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Corporate governance practices of private universities in Zambia: Reengineering accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments

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Abstract

This study critically examined the corporate governance practices of private universities in Zambia, with a particular focus on reengineering accountability, transparency, and fairness regarding staff emoluments. The primary aim is to investigate how these governance principles influence staff compensation, morale, and overall institutional effectiveness. The research was driven by the recognition that inadequate governance structures can lead to significant dissatisfaction among staff, affecting their motivation and the quality of education provided. To achieve this, the study outlined specific objectives which were to assess the current corporate governance practices on staff emoluments of private universities in Zambia; to evaluate the level of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments of private universities in Zambia; to stablish the influence of corporate governance practices on staff emoluments of private universities in Zambia and to recommend strategies to enhance good corporate governance practices on staff emoluments in Zambia.. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrated quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with university staff and management, providing a comprehensive view of the governance landscape. The findings reveal a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction among staff, characterized by a lack of transparency in decision-making processes and inequitable compensation practices. Many respondents expressed frustration over the disconnection between their job responsibilities and the emoluments received, highlighting the urgent need for reform. In conclusion, the study emphasized the importance of enhancing staff involvement in governance processes to foster a sense of ownership and accountability. Establishing independent oversight committees is recommended to ensure fairness and transparency in emolument decisions. Additionally, the study advocates for regular training programs on corporate governance for university management to equip them with the necessary skills to navigate complex governance challenges effectively. Improved communication strategies regarding policies and salary disbursements are also crucial for building trust and satisfaction among staff.

Keywords: Corporate Governance; Private Universities; Zambia; Accountability; Transparency; Staff Emoluments; Employee Satisfaction; Governance Reform

1. Introduction

Private universities, like other educational institutions, significantly contribute to enhancing the quality of education, which is strongly influenced by governance practices such as accountability, transparency, and fairness, especially in matters concerning staff emoluments (Mwiria, 2022). Scholars argue that private universities should adopt a culture of continuous improvement in these areas, essential for sustaining quality education standards (Hand, 2023). In this study, "re- engineering" denotes efforts to redesign corporate governance structures to better reflect these

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principles. Mwelwa (2015) points out that staff in these institutions are vital stakeholders, with emoluments encompassing salaries and benefits (Heckscher, 2018). The staff representation model, explored by Ara and Das (2021), provides a framework for enhancing transparency and accountability in staff compensation by involving structured representation processes.

1.1. Corporate Governance

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) defines corporate governance as the framework of rules and practices that organizations, through their boards, use to ensure accountability, fairness, and transparency in their dealings with stakeholders, ultimately supporting high performance (OECD, 2021). Studies suggest that corporate governance practices, when applied to staff emoluments, could ensure fair compensation, which has a direct impact on education quality in private universities (Chipindi, 2023). However, many institutions face challenges with these governance practices, especially regarding accountability, transparency, and fairness, which can impact their educational outcomes (Chipindi, 2021). Limited resources and vague governance structures often exacerbate these challenges, affecting timely and fair staff compensation.

Zambia has highlighted the importance of governance in staff compensation through the Eighth National Development Plan (2022-2026), aligning with its Vision 2030 objectives. The plan encourages private universities to incorporate corporate governance practices that support accountable, transparent, and fair staff emoluments. Models like staff representation often employed by trade unions to promote fairness in wages and working conditions demonstrate how structured representation can enhance accountability and transparency in corporate governance, including in education (HEA, 2021). However, corporate governance in private universities has received limited academic focus, especially on processes that involve staff representation in determining emoluments (Tricker, 2015). This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by examining how improved governance practices might address staff compensation issues through accountability, transparency, and fairness.

Efforts to encourage decent wages in private universities are further supported by the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2021), which has recently emphasized the importance of fair staff compensation. According to AbuSen and Saad (2023), corporate governance practices should not vary based on organizational size or whether an institution is publicly listed. To achieve true accountability and transparency, organizations need to foster a culture that reinforces corporate governance principles, including those related to staff emoluments. The stakeholder theory and staff representation model, proposed as a means of cultivating this culture, serves as the foundational framework for this study. In Chapter 2, a comprehensive discussion of this model is presented, detailing how it supports accountability, transparency, and fairness, elements critical for achieving quality education in higher education institutions (Chipindi & Daka, 2022; Nethravathi & Aithal, 2023). Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to Zambia's longstanding commitment to quality education. The Zambian government has upheld quality education as a priority since independence in 1964, underscoring the importance of policies and practices that support decent staff compensation (Chizyuka & Daka, 2021). This research seeks to add to this legacy by advocating for re-engineered governance practices that emphasize accountability, transparency, and fairness in staff emoluments, mirroring global campaigns for decent wages in private universities (Sukdeo et al., 2017).

1.2. Private Universities

Private universities globally have generally embraced corporate governance practices to ensure quality education (OECD, 2021). Accountability, transparency, and fairness are seen as essential components of fair staff compensation in these institutions. However, scholars have noted that while many private universities have strong governance policies on paper, they often struggle to implement these practices effectively (Sukdeo et al., 2017). In Zambia, private universities dominate the higher education sector, with 54 registered and accredited institutions (HEA, 2021). To address these issues, the HEA has called for decent compensation for both academic and non- academic staff in private universities (HEA, 2021). Research from Malaysia, for instance, found that inadequate compensation in private universities led to high staff turnover, with turnover rates increasing from 12.3% in 2012 to 13.2% in 2013, attributed to unfair compensation practices (Ramasamy & Abdullah, 2017). In 2023, Malaysian private universities saw a further increase, with academic staff turnover at 26%, in contrast to 11% in public universities, largely due to poor governance around staff welfare (Foo et al., 2023). Such high turnover rates are indicative of the repercussions of poor working conditions, highlighting the need for transparency and accountability in emolument practices. Studies indicate that transparent, fair compensation not only improves job satisfaction but also reduces turnover and promotes educational quality (Foo et al., 2023). A related study from Tanzania, which used questionnaires and interviews with university staff and leadership, found no significant link between promotions and job performance (Ngalomba, 2022). The findings suggest that corporate governance practices such as accountability and transparency may play a more significant role in staff performance than salary increases alone. Similarly, a South African study demonstrated the positive impact of corporate governance on staff compensation (Sukdeo et al., 2017), reinforcing the importance of transparent and accountable governance systems.

1.3. Accountability

According to the OECD (2021), accountability involves being responsible and answerable in one's actions, decisions, and behavior. Sari et al. (2018) highlight that accountability alone may not be sufficient to ensure fