decisions made publicly may be conceived and made behind closed doors with a view to complying with the government's agenda. Rationales behind some major decisions are not always readily explicable, and enquiries can elicit responses from senior university managers such as "it's not for me to decide", or "this is the godfather's agenda, my hands are tied". General university policy is governed by the vice-chancellor who is concerned to align those with the agenda of the university chancellor (who is the country's president) in pursuit of the government's policies. Indeed, interviewees spoke of meetings of senior management called by the chancellor to challenge them on how their strategies will fit with and divert financial resources to the government's 'New Direction programme'. As with senior appointments that may change as government changes, so interviewees observe that university strategies may be discarded or change direction in response to changes in government. Therefore, interviewees observe that in Sierra Leone as in other African countries, university strategies are driven by currently dominant political interests. The political influence on governance and strategy is therefore pre-eminent, with the dominant accountability being exercised being political. This governance structure is characterised by interviewees as inappropriate:

".....it does not enhance or even contribute to meeting the overall vision or mandate of the university as a whole. It does not provide the level of autonomy that....allows universities to make decisions.....that enable them to strive and do what they do really well." (Interviewee 3)

Senior appointments being politically influenced by the government in power have a cascading effect down through the university hierarchy. Positions may be advertised, and interviews conducted, but the outcomes may result from political influence. This is observed by interviewees to be the system common in the country's judicial system appointments as well: all ultimately influenced and approved by the president. The key prerequisite is senior university appointees' willingness to work in sympathy with the government's objectives. This is seen to directly affect all university academics and their work.

So it always has that dynamic whereby it has a direct impact on our role as university academics. It does affect us directly." (Interviewee 6)

Examples of political influence upon academic governance issues and activities provided by interviewees included influence exerted on managing staff refusing to be relocated, academic staff association consideration of strike action for a salaries increment being characterised as sabotaging the government, a supervisor finding they have formal organisational authority but not political authority to deal with subordinates, or a staff relocation decision made by the courts being revisited due to "political interference". Further examples of government policy influence penetrating right through university governance and strategizing included a curriculum re-

engineering process initiated by the government and required for immediate actioning without adequate time for evaluation, expert advisory services, and long-term planning. As one interviewee remarked:

“...those at the top of the governance chain basically dance to the tune of the government because they are somehow indebted to the president or some other minister.” (Interviewee 4)

Grass Roots Governance and Accountability

The effect on individual academics can be one of compliance with the informal accountability to the ruling government ethos, given that change is realistically exceedingly difficult to instigate. Once again, especially if they are junior academics or academics returning from overseas, they gradually realise that without personal political connections, influence and change is difficult to realise. This is accentuated by the poor and sometimes intermittently paid salaries they receive. In many cases, this requires them to generate additional sources of personal income outside the university to support their families. This, in itself, is seen as laying the foundations for potential corruption as academics may become financially susceptible to bribery. Indeed, a proportion of Sierra Leone academics returning to USL ultimately decide to return to university posts overseas because of these pressures.

“Remember the saying ‘the cow has no option but to feed around the tree to which it is tied?’. That’s the justification for corruption in many offices.” (Interviewee 4)

“I am acutely aware that a lot of the system is broken or in some cases no system at all.” (Interviewee 5)

In this politically driven environment then, governance and control is very much exercised from the top-down.

“I would say the governance system looks like a top-down system because whatever comes from the bottom is often ignored.”

(Interviewee 1)

Strategic priorities within the university depend heavily on the priorities and support from the top of the hierarchy. Interviewees explain that faculty and department heads may appear to have formal governance authority but, in fact, find their authority restricted to decisions on minor, mostly student related, issues. Any significant decision and any change initiative “has to come from those above you and those above you also take instructions from those above them and this could go up to the highest level of government.” (Interviewee 1). Indeed, one interviewee made allusion to the military background of their higher-level connection in the university and his predilection for taking action if he chooses.

Interviewees argue that this environment produces a culture within lower ranks of the university hierarchy of focussing on their own immediate local level responsibilities over which they have some jurisdiction, “...because then I get to do pretty much what I feel is good for me and my students...” (Interviewee 6) and “...my conviction is that I have to contribute meaningfully in my own little way to the system.” (Interviewee 5). So at the mid to lower levels of the organisational hierarchy, staff tend to “focus on what we’re contracted to do, because anything more is not worth the hassle, because there is no incentive.” (Interviewee 4). In addition, interviewees reported that their ability to manage subordinates could be constrained by the subordinates’ personal connections to higher level university management or government. The entire top-down governance culture therefore produces in senior management a self-governing

tendency to restrict their decisions based on their perceived accountability to government, while lower university levels focus on their local level scope of governance over which they are allowed some limited jurisdiction.

