

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF MOI UNIVERSITY IN KENYA

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<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJSSMR.2026.9520>

ABSTRACT

Corporate governance plays a significant role in the performance of public universities and Moi University is still experiencing a challenge of governance that has affected its performance. Stakeholder theory was used to guide this study in examining the relationship between stakeholder engagement and Moi University in Kenya. The descriptive research design was used with a census of 79 administrative staff from the senior and middle level. The collection of primary data was conducted by means of structured questionnaires and analysed using SPSS version 28 and descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation) as well as inferential statistics (correlation, regression, R , R^2 , adjusted R , t and p values and beta coefficients). Results showed that stakeholder engagement was positively related to university performance and this relationship was statistically significant ($r = .759$, $p < .05$; $B = .652$, $\beta = .597$, $p = .000$). The study finds and suggests that a participatory governance structure with the incorporation of different stakeholder representation in major committees should be embraced by Moi University as a means of driving its institutional performance.

Keywords: Stakeholder Engagement, University Performance, Board Committees, Corporate Governance, Public Universities.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, corporate governance has become one of the most important aspects that affect the performance and sustainability of organisations around the world, including those of a higher education institution (Naciti, Cesaroni, & Pulejo, 2022). According to Zhou, Li and Chen 2021, corporate governance is the mechanism of balancing the interest of the different stakeholders in the company, which includes shareholders, top management executives, consumer, suppliers, financiers, government and the community. For public universities, indicators considered to be a success in corporate governance include the frequency of board meetings, the presence of outside members on the board, financial reporting and maintaining

relationships with stakeholders, and several other indicators (Kariuki, Ombaka, & Mburu, 2021). Good governance is key to building institutional trust, confidence in institutions and good performance. Governance in higher education institutions is a roadmap to achieve mission and goals (Zhu & Sharp, 2022).

Luo, Junfeng, Abbasi and Li (2024) examined the relationship between governance capability and institutional performance of public universities in China. The results indicated that the tenure of board members affects the effectiveness of the governance and thus the university performance; and that good governance systems promote governance capability which in turn helps in the university performance. Abdeldayem and Aldulaimi (2018) conducted a comparative study in the United Kingdom to investigate the relationship between corporate governance practices and leadership in the HEIs in the United Kingdom and Bahrain and the impact on HEIs effectiveness in the United Kingdom; their results indicated that the relationship between the corporate governance practices and leadership in HEIs in the United Kingdom was found to influence the overall effectiveness of higher education institutions through transparency, accountability and stakeholder involvement.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Boyndombe Zinga (2025) discovered that governance internal practices strongly influence institutional performance including academic results and administrative performance, while external governance that is strict or intrusive limits the institutional autonomy and hinders performance gains. In Ghana, Boateng, Chilala, and Arthur (2025) discovered that transparency and participation had significant positive effects on employee engagement, and accountability had a positive yet non-significant relationship. Three governance models (entrepreneurial governance, stakeholder governance, hybrid governance) were investigated in Côte d'Ivoire by Kone and Hien (2024) and they revealed that entrepreneurial and hybrid governance had positive significant effect on institutional performance whereas stakeholder governance had no effect on institutional performance. Robust board structures and board transparency in Kenya were significantly correlated with improved management effectiveness at the University of Nairobi, whereas management accountability and director independence were comparatively less correlated.

In Kenya, Muga (2024) discovered that robust board structures and transparency were significantly correlated with improved management effectiveness at the University of Nairobi, whereas management accountability and director independence were comparatively less correlated. At the United States International University – Africa, Mberabahizi (2021) reported a positive relationship with high performing board committees and loyalty to governance codes, and well-defined organizational structures, indicating that governance arrangements are critical for private universities financial sustainability in Kenya.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the context of public universities, the quality of corporate governance is reflected in the practices adopted by board members, including how often they meet, their outside membership, financial reporting, stakeholder engagement, ethical practices and transparency, which have a bearing on the efficiency of the operations, academic performance and public trust in public universities (Ingosi, Odero, & Ali, 2024). Moi University, however, suffers performance challenges in spite of the corporate governance practices. The board's inability to resolve the

University's financial problems and internal leadership disputes led the Public Investments Committee on Education (PIC) in the National Assembly to want to abolish the board in November 2024 (Ngetich, 2024). There are some areas of financial reporting that are weak in the University as expenses are not validated and there is a lack of good procurement practice coupled with a delay in infrastructural projects.

