



Original Research Article

Degrees of Autonomy: A comparative analysis of governance autonomy for private, faith-based and public universities in Malawi

Received 12 December, 2022

Revised 15 January, 2023

Accepted 19 January, 2023

Published 2 February, 2023

Dennis J R Matekenya, PhD

Country Director: Adventist
Development and Relief Agency –
Malawi.

Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8933-1823>

Author's Email:
dennis.matekenya@adra.org.mw

Governance autonomy of university councils depicts the ability for self-regulation, self-determination, and self-directing. This study was about establishing the perceptions of the degrees of autonomy private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi. The ability of the universities to be able to attract resources, research grants, high calibre faculty and administrators has much to do with the perceptions of their autonomy from interference of shareholders and special interest groups. This research collected data from 130 academicians and higher education administrators to assess the perceptions about autonomy and how they compare between the three categories of universities. Through non-probability research design, employing purposive sampling techniques, data collection through Survey Monkey© and Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) using SPSS©, the research demonstrated that the mean score for autonomy of these three kinds of universities is not significantly different. The study also demonstrated that administrative, academic, and financial autonomy of private, faith-based, and public universities is not significantly different. This means that the perceptions of governance autonomy for these categories of universities are statistically similar. This also means that regulators and operators of institutions of higher education must use similar governance framework and follow the same governance principles although the universities are different in terms of structure and proprietorship.

Keywords: Governance Autonomy, administrative autonomy, academic autonomy, financial autonomy, degrees of autonomy, higher education governance.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of autonomy covers various kinds of phenomena. An understanding of university autonomy and its diverse types are enhanced if some distinctions covering the different specific degrees of autonomy. According to Sarpong (2021), autonomy is an important concept for the analysis of relationships between the university and its

environment. To speak of autonomy in relation to an organisation is to say something about the decisions which govern the actions of the organisation. An organisation is autonomous when it decides itself what to do. Bhambra (2018) says that effective universities must be decolonized by according the appropriate degrees of autonomy for self-

governing and determination. University autonomy emanates from the mandate of the university council or college board.

Roberts et al. (2023) say that university autonomy is the state of self-regulation or the right of self-government; self-determination; autonomy with respect to local or internal matters. An autonomous institution is one able to act according to own discretion, able to regulate its own affairs. Ideals about institutional autonomy are intricately linked to conceptions of academic freedom. Institutional autonomy is the freedom to decide academic issues like curriculum, instructional material, pedagogy, techniques of students' evaluation. Bergan et al. (2020) argue that the freedom of any institution of higher education in Africa appears to be suffering from various impediments including political influence and capture by special interest groups.

Roberts et al. (2023) suggest that institutional autonomy should be understood in the context of limited self-governance: Autonomy as that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision-making by institutions of higher education in relation to their academic work, standards, management, and related activities. To develop the quality of university management as well as educational service quality universities need real university autonomy, which should be strong enough to prevent mistakes and shortcomings (Zelenska et al., 2021).

While literature on university autonomy is available, there appears to be no studies done that provide a comparative analysis of the perceptions about degrees of autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi. There remains a gap to be filled in understanding the variances in perception about degrees of autonomy.

Governance Autonomy

According to Bergan et al. (2020) autonomy means the freedom and the mandate of an institution to act by its own will in pursuit of its mission and goals. The degree of autonomy depends on the extent an institution can decide its actions, follow decisions and actions. Universities are supposed to act as social entities that possess a certain degree of autonomy and sovereignty, with self-interested goals as well as with rational means, commanding independent resources and visible boundaries (Anderson, 2022). Universities are expected to have autonomy consistent with higher education demands. Basheer et al. (2019) however, contend that reforms in university governance should not be fundamentally different from political and administrative governance.

The autonomy of higher education institutions is essential to establish World-Class Universities, overcome the current challenges, and remain nationally competitive, (Chankseliani et al. (2021). Institutional autonomy is key to enabling universities to respond to these governance demands. The European University Association (2021) agrees that increasing the autonomy of more strongly governed universities has repeatedly been affirmed as the best option to achieve institutional success as it refers to both the actor's

self and the actor's relationship to its environment.

Rónay and Niemczyk (2022) also say that institutional autonomy refers to the constantly changing relations between the state and higher education institutions and the degree of control exerted by the state, depending on the national context and circumstances, and can be measured by assessing the institution's ability to make decisions in various areas. Autonomy is contextually and politically defined according to contextual and political realities which inform the reformulation of university autonomy (Anderson, 2022). They argue that a distinctive higher education institution deserves special status in terms of autonomy based on a social compact that evolves between higher education, the shareholders, and industry.