This top-down governance and restricted local level academic jurisdiction is argued by interviewees to have produced a reluctance to change the system and a breakdown in accountability.

“To be honest there is a high degree of lethargy of administrative staff simply because people are not generally held to account, and they are used to that over a long period of time.” (Interviewee 2)

Academic staff too, may feel threatened by any public discussion of assessment problems or other issues they feel may reflect on their own performance in this top-down governance and accountability culture. This can extend to staff resistance to any changes in teaching program content and delivery, or any introduction of workload models for organising and managing course delivery and staff contributions. The result can be that:

“...some people go to teach with nothing at all and no materials for students either. But they will go to class and say whatever they like until their period is over, but they haven't actually taught anything meaningful.” (Interviewee 1)

Unaccountable Resourcing

Interviewees report that USL students have rioted on campus at least three times in recent years, protesting a lack of facilities, teaching materials, and the lateness or complete lack of release of their examination grades. Hence, governance failure extends even to the classroom level without consequences for the academic staff involved. On the other hand, interviewees also report academic staff experiencing poor financial, equipment and teaching materials resourcing and, in some cases, resorting to using their own personal resources to assist their teaching. Faced with such constrained salary and materials resourcing, staff become susceptible to the risk of succumbing to malpractices including bribery and corruption. These are alleged by interviewees as becoming entrenched under this system, reflecting a culture even extending to various examining bodies across the country.

As already indicated, USL is comprised of three institutional campuses that in part retain their own revenues and contribute part of their revenues to the central university secretariat for the overall running of the university. This however creates financial disagreements where campuses feel they contribute more than their equitable share to the central university (especially if they are earning a higher total revenue stream than their companion institutional campuses).

“...respective heads of campuses have concerns that the proportion they remit to the university account is not fair.” (Interviewee 3)

Indeed, this can trigger a campus to develop alternative income streams (such as short courses) to retain the revenues outside the central funding system and pursue its own campus infrastructure development. It also creates tensions where staff on different campuses perceive different salary levels being paid across campuses, and staff object to what they see as differential benefits being accorded by the university across campuses.

These stress points are aggravated by government grants to USL and its constituent campuses being paid late or never being paid at all (sometimes not for several years). This can produce situations where USL may receive as little as half the student scholarship fees it has generated, since those are technically to be paid by the government. The unpredictability of government financial contributions cascades right down to the academic staff level where payment of monthly

salaries is unpredictable and can even involve non-payment periods as long as three months. Thus, the overall USL three campus internal and government financing system is seen by interviewees to be highly complex, contentious, inefficient and difficult to manage. This general financial resourcing failure compounds the problem of holding even individual academics accountable for their work and performance. As one interviewee explained:

“But governance generally also depends on funds.you are not going to ask a head of department to do ABCD if they don’t have the requisite materials such as computers and good internet.....so governance is about how do we manage, how do we control, how do we hold people to account. But these things are also intricately related to resources.....so sometimes somebody cannot be accountable simply because they don’t have the requisite resources to make them accountable.”
(Interviewee 2)

REFLECTING ON CORE ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIPS

This case study yields several fundamental observations about the nature of university governance and accountability in an African developing country context such as Sierra Leone. Governance is primarily implemented through personal relationships that thereby leave significant gaps in overall organisational governance effectiveness. Accountability emerges as being primarily defined and exercised in terms of political and personal accountability with top-down control triggered from the level of government that ultimately limits the governance mandate of middle management and lower down the university hierarchy. Overall, however, any prospect of effective governance and accountability is undermined by significant and periodic under-resourcing of institutional campuses, staff and classrooms.

The findings in this Sierra Leone case support some of the observations made in prior research on the African continent. Top-down control by means of national government intervention and influence on university policies and strategies has been observed in prior literature already cited in this chapter. The indigenous government can constitute the new ruling class to which university leadership at both board and executive levels owe their positions and hence loyalty and compliance. In the case presented here, we see more specific accounts of how this takes place and its impacts on governance and accountability within the university. This has been referred to in more general terms by the prior literature as universities being subject to local contexts and influences and needing to integrate governance and management control systems with a country’s national culture.

This case study, however, points to the challenges involved in such approaches when university management concern to comply with government expectations raises questions concerning the appropriateness and effectiveness of governance and accountability processes and outcomes within the university. This includes the problem of academics’ and students’ inadequate participation in, and influence upon, internal governance. That challenge is compounded by the lack of resources referred to in the prior literature and clearly pointed to by interviewees in this case study. The impacts referred to in the literature and identified in this case are clearly evidenced in the oftentimes inadequate salaries and teaching resourcing for academics, the variable quality of teaching in the classroom, and the (in)adequacy of physical infrastructure to support university functioning.