The Auditor General report of 2024 revealed that the university had spent Ksh 1.6 billion on unsupported expenses, overpayments, discrepancy in payroll, suppliers' invoices, unremitted pensions, statutory deductions and union dues. The university also did not perform well with student enrollment of 6,771 in 2024 compared to the capacity of 14,000 students (KUCCPS, 2024). Financial issues have also caused some industrial unrest in the university, with Ksh 53 ½ Million case being brought by KMPDU against the university (KMPDU, 2024). Although there has been a lot of literature on the relationship between the performance of institutions and corporate governance (Chokaa, Baimwera, Mugambi, & Senaji, 2023; Muga, 2024; Otolo, Muathe, & Kimencu, 2024), there is a contextual, geographical and empirical gap in public universities in Kenya regarding the effect of the frequency of board meetings, external members of the board, financial reporting and stakeholder engagement on the performance of Moi University. This study is aimed at filling this gap as it seeks to investigate the relationship between stakeholder engagement and Moi University performance.

1.3 Objective of the Study

To explore the relationship between stakeholder engagement and performance of Moi University in Kenya.

1.4 Hypothesis

H01: There exists no statistically significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and performance of Moi University in Kenya.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes that institutions cannot outperform in the long run unless they balance and consider the interests of all legitimate stakeholder groups (students, faculty, regulators, communities, donors and government bodies), is the foundation of the study. The theory is that governance practices that include more board meetings, have more outside board members, provide more financial reporting and engage more stakeholders lead to improved performance because they make the decision-making process more inclusive, transparent and responsive, and have been incorporated into corporate governance codes and ESG frameworks (Parmar, Harrison, Purnell, & de Colle, 2010; Choi & Wang, 2009; Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003). Post, Preston and Sachs (2002) state that thinking about the interests of all the stakeholders will promote responsible action, help to minimise negative externalities, ensure long term survival of the organisation and ensure welfare of the society, and Phillips (2003) mentions that it can be applied to the risk-management studies. Mansor and Che-Ahmad (2021) reported that the timely financial disclosure improved stakeholders' perception of transparency, consequently reducing the level of scepticism, improving reputation and strengthening the relationship with stakeholders, thus improving performance.

Stakeholder theory also suggests that a multi-stakeholder approach in governance results in better-informed and balanced decision-making, increased informativeness of the governance process, more innovative solutions and less groupthink, as well as less conflict due to the proactive handling of stakeholder concerns in formal governance processes (Kraus et al., 2022). This inclusiveness is natured by transparent governance which fosters trust and institutional legitimacy (Lim, 2022). There has, however, been some criticism of the theory, such as Sundaram and Inkpen (2004) who suggest that a broader accountability means increased complexity for firms and the need for compromises to be made, often involving negotiations based on conflicting interests, and Mansell (2013), who suggests that Freeman's proposal poses a threat to the principles of a market economy. Notwithstanding these critiques, the theory is relevant to the current study as it emphasizes that legitimacy and broader stakeholder involvement is important and adds an element of objectivity and multiple points of view to an institution, thereby raising its stakeholder importance and thus moving away from institutional biases; that frequent board meetings increases stakeholder engagement by providing a forum for different points of view to be included in the decision-making process.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