Roberts et al. (2023) defines the principle of university autonomy as the required level of freedom from external interference that the university requires in respect of its internal organization and governance, the internal distribution of financial resources, the recruitment of its staff, the setting of the condition of study and finally the freedom to conduct teaching and research. Olorunsola (2018) says that university autonomy stands as the cardinal principle that anchors the university system and stabilizes the strategy towards goals and aspirations of the institution.

Importance of Governance Autonomy

Mitchell and King (2018) assert that good academic governance presumes a commitment to know more about what you do not know even when you do not know that you do not know it. Shared governance is not only a functioning reality but also how higher education institutions develop their policies and implement policy decisions within the universities. Schalin (2020) agrees that shared governance is responsible applying the term "governance" to higher education when apportioning mandate for making decisions between academic departments. Administration, which had the authority to manage institutional operations such as financial administration, student services, physical properties, and public relations.

Institutions of higher education need to have autonomous governance structures that prevent interference and overreach of unwanted or biased influences. Governance autonomy increases the efficiency of the organization. Krause and Van Thiel (2019) argue for the importance of autonomy in the effective management of organizations. As such, autonomy is considered a key predictor of quality performance for colleges and universities, according to Voorn et al. (2017).

Governance autonomy keeps politicians in check from meddling in service delivery, and since politicians may have inclination to sacrifice efficiency for the sake of elected positions (Carvalho and Diogo, 2018). Zelenska et al. (2021) have confirmed that to develop the quality of university management and educational services, universities need real university autonomy, which should be strong enough to prevent errors and inadequacies experienced in the past. An autonomous university has power for self-governance and

independent dominance over its internal administration, academic affairs, recruitment of teachers and administrative staff, examination and evaluation, admission of students, and award of degrees without interference from the funding agencies, proprietors, interest groups and politicians (Niroula, 2020).

One aspect of 'modernization', particularly important in many European systems, has been the decision by governments to give institutions greater autonomy, more control over their budgets, and legal responsibility for the employment of their staff (Shirin and Wockelberg, 2021). The level of autonomy that universities in Europe have today in designing their governance models like their missions and societal expectations varies greatly. Promoting institutional autonomy as a core principle continues to be highly relevant and important (European University Association, 2021). A situation where Universities are coerced whether directly or indirectly into making admissions, tenure, and appointment decisions on non-academic grounds is an affront to autonomy (Babalola, 2020). Chang, Sirat and Razak (2020) corroborate that the knowledge triangle has increased participation in tertiary education, a focus on skills, entrepreneurship, and employability of higher education graduates. Therefore, higher education decision-making strategy should include how they intend to work with the corporate sector in improving the degree of autonomy for the University Council.

Scope of University Governance Autonomy

The scope of university autonomy can be categorized into three major groupings namely, administrative autonomy, financial autonomy, and academic autonomy. These key functional areas are supposed to be governed in a manner that demonstrates that the institution of higher education is operating without external interference or undue influence.

Administrative Autonomy

Esien and Bassey (2020) observe that administrative autonomy in universities implies the extent to which an institution is given free hand in coordinating its internal affairs without interference from external forces. Administrative autonomy is the freedom to make decisions on activities such as organizing, controlling, and directing both material and human resources in the institution. Administrative autonomy safeguards institutions freedom to independently decide the number of students to be admitted, the cut off mark for admission, the appointment and termination of university staff and heads, formulation of academic policies and general control of standards and all other activities within the institution. According to Zalewska and Harms (2020), administrative autonomy allows university management to undertake appropriate action in the interest of the university. Administrative Autonomy enables those managing universities to have sufficient latitude for decision-making that is consistent with the

governance of institution of higher education.

Roberts et al. (2023) agree that administrative autonomy is key for any effectively run university. It allows universities to make decisions about operations of the university, personnel recruitment, and promotion of staff. Institutional autonomy entails the degree to which an organization can make decisions on their own without external interference or meddling. Dettenhofer et al. (2019) found that Administrative Autonomy enables universities to engage strategic reviews, identifying novel strategic directions and enabling management to engage partners and collaborators to move the university forward. Therefore, it is observed that universities that have administrative governance autonomy will reduce red-tape in decision making, avoid meddling by politicians and interest groups thereby ensuring the true independence of the university.

Academic Autonomy

Rónay and Niemczyk (2022) say that academic autonomy needs to be enshrined in the University Charter to guarantee academic freedom of the University. Regulatory institutions need to embrace principles of academic autonomy because they guarantee that academicians will be accorded appropriate space to engage in unabated pursuit of knowledge through research and academic engagement. According to Roberts et al. (2023) academic freedom embraces the right to pursue and acquire knowledge as needed and required by the researcher. The discussion of academic freedom thrives in an environment where those engaged in the pursuit of knowledge are unhindered by anything or anyone until that quest is legitimately satisfied.

Academic freedom is not merely the privy of the academic community. It is inclusive of all in the knowledge industry as captured by UN ECOSOC, 1999:

Members of the academic community, individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, or writing. Academic freedom includes the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfil their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the State or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights, (UN ECOSOC, 1999).

Matei and Iwinska (2018) argue that conversations about academic freedom cannot take place without discussing elements of institutional autonomy. In European higher education system, the issues of institutional autonomy and academic freedom have been understood as different but intricately related. This is the case because academic freedom rides on the back on established and entrenched institutional autonomy. Academic freedom and university autonomy refer to a single constitutive, defining characteristic of the university as an institution: certain freedom, or freedoms, for both the individuals within it and for the institution are needed to fulfil its core mission.

Kabasakal (2022) adds that the definition of academic freedom is based on the idea that scholars, researchers, teachers have an individual right to express and disseminate their views freely. This means that academic staff is entitled to teach, research, publish and speak autonomously as they see fit to their conceptions of facts and truths, without being intervened by other authorities. Tena et al. (2022) emphasize that academic freedom is at the very core of higher education and of the mission of the university: that much is undisputed. Most scholars argue that a properly developed higher education system is impossible to achieve without it. Academic freedom is widely acknowledged to be central to both teaching and research. Wilkins (2017) observes that ethical issues such as lack of academic freedom and civil liberties which might arise in establishing universities, particularly in countries with authoritarian regimes. There are countries where academicians are not allowed to freely research and publish their findings without reprisals. That is an affront to academic autonomy. Therefore, academic freedom needs to be vigorously guarded with all might.

Financial Autonomy

OECD (2019) suggests that higher education governance autonomy entails the freedom HEs enjoy in setting their curriculum, deciding on their policies, and how to implement their activities. For example, only three countries in Europe regard their public universities are part of the government. The government controls programs they offer, the staff and faculty they hire, and their annual budget. Rónay and Niemczyk (2022) argue that institutional autonomy goes beyond academic freedom and includes operational freedom and the freedom of deciding the framework and structure of the decision-making process. It guarantees that the institution can determine its structure, systems, mission, goals, and priorities consistent with the societal needs and makes decisions independently. Universities must be able to employ the most suitable and qualified academic staff without external prescriptions or interference (Olorunsola, 2018).

Bergan et al. (2020) says that financial autonomy means the freedom to raise and use funds as the University Council finds suitable. Any institution that raises its funds can decide to use it according to its internal rules, systems, and processes. The university has financial autonomy if it has independent decision-making power to use its own and proprietor's funds. Financial autonomy refers to a university's ability to manage its funds and allocate its budget independently. This is the crux of the stability of any institution (Olorunsola, 2018).

University autonomy is protection of the universities from interference by government officials in the day to day running of the institution, especially on the issues related to the admission of students, the appointment and dismissal of staff (Bergan et al., 2020). Atibuni (2020) argues that freedom must be guaranteed everywhere, legally or by tradition and practice, irrespective of financial dependence

or independence of an academic institution. Academic autonomy resulted in intellectual wealth of excellent quality.

Statement of the Problem

A comparative study had to be done to measure perceptions of degrees of governance autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi. This kind of study would assist the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in regulating the governance aspects of running institutions of higher education regardless of the proprietorship. This study seeks to provide the perceptions of the degrees of governance autonomy considering administrative, academic, and financial autonomy. Currently, there is no known study that has tackled this subject.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study included choices of research design, sampling procedure, research questionnaire, data collection procedure and data analysis.

Research Design

This study used a Descriptive research design which seeks to describe the status of an identified variable, Council Autonomy. This research design provides systematic information about a phenomenon, autonomy. Among the types of quantitative research, this design helps to understand perceptions attached to the autonomy of private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi. According to Manjunatha (2019) says that the goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened. Descriptive research design is a quantitative research method that attempts to collect quantifiable information that used statistical analysis of the population sample. It is a popular market research tool that allows to collect and describe the nature of the demographic segment (Manjunatha, 2019).

Sampling Technique

The study used a non-probability research design which followed purposive sampling technique. Non-probability sampling method mostly involves judgment. Instead of randomization, participants were selected because they are easy to access. Purpose sampling allows participants to be chosen as per the researcher's own judgement, keeping in mind the purpose of the study. (Showkat and Parveen, 2017). It uses the judgment of an expert in selecting participants with a specific purpose in mind. This type of sampling is common in exploratory research or in field research.

There was a total of 130 valid responses. Participants to the study were higher education practitioners who include

Table 1. Reliability Statistics of the Study Instruments

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Sig.
.840	.848	.742	.000

faculty, staff, administrators, and council members within private, faith-based and public universities in Malawi. In non-probability research design, the selection of the sample is made based on subjective judgment of the investigator. This technique does not need the population to be precisely defined, and can be used for both types of population: the population that is a general category and the population that is a specific category, (Datta, 2018).