Governance within this case study university could be typified as governance by relationship, whereby access to, and influence over, university leaders by management and academic subordinates is exercised through personal relationships, as historically developed between

individuals either outside or within the university. It reflects the phrase “It’s not what you know, but who you know”, that was coined in *The Electrical Worker* in May 1914, and in the *New York Tribune* in September 1918. Such personal relationships appear to allow individuals to wield direct influence on university leaders regardless of an individual’s position or rank in the university while conveniently bypassing formal corporate governance systems and accountability hierarchies and processes. This decoupling of actual governance lobbying and decision-making from the formally specified and declared governance and accountability structures leaves the latter as largely ceremonial in function. Instead, informal relationships manipulate, avoid and ultimately undermine the formal governance system and accountability structure. In so doing, the related parties manage their own informal governance process, protecting their own autonomy from the formal governance system and avoiding other parties’ intervention and public scrutiny (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Oliver, 1991; Scott, 2003; Tucker and Parker, 2015; Narayan et al, 2017; Masum and Parker, 2020).

Sinclair (1995) identified 5 forms of accountability: political, public, managerial, professional and personal. Two of these appear to dominate accountability exercised within the case study university, namely political and personal accountability. However, in this developing country context, they have particular meanings. Under political accountability, the public servant exercises authority on behalf of elected representatives. In this case, university management operates under the expectation that they will directly execute the will of government. Thus, given the dominance of political accountability, the publicly funded university retains little if any independence from government with respect to governance, strategy or accountability.

The notion of personal accountability emerging in this case, diverges somewhat from Sinclair’s (1995) notion, in that rather than representing managers’ fidelity to their internalised moral values, it has transmogrified into an accountability to superiors with whom an individual has longstanding personal relationships and to whom they owe loyalty (Parker and Gould, 1999). Arguably then, the relationship-based accountability exercised within this university setting, both by senior managers and by individuals with personal links to university leadership, is internally and self-focussed rather than reflecting an accountability oriented towards the community and the common good. It instead is focussed on the government as ‘owner’ (Shearer, 2002; Shenkin and Coulson, 2007; Messner, 2009; Parker, 2014).

For all levels of academic staff, be they in managerial or teaching roles, including those without personal relationships to senior leadership and government, there is an observed compliance with the government of the day’s agenda. Either by means of formal government announcements or instructions, formal or informal senior management communications, past experience and related learnings of rejected or unanswered proposals, or unspoken understandings of what cannot be resourced, staff develop an appreciation of the bounds of their discretion. This produces what some interviewees observed as an individual focus limited to one’s immediate workplace environment and what is feasible given available resources.

From a governmentality perspective, therefore, government’s governance and control within the university reaches right down to the lowest levels of the university hierarchy: to each individual academic. Yet it is largely invisible. The political rationalities of the day are understood by university staff who exercise self-governance in compliance with what they perceive to be the policy and strategy agendas of government and therefore of university leadership. Compliance and immediate responses to shifts in government agendas becomes normalised and absorbed into the routines of academic activity (Miller, 1990; Rose and Miller, 1992; Miller & O’Leary, 1994; Jeacle and Parker, 2013).

WHITHER UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY?

While internationally based authors can be tempted to envisage a forward trajectory on such matters as public university governance and accountability based on developed country literature and experience, caution is a wise reaction. It can be a hasty rush to judgement if researchers and policymakers assume that developed country approaches are inevitably a basis for international benchmarking. Indeed, it can be argued that the institutional, social, cultural and political characteristics of developing countries can yield unique insights into governance and accountability issues that are sometimes more visible than similar, but more concealed, phenomena in developed countries to which inadequate attention has hitherto been paid. Such may be the situation with respect to this study of university governance and accountability in Sierra Leone. Both direct and indirect government intervention in university governance, and the strategic and processual compliance of university management and staff has been in clear view in this case study. Relevant literature suggests that such a phenomenon can be found across several countries on the African continent. However, evidence of similar tendencies in developed countries' public universities has been identified in the accounting research literature.

In many western democracies, researchers have identified evidence of governments treating public universities as export revenue earning businesses, also required by government to produce employment ready graduates for the national workforce, thereby becoming major contributors to national economic development. Research too has come under government scrutiny, with national grant systems often tailored to the current priority economic objectives set by government. In fact, instead of funding supporting research as a desirable objective, research itself has been transmogrified into a fund seeking/generating activity. Governments have effectively commodified research as a marketable private interest commodity, diverting it from its earlier orientation towards being as a public good for societal benefit. So public universities increasingly serve the highly instrumental policy agendas of government. Financial resources are also invariably in short supply.

Research reveals national developed country governments committing less and less budgets in real terms to higher education and forcing public universities to seek their own funds from international student revenues and industry partnerships. In countries such as Australia, for example, student/staff ratios have been deteriorating over many years, with staff teaching workloads commensurately increasing. Mass education with low-cost delivery has increasingly become the order of the day. Public university vice-chancellors operate as corporate CEOs running their organisations as businesses responding always to latest government policies and initiatives. Their governing councils are arguably passive observers and compliant with CEO agendas (Parker, 2012, 2013; Guthrie and Parker, 2014; Du and Lapsley, 2019; Martin-Sardesai et al, 2021).

So public university governance and accountability trends do exhibit some degrees of parallelism between developed and developing countries. Both groups exist in a global higher education marketplace but have national government agendas, resource constraints and conditioning national contexts and cultures. While international guidelines and standards may be promulgated for use globally, as Masum and Parker's (2020) study of attempts to implant international accounting standards in a developing country such as Bangladesh found, local developing country institutional and cultural contexts and traditions can significantly undermine such attempts despite an overt appearance of compliance.

Universities globally are increasingly subject to government audits of teaching quality, graduate satisfaction, research quality, and societal engagement and impact. These tend to focus on and induce a proliferation of control systems and documentation, and accountability reports. Yet even in developed economies, apparently compliant performance against such control metrics can

conceal significant decoupling between reported statistics and the situation as observable on the ground. In developing country contexts then, the way forward may require small initial steps that, in the first instance, focus on accountability through action: accountability executed and transmitted through publicly observable action (Parker, 2014). In this sense, accountability is not simply claimed and audited through documentary reports, but through staff, student, management, and the general public's observation of actions and outcomes produced by government and university. It is accountability for good governance determined *through* key stakeholders' observable actions. In Goffman's (1959) impression management language of front stage and backstage performances, it is an accountability based on the public audience's witnessing the actual frontstage performance and delivery of university work and services: by developing country government, university leadership and staff.

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Table 1: Relevant legislation and key issues covered.

Relevant Legislation Acts	Key Issues Covered
The Fourah Bay College Ordinance, 1950	Dissolved and reconstituted the FBC and renamed it FBC-UCSL, the aim being to expand provision for higher education in SL.
Njala University Act 1964	Established the NUC in a bid to expand higher education provision to the provinces of the country.
The University of Sierra Leone Act, 1967	Amended the NUC Act 1964. Provided for the merger of NUC and FBC-UCSL to establish the University of Sierra Leone (USL) with a federal governance structure, allowing for both constituent institutions to continue to operate exclusively in accordance with the FBC Ordinance 1950 and NUC Act, 1964 respectively.

The University of Sierra Leone Act, 1972	Repealed the FBC-USL Ordinance 1950, consolidated and amended the NUC Act, 1964 and the USL Act 1967. Replaced the federal governance system with a unitary governance structure, where both institutions were governed by and answerable to one Vice Chancellor, court and senate.
Tertiary Education Commission Act 2001	Established the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) for the development of tertiary education. Functions include advising the government on tertiary education; fund-raising for tertiary education; vetting the budgets of tertiary institutions; ensuring relevance of offerings; ensuring equity in admissions, conditions of service, and staff promotions.
The Universities Act 2005	Repeals the NUC Act, 1964 and the University of Sierra Leone Act, 1972. Reconstitutes the constituent colleges of USL (FBC and NUC) to establish two new universities: Njala University and the University of Sierra Leone. Allows for university autonomy in matters of administration and academics. Provides for the establishment of other public as well as private universities.
The Universities (Amendment) Act 2014	Amends the Universities Act, 2005 to provide for the establishment of the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST).

Table 2: Public universities' governance structure.

Chancellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of Sierra Leone • Head of all public universities • Power to confer academic awards; visit/probe as necessary. • Chairman of the university on all ceremonial occasions
Pro Chancellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed by the Chancellor, on the advice of the Minister. • Chairman of the university Court. • Additional responsibilities as determined by the Court. • Performs Chancellor's duties where necessary.
Vice-Chancellor and Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed by the Chancellor on the advice of the Minister. • Based on the recommendation of the Court • Chief academic and administrative officer • Responsible to the Court and Senate • University vote controller • Co-signatory with the Finance Director to University bank accounts

Pro Vice-Chancellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed by the Court from among the Deputy Vice-Chancellors • Performs the duty of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal (V-CP) where position is vacant or where the V-CP is unable to perform <i>his</i> duties. • Holds office for two years, eligible for re-appointment for a further two-year term only.
Deputy Vice-Chancellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed in accordance with the Statutes. • Persons who are not below the rank of associate professor • Oversees a designated campus. • Chief academic, administrative and accounting officer of <i>his</i> Campus • Supervises teaching, research and community activities of Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments within his Campus, under the direction of the V-CP.
University Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest authority on all administrative matters • Chaired by the Pro Chancellor. • Authority to exercise all administrative powers.
University senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest authority on all academic matters • Chaired by the V-CP