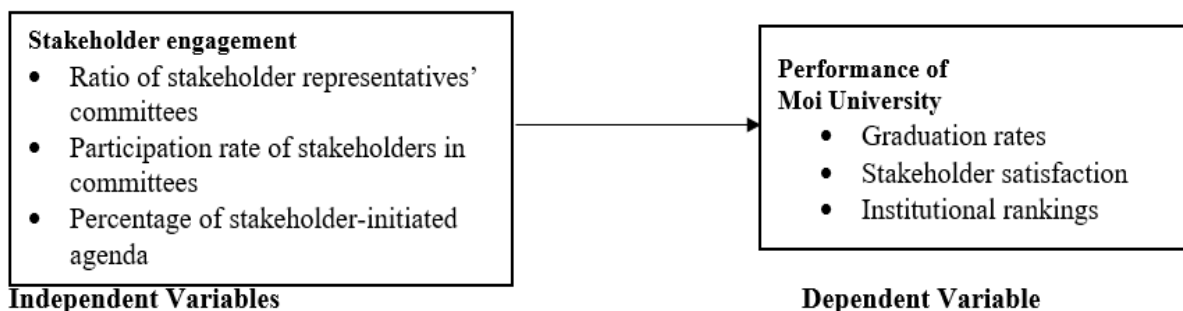


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The study assumes that stakeholder engagement is the independent variable and the university performance is the dependent variable. Stakeholder engagement understands that the commitment of universities is a complex matrix of internal and external stakeholders and is measured by the proportion of stakeholders in committees, the participation rate of stakeholders in committees and percentage of agenda items initiated by stakeholders. These metrics reflect the depth and quality of involvement of stakeholders in university governance. Effective stakeholder engagement involves bringing a range of key stakeholders students, faculty and external partners into the decision-making process, resulting in policies that are more relevant, equitable and effective; enhances trust, transparency and institutional legitimacy; promotes a culture of collaboration that encourages innovation; and helps align strategies with community and academic needs. Engaging with stakeholders also helps to implement practical measures like sustainability and performance improvement, as it fosters widespread participation and joint accountability for achieving results (Serrano-Bedia, Boaventura, & Freeman, 2025).

1.7 Empirical Literature Review

In the Australian context of higher education, Attree and Bamforth (2024) explored the value added role of stakeholders in higher education, in this case through the course advisory

committee. Findings showed that internal stakeholders were motivated to join governance committees to contribute back to their profession, viewing their participation as a value addition to the university, their profession and society. In Ogunode, Ayoko, and Orifaf (2023) systematic literature review on stakeholder involvement in university administration in Nigeria, it was revealed that there are weak university leadership, low level of stakeholder involvement, inadequate capacity development, inadequate application of stakeholder-engagement policy, weak advocacy by stakeholders and stakeholder opposition.

In a systematic literature review, Nakiyaga, Serem and Ssentamu (2021) discovered that stakeholder participation in planning school improvement in selected secondary schools in Kampala, Uganda, had a positive impact on improving the academic outcome of these schools and their management practices by fostering inclusive school-improvement planning decisions. Mwikali (2023) in a descriptive design study with 146 stakeholders at the University of Nairobi determined that stakeholders' involvement influenced the effectiveness of the University in enhancing students' skills and concluded that stakeholders' engagement is a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness of the University. Ikiugu (2021) used descriptive survey of 36 deputy principals, 36 heads of guidance and counselling and 36 student council presidents in Meru County, Kenya and noted that student discipline in Meru was 60% with some indiscipline experienced (30%) of students and that the more the student council was involved in governance, the fewer the incidents of indiscipline, while the less, the more indiscipline was experienced, but that the student council existed in every school.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study used descriptive research design suitable for describing the variables characteristics and the relationship between stakeholder engagement and university performance in their natural state without their manipulation.

2.2 Study Population and Sampling

Moi University constituted the unit of analysis with 79 senior and middle level administrative staffs constituting the unit of observation. The relatively small size of the population, and the ease of access, meant that the study was a census (all 79 members of the population were selected, not a sample).

2.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data from the senior as well as middle level administrative staff. A total of 79 questionnaires were given and a response base (N = 62) was used in the analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28 was used for analysis of the data. Descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were generated to summarize the data. Pearson correlation, simple linear regression (R, R², adjusted R, t and p

values, and beta coefficients) were used in inferential statistics to test the relationship between stakeholder engagement and university performance and to test the study hypothesis. Data was analysed and presented in tabular form.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Stakeholder Engagement

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
A higher ratio of stakeholder representatives in committees enhances governance quality and improves Moi University's performance	62	4.24	1.00
Stakeholder representation in committees ensures balanced decision-making that positively impacts institutional performance	62	4.35	1.17
Active participation of stakeholders in committees contributes to better oversight and improved performance of Moi University	62	4.11	0.99
Low participation of stakeholders in committees reduces accountability and negatively affects the university's performance	62	4.31	1.20
Stakeholder-initiated agenda items influence strategic decisions that enhance the performance of Moi University	62	4.26	1.02
A higher percentage of stakeholder-driven agenda items improves responsiveness to institutional challenges and boosts performance	62	4.13	1.05
Composite Mean Score	62	4.23	1.07

Table 1: Stakeholder Engagement (N = Number of respondents; Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation. Source: Primary Data, 2026)

Results indicate that there is an agreement between respondents that stakeholder representation in committees leads to balanced decision making that has positive impact on institutional performance ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.17$), low stakeholder participation in committees reduces accountability and negatively impacts on the performance ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.20$), the agenda items that are initiated by the stakeholders influence the strategic decisions ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.02$), and an increase in stakeholder participation in committees increases the quality of governance ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.00$). There was also agreement that more stakeholder-driven agenda items leads to increased responsiveness to institutional challenges ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.05$) and that greater active stakeholder participation increases oversight ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.99$). The composite measure for stakeholder engagement had a mean score of 4.23 ($SD = 1.07$), which suggested that overall stakeholder engagement is present and valued.

3.2 Performance of Moi University

Statements in the Questionnaire	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Students graduate within the expected timeframe	62	2.23	1.03
Governance practices effectively support timely student graduations.	62	2.11	1.04
The academic processes ensure constant graduation rates.	62	2.18	1.17
Stakeholders show satisfaction with the university academic and operational services.	62	2.23	1.22
Governance practices ensure stakeholder trust and satisfaction.	62	3.85	1.08
The University regularly collects and addresses stakeholder feedback.	62	2.10	1.05
The University has retained a strong position in national and international rankings	62	2.24	1.30
Governance practices contribute to improved institutional rankings.	62	4.10	1.03
The ranking reflects its academic and research excellence	62	4.42	1.08
Means Score	62	2.83	1.11

Table 2: Performance of Moi University (N = Number of respondents; Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation. Source: Primary Data, 2026)

The results indicate high consensus about the ranking's validity in terms of the university's academic and research excellence ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.08$) and that governance practices help improve university rankings ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.03$) and ensure the trust and satisfaction of the stakeholders ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.08$). The opposite was true, however, in the cases of the University maintaining a strong position in national and international rankings ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.30$), stakeholders being satisfied with academic and operational services ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.22$), students graduating in a reasonable time ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.17$), academic processes ensuring a steady graduation rate ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.04$) and the University regularly collecting and acting on stakeholder feedback ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.05$). Respondents generally were mixed in their responses on the performance of the university, with governance practices perceived as good for the building up of its reputation and trustworthiness among stakeholders, but despite this, there was widespread complaints of dissatisfaction with rankings, graduation rates and feedback mechanisms. The overall mean performance of 2.83 ($SD = 1.11$) depicts moderate performance at Moi University.

3.3 Coefficient of Correlation

Variables	University Performance	Stakeholder engagement
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University Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	62	
Stakeholder engagement	Pearson Correlation	.759**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	62	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Coefficient of Correlation (Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed)**

The relationship between stakeholder engagement and university performance was highly positive and statistically significant ($r = .759$, $p < .05$), meaning that a higher stakeholder engagement is positively related to higher performance of the university.