Research Environment

The research was conducted in Malawi as part of the doctoral study of the researcher. This article is a small part of the study. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) requires all higher education operators to have strong governance systems that respond to the needs of industry, students, faculty, and proprietors. Governance autonomy is, therefore, an integral part of higher education. With this in mind, this study is critical in establishing the perceptions of degrees of autonomy for the three kinds of university in Malawi, namely private, faith-based and public universities.

Instrument for Data Collection

This study used a closed-ended questionnaire to collect responses from respondents on different items of the instrument. The instrument was developed by the researcher as part of the doctoral requirement. It was pretested and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Adventist University of Africa after passing the validity and reliability assessment. The instrument provided for four options of perceptions which are superficial, subsistent, sufficient, and strong autonomy.

For purposes of this research, the researcher used a structured questionnaire as a tool for data collection as this is a quantitative study (Taherdoost (2021). The instrument is on 4 points Likert's scale labelled 1 = Superficial Autonomy (0-25%); 2 = Subsistent Autonomy (26-50%); 3 = sufficient Autonomy (51-75%) and 4 = Strong Autonomy (76-100%) in measuring the perceptions of degrees for Council autonomy. According to Mushure (2017), measuring perceptions is the most complex and viable way of capturing one's opinions that are subjective and aggregate them in a manner that creates a pattern to extract meaning.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

The test for internal consistency of the instrument was

conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha score. The results show that there was a high internal consistency of the instrument as the Cronbach's Alpha score was 0.840 which is above 0.50. Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized items in .848 showing high reliability of the data. Table 1 shows the reliability statistics.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy shows that the score is above .50 which stands are .742 showing that sampling was adequate which is statistically significant at <.001. This shows the appropriateness of factor analysis for the data, as seen in Table 1.

Data Collection Procedure

Universities that were selected were asked, were asked to participate with full confidentiality through specific channels according to university policies. Participants received the Survey Monkey© link which contained the questionnaire. After completing the informed consent requirements, participants decided whether they were willing to participate or not. Once they accepted to participate, the questionnaire prompted them to proceed completing the questionnaire. Once the responses were completed, the results were automatically sent to the researcher with all respondents' identifiers turned off. The data was collected and exported to SPSS© for analysis.

Two types of data was collected. Level one was demographic data of the questionnaire respondents like age, gender, religion, residence, and education background. The second level of data was measuring the perceptions about the dependent and independent variables and their interaction. Data on perceptions about the degrees of autonomy for administrative autonomy, academic autonomy, financial autonomy, and governance autonomy was collected for private, faith-based, and public universities and was analysed accordingly.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using IBM's SPSS© tests were done to ensure that critical assumptions were not violated like normality, linearity, and equality of variance. Once it was confirmed that data satisfied the assumptions, descriptive statistics were done whose outputs have been reported. Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) was conducted to check if there were significant differences in the mean scores for the perceptions of the degrees of autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities. The outputs were analysed and reported. This study did not measure correlations or regression because that was not necessary to answer

the research questions and confirm the hypotheses (Bhandari, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

The process of collecting data involved administering an electronic questionnaire through survey monkey. The design of the questionnaire included a section of informed consent for the participants which stipulated that a participant had the freedom to choose to participate or not to participate in the study. Participants who chose to take part in this study did so voluntarily and had an option to not to proceed at any point they felt no longer willing to proceed without any consequences. The survey monkey instrument had respondent identifier disabled so that it was not possible to track or follow the identity of the respondents in any way. By do this, there was protection and confidentiality of the respondents.

Ethical considerations also included commitment to truthful reporting of data without manipulating the data to portray what the data is not suggesting. This undertaking was done to be truthful and honest to the outcome of the study whichever direction data pointed.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of governance autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi?
2. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of administrative autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi?
3. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of academic autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi?
4. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of financial autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi?

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2 shows that the study received 130 valid responses. Out of the 130 respondents, ninety were male which represents 69.2% while thirty-seven were female respondents which are 29% while three responses did not indicate their gender representing 2.8%. Results show that out of the 130 respondents, five were below 31 years of age which is 3.8%, 15 were of the age between 31 and 40 years representing 11.5%, 35 respondents were between 41 and 50 years which is 26.9%, while forty-nine were of the age between 51 and 60 representing 37.7% of total respondents. Respondents that were above 60 years of age were twenty-three which was 17.7% of the sample size.

Table 2 on demographic data about educational levels attained by the respondents shows that out of 130 respondents, eleven of them had bachelor's degrees which

are 8.5%, 55 respondents had masters which is 42.3% of the sample size, while fifty representing 38.5% of total respondents had attained doctoral qualifications with twelve respondents having post-doctoral qualifications which were 9.2%. The data also shows that out of the 130 respondents, nine were from East Africa which is 6.9%, 63 were from Southern Africa which is 48.5% and West Africa had twelve representing 9.2%. Further, data shows that seventeen respondents were from Canada is 13.1%, 13 from the United States of America while four respondents were from Europe scoring 10% and 3.1% respectively while respondents from Asia were ten which was 7.7%. Table 3 shows the distribution of sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents.

The output Table 3 shows that 10.8% of respondents believe that the financial autonomy of public university councils is superficial (0-25%) while 30.8% perceive the financial autonomy to be subsistence (26-50%). The output table also shows that 38.5% of respondents hold that the academic autonomy of the university council is sufficient (51-75%) with 15.4% of the respondents believing that the financial autonomy of public university councils is strong (76-100%).

The Table 3 shows that 10% of respondents believe that the overall autonomy of private for-profit university councils is superficial (0-25%) while 25% perceive the overall autonomy to be subsistence (26-50%). The output table also shows that 43.1% of respondents hold that the overall autonomy of the university council is sufficient (51-75%) with 17.7% of the respondents believing that the overall autonomy of private for-profit university councils is strong (76-100%).

Table 3 shows that 6.9% of respondents believe that the overall autonomy of private for-mission university councils is superficial (0-25%) while 28.5% perceive the overall autonomy to be subsistence (26-50%). The output table also shows that 46.9% of respondents hold that the overall autonomy of private for mission university council is sufficient (51-75%) with 15.4% of the respondents believing that the overall autonomy of private for-mission university councils is strong (76-100%).

Additionally, 10% of respondents believe that the overall autonomy of public university councils is superficial (0-25%) while 26.2% perceive the overall autonomy to be subsistence (26-50%). The output Table 3 also shows that 43.1% of respondents hold that the overall autonomy of the university council is sufficient (51-75%) with 16.2% of the respondents believing that the overall autonomy of public university councils is strong (76-100%).

Null: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the degrees of governance autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi.

The results in Table 4 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of perceptions about the degree of autonomy for the three types of universities [F (34,89) =.888, $p=.643$], [F (34,92) =1.091, $p=.365$] and [F (34,88) =1.091, $p=.365$]. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 2. Distribution of Socio-demographic Characteristics among Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	90	69.2	70.9	70.9
	Female	37	28.5	29.1	100.0
	Total	127	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.3		
Total		130	100.0		
Age	Under thirty-one	5	3.8	3.9	3.9
	31-40	15	11.5	11.8	15.7
	41-50	35	26.9	27.6	43.3
	51-60	49	37.7	38.6	81.9
	Above 60	23	17.7	18.1	100.0
	Total	127	97.7	100.0	
Missing	System	3	2.3		
Total		130	100.0		
Education	Bachelors	11	8.5	8.6	8.6
	Masters	55	42.3	43.0	51.6
	Doctoral	50	38.5	39.1	90.6
	Post-Doctoral	12	9.2	9.4	100.0
	Total	128	98.5	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.5		
Total		130	100.0		
Region	East Africa	9	6.9	7.0	7.0
	Southern Africa	63	48.5	49.2	56.3
	West Africa	12	9.2	9.4	65.6
	Canada	17	13.1	13.3	78.9
	Europe	4	3.1	3.1	82.0
	USA	13	10.0	10.2	92.2
	Asia	10	7.7	7.8	100.0
	Total	128	98.5	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.5		
Total		130	100.0		

Table 3. Degree of University Governance degree of Autonomy

		Private for Profit		Private for Mission		Public - State Owned	
		Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Valid	Superficial (0-25%)	13	10.0	9	6.9	13	10.0
	Subsistence (26-50%)	33	25.4	37	28.5	34	26.2
	Sufficient (51-75%)	56	43.1	61	46.9	56	43.1
	Strong (76-100%)	23	17.7	20	15.4	21	16.2
	Total	125	96.2	127	97.7	124	95.4
Missing	System	5	3.8	3	2.3	6	4.6
Total		130	100.0	130	100	130	100

Null: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of administrative autonomies for private universities, faith-based universities, and public universities in Malawi.

The results in Table 5 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of perceptions about the degree of administrative autonomy for the three types of universities as *p-values* are $>.05$. [F(34,91) = .949, $p = .555$], [F(34,91) = .992, $p = .494$] and [F(34,90) = .904, $p = .620$]. Therefore, we fail to reject the

null hypothesis.

Null: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of academic autonomies for private universities, faith-based universities, and public universities in Malawi.

The results in Table 6 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of perceptions about the degree of administrative autonomy for the three types of universities as *p-values* are $>.05$. The ANOVA significance scores are $>.05$, [F(34,93) = .559,

Table 4. ANOVA of Degree of Governance Autonomy Mean Scores

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Private Universities	Between Groups	19.534	34	.575	.888	.643
	Within Groups	57.553	89	.647		
	Total	77.087	123			
Faith-Based Universities	Between Groups	8.225	34	.242	.387	.999
	Within Groups	57.570	92	.626		
	Total	65.795	126			
Public Universities	Between Groups	23.902	34	.703	1.091	.365
	Within Groups	56.727	88	.645		
	Total	80.629	122			

Table 5. ANOVA of Degree of Administrative Autonomy Mean Scores

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Private Universities	Between Groups	25.992	34	.764	.949	.555
	Within Groups	73.309	91	.806		
	Total	99.302	125			
Faith-Based Universities	Between Groups	22.513	34	.662	.992	.494
	Within Groups	60.765	91	.668		
	Total	83.278	125			
Public Universities	Between Groups	27.068	34	.796	.904	.620
	Within Groups	79.220	90	.880		
	Total	106.288	124			

Table 6. ANOVA of Academic Autonomy Mean Scores

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Private Universities	Between Groups	14.230	34	.419	.559	.971
	Within Groups	69.645	93	.749		
	Total	83.875	127			
Faith-Based Universities	Between Groups	10.406	34	.306	.398	.998
	Within Groups	71.594	93	.770		
	Total	82.000	127			
Public Universities	Between Groups	13.767	34	.405	.570	.967
	Within Groups	66.100	93	.711		
	Total	79.867	127			

$p=.971$], $[F (34,93) =.398, p=.998]$ and $[F (34,93) =.570, p=.967]$. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Null: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of financial autonomies for private universities, faith-based universities, and public universities in Malawi.

The results in Table 7 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of perceptions about the degree of financial autonomy for the three types of universities as p -values are $>.05$. $[F (34,89) =1.104, p=.348]$, $[F (34,88) =.965, p=.532]$ and $[F (34,89) =1.409, p=.102]$. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The study has shown that perceptions of governance autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities are similar as their mean scores are not significantly different. This would mean that perceptions of governance are same across the three types of universities. This means that operators and regulators must use the same guidelines for assessing and enforcing governance autonomy regardless of the kind of university. Pruvot and Estermann (2018) agrees that in Europe, university governance is required across different kinds of universities to create quality and trust of the academic systems. Nguyen et al.

Table 7. ANOVA of Financial Autonomy Mean Scores

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Public Universities	Between Groups	31.436	34	.925	1.104	.348
	Within Groups	74.523	89	.837		
	Total	105.960	123			
Faith-Based Universities	Between Groups	26.451	34	.778	.965	.532
	Within Groups	70.915	88	.806		
	Total	97.366	122			
Public Universities	Between Groups	34.084	34	1.002	1.409	.102
	Within Groups	63.335	89	.712		
	Total	97.419	123			

(2022) agree that all factors that enhance degrees of governance autonomy must be considered in order to have effective institutions of higher education.

The results show that perceptions of administrative autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities are similar as their mean scores are not significantly different. This would mean that perceptions of administrative governance autonomy are same for private, faith-based, and public universities. This means that operators and regulators must use the same guidelines for assessing and enforcing administrative autonomy irrespective of the kind of university. Esien and Bassey (2020) confirm that having effective policies that ensure autonomy of universities will improve effectiveness, empower management and create conducive environment for academic activities. According to Ritzen (2016), administrative autonomy also influences educational outputs. This is possible to creation of policies and procedures that empower and liberate academicians to be sincere and honest in their quest for knowledge fully aware that they are protection by the university.

The outcome of this work demonstrates that perceptions of academic autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities are similar as their mean scores are not significantly different. This would mean that perceptions of academic governance autonomy are same for the three categories of universities. This means that operators and regulators must use the same guidelines for assessing and enforcing academic governance autonomy regardless of the kind of university. Prawelska-Skrzypek (2020) says that universities should be allowed space for self-governing without external interference. That degree of academic autonomy allows academia to work freely as they will be guided only by academic code of conduct. Belgaroui and Hamad (2021) confirm that good practices of academic autonomy in universities enhance performance of higher education institutions. Therefore, universities in Malawi should strive for academic autonomy if they are to achieve world-class status.

The research results have shown that perceptions of financial autonomy for private, faith-based, and public

universities are not different as their mean scores are significantly similar. This shows that perceptions of financial governance are same for private, faith-based, and public universities. This means that operators and regulators must use the same guidelines for assessing and enforcing financial governance autonomy for all universities. Sitnicki (2018) agrees that universities should be able to make independent decisions on how they want to use their resources, how much they want to invest in research and what kind of research team they can hire based on resources available. Tuan (2022) concludes that state financing of public universities should be without strings attached thereby allowing universities financial autonomy to decide on their economic affairs.