3.4 Regression Analysis

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant / Y-Intercept	4.602	.548	—	8.403	.000
Stakeholder Engagement	.652	.084	.597	7.759	.020

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Stakeholder engagement had a positive and statistically significant relationship with university performance ($B = 0.652$, $\beta = 0.597$, $t = 7.759$, $p = .020$). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.652$) indicates that, holding the other predictors constant, a one-unit increase in stakeholder engagement is associated with an estimated 0.652-unit increase in university performance.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The results show that stakeholder engagement has a strong, positive and statistically significant relation to university performance ($r = .759$, $p < .05$; $B = .652$, $\beta = .597$, $p = .000$) which corresponds with the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) that sustainable university performance depends on the identification and balancing of the interests of legitimate stakeholder groups. This is in line with Mwikali (2023) who found that stakeholders' participation was a factor that promoted the effectiveness of the University of Nairobi and Nakiyaga, Serem and Ssentamu (2021) who found that involving stakeholders in school planning significantly improved academic performance in secondary schools in Uganda. It is also consistent with the findings of Abdeldayem and Aldulaimi (2018) who reported that stakeholder participation improved institutional effectiveness in the UK and Bahrain, and Boateng, Chilala, and Arthur (2025) who reported that participation mechanisms were found to have positive impacts on employee engagement in public universities in Ghana.

The finding also corroborates with that of Boyndombe Zinga (2025) who established that internal governance practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have a significant

impact on the performance of the institution, including the engagement of stakeholders, and that of Muga (2024) who asserted that governance elements are strongly correlated with management effectiveness at the University of Nairobi, where stakeholder engagement is one of the elements. The finding is at odds with Kone and Hien (2024), which found that the stakeholder governance model did not directly significantly affect institutional performance in Côte d'Ivoire, however, the extent of the stakeholder–performance link may vary depending on institutional and national context, or on the form of “stakeholder engagement” (formal representation versus active, agenda-setting participation).

In Moi University specifically, the level of agreement with the value of stakeholder engagement (composite mean = 4.23) is in the moderate range and is alongside only moderately reported performance (composite mean = 2.83), while rankings and timeliness of graduation showed marked dissatisfaction. In Moi University specifically, the level of agreement with the value of stakeholder engagement (composite mean = 4.23) is in the moderate range and is alongside only moderately reported performance (composite mean = 2.83), while rankings and timeliness of graduation showed marked dissatisfaction. The gap indicates that although stakeholder engagement mechanisms may be there in paper, implementation of the mechanisms in enhancing the operational outcome is not happening as expected, consistent with Ogunode, Ayoko and Orifah (2023) which revealed that stakeholder involvement and the failure to implement the policies well hinders the operational outcome of stakeholder involvement in the university administration. Overall, the findings indicate that the presence of formal stakeholder representation on committees is important but not enough the key element is real, continuous participation from stakeholders, as well as incorporating their perspectives into the decision-making process, as suggested by Attree and Bamforth (2024).

4.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that in the effective governance of the university and the performance of the institution, there is an imperative need to engage stakeholders. Having students, staff, alumni, government agencies and industry partners, among other key stakeholders, actively engaged in decision making increases accountability, transparency and institutional legitimacy. Stakeholder engagement is more than just formal representation it is a process of participation, of ongoing dialogue and of integrating stakeholder input into governance processes. The study shows that stakeholder engagement has a positive effect on the performance of universities as stakeholder participation contributes valuable perspectives and information to the decision-making process within the university, fosters collaboration and helps the university meet the needs of its stakeholders.

4.3 Recommendations

The findings of the study indicate that stakeholder participation in the composition of key committees in Moi University's management structure should be based on a participatory governance framework, with multiple key stakeholders representing different interests involved in the decision-making process, to reinforce the importance of stakeholder participation in institutional performance. The university must change the rules governing the membership of committees to allow major stakeholders to voice their concerns and preferences about the university and set clear rules on how stakeholders can formally raise issues for

discussion. Lastly, the university ought to put measures in place to ensure stakeholders participation, which otherwise compromises accountability.

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