Conclusion

On research question 1, we may note that there so significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of governance autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi. We may conclude that governance autonomy in institutions of higher education is the same. Response to research question 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of administrative autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi. It is, therefore, concluded that the mean scores for administrative autonomy are the same across the three types of universities in Malawi.

On whether there is a significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of academic autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi, results show that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of academic autonomies across the three kinds of universities in Malawi. About degree of financial autonomy, the study has established that there is no significant difference in the mean scores for the degrees of financial autonomy for private, faith-based, and public universities in Malawi. Therefore, we may conclude that operators of HEIs endeavour to establish universities using similar governance model and structure the governance system in the same way across the three kinds of universities.

Recommendations

The research presents four recommendations for further consideration by higher education regulators and operators and future investors in higher education provision.

1. Regulators must ensure that governance requirements are similar for all types of universities, although slight variations may exist depending on specific circumstances prevailing. This would ensure that there is equity in higher education governance in Malawi.

2. Private and faith-based universities should align their governance systems with the regulators framework in order to sustain the perception of equality of variances in governance autonomy as the study has demonstrated.

3. There is need for harmonized framework for higher education governance in relation to administrative autonomy, academic autonomy and financial autonomy of different kinds of universities in Malawi.

4. There is need for further study, of a workshop format, that would develop matrix of real governance autonomy, administrative, academic and financial autonomy of institutions of higher education in Malawi. This would set minimum standards of expected items in the autonomies. This harmonization would create shared understanding by higher education operators and regulators thereby reducing conflicts of expectations and enhance trust on both sides.

REFERENCES

- Anderson RL (2022). Nietzschean Autonomy and the Meaning of the "Sovereign Individual". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 2022; 105: 362-384. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12824>
- Atibuni D (2020). Autonomy and Interdependence of Higher Education Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Africa. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341180651_Autonomy_and_Interdependence_of_Higher_Education_Quality_Assurance_Mechanisms_in_Africa/citation/download
- Babalola AA (2020). University Autonomy and Good Governance. Retrieved from Maroonsquare website: <https://maroonsquare.com/university-autonomy-and-good-governance/>
- Basheer A, Ibrahim DN, Ab-Hamid MR (2019). "An Investigation of the Current Autonomy Status of the Malaysian Public and Private Universities: An Empirical Result" in FGIC 2nd Conference on Governance and Integrity 2019, KnE Social Sciences, pages 347-363. DOI 10.18502/kss.v3i22.5060
- Belgaroui R, Hamad SB (2021). The Good Practices of Academic Autonomy as Mechanism of Governance and Performance of Higher Education Institutions: Case of the University of Sfax. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*.
- Bergan S, Gallagher T, Harkavy I (2020). Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and the Future of Democracy. Council of Europe Publishing F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex <http://book.coe.int> ISBN 978-92-871-9018-5 ©Council of Europe.
- Bhambra GK (2018). *Decolonizing the University*. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/25936/1004145.pdf>
- Bhandari P (2022). Independent vs. Dependent Variables: Definition & Examples <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/independent-and-dependent-variables/>
- Carvalho T, Diogo S (2018). Exploring the relationship between institutional and professional autonomy: A comparative study between Portugal and Finland. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 40(1), 18-33.
- Chang DW, Sirat M, Razak DA (2020). Academic Governance and Leadership in Malaysia: Examining the National Higher Education Strategic Initiatives. *J. Int. and Comparative Education*, Volume 9(2) ISSN 2232-1802 doi: 10.14425/jice.2020.9.2.0913
- Chankseliani M, Qoraboyev I, Gimranova D (2021). Higher education contributing to local, national, and global development: new empirical and conceptual insights. *High Educ* 81: 109-127.
- Datta S (2018). Sampling methods. 10.13140/RG.2.2.22856.57605. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327891202_Sampling_methods/citation/download
- Dettenhofer M, Doussineau M, Arregui PE (2019). An Analysis of University Governance Dimensions in Academic Research and S3 Innovation Performance. 10.4018/978-1-5225-6152-1.ch007.
- Esien OE, Bassey MO (2020). Administrative Autonomy and the Management of Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)* Volume 10, Issue 1 Ser. III. (Jan. - Feb.2020), PP 01-05
- European University Association (2021). Autonomy & Governance. Retrieved from Autonomy & Governance website: <https://www.eua.eu/issues/4:autonomy-and-governance.html>
- Kabasakal BD (2022). Academic freedom: How to conceptualize and justify it? *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 48(4), 619-630. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537211072888>
- Krause T, Van-Thiel S (2019). Perceived managerial autonomy in municipally owned corporations: Disentangling the impact of output control, process control, and policy-profession conflict. *Public Management Review*, 21(2):187-211.
- Manjunatha N (2019). Descriptive Research. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)* www.jetir.org JETIR1908597
- Matei L, Iwinska J (2018). Diverging Paths? Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom in the European Higher Education Area. In: Curaj, A., Deca, L., Pricopie, R. (eds) *European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies*. Springer, Cham.

- https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77407-7_22
- Mitchell BC, King WJ (2018). *How to Run a College: A Practical Guide for Trustees, Faculty, Administrators, and Policymakers*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Mushure G (2017). Measuring Perception: The limitations of the questionnaire methodology for gathering research data... 10.13140/RG.2.2.24689.17766.
- Nguyen HP, Pham TH, Nguyen TA, Mai AN, Hoang LHT, Nguyen TT (2022). Factors Affecting the Degree of University Autonomy in Vietnam. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Research*, 7(2),120-131. <https://doi.org/10.51847/9Clj5XxPVA>
- Niroula GK (2020). Higher Education Institutions: University autonomy and governance. Retrieved from Sikkimexpress website: <http://www.sikkimexpress.com/higher-education-institutions-university-autonomy-and-governance>
- OECD (2019). *Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance*. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Olorunsola EO (2018). Erosion of autonomy: The pitfall of educational management in Nigerian universities. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 10(4):33-38.
- Prawelska SG (2020). Academic Autonomy in the Contemporary University. *Journal of Intercultural Management*. 12. 2-29. 10.2478/joim-2020-0043.
- Pruvot EB, Estermann T (2018). University Governance: Autonomy, Structures, and Inclusiveness. In: Curaj, A., Deca, L., Pricopie, R. (eds) *European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77407-7_37
- Ritzen J (2016). University autonomy: Improving educational output. *IZA World of Labour*. 10.15185/izawol.240.
- Roberts LK, Saliba I, Spannagel J (2023). *University Autonomy and Academic Freedom in Decline: Causes, Responses, and Implications for Academic Freedom*, ISBN 978-1-0033-0648-1, Routledge, London, pp. 9-29, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003306481-3>
- Rónay Z, Niemczyk E (2022). *Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom in the Light of National Regulatory Frameworks: Glimpse at Hungary and South Africa*.
- Sarpong J (2021). Research Autonomy and "Marketisation" in Higher Education: A Case Study of Two New Zealand Universities. 10.13140/RG.2.2.12800.10248.
- Schalin J (2020). Bolstering the Board: Trustees Are Academia's Best Hope for Reform. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608233.pdf>
- Shirin AÖ, Wockelberg H (2021). Agency control or autonomy? Government steering of Swedish government agencies 2003-2017, *International Public Management Journal*, 24:3, 330-349, DOI: 10.1080/10967494.2020.1799889
- Showkat N, Parveen H (2017). *Non-Probability and Probability Sampling*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319066480_Non-Probability_and_Probability_Sampling/citation/download
- Sitnicki M (2018). Managing financial autonomy of a research university. *e-mentor*. 1. 10.15219/em73.1342
- Taherdoost H (2021). *Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; A Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Collection Technique for Academic and Business Research Projects*. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)*, 10 (1):10-38.
- Tena P, Furstenberg S, Heathershaw J, Thomson C (2022). Is academic freedom at risk from internationalisation? Results from a 2020 survey of UK social scientists, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 26:10:1698-1722,
- Tuan NA (2022). Financial Autonomy in Universities Around the World: Management Implications for Vietnam. *International Journal of Research in Education Humanities and Commerce: Volume 03, Issue 01 "January -February 2022" ISSN 2583-0333*.
- UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1999). General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Art. 13 of the Covenant), 8 December 1999, E/C.12/1999/10, available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4538838c22.html>.
- Voorn B, van-Genugten ML, van-Thiel S (2017). The efficiency and effectiveness of municipally owned corporations: A systematic review. *Local Government Studies*, 43(5), 820-841.
- Wilkins S (2017). 'Ethical Issues in Transnational Higher Education: The Case of International Branch Campuses,' *Studies in Higher Education*, 42.8, 1385-1400.
- Zalewska KK, Harms R (2020). Managing autonomy in university-industry research: a case of collaborative Ph.D. projects in the Netherlands. *Review of Managerial Science*. 14. 10.1007/s11846-019-00361-4.
- Zelenska L, Holubnycha L, Tetiana L, Matsapura L, Popova N (2021). Academic council activity as the basis for university autonomy: Historical aspect. *Revista Amazonia Investiga*, 10(39):205-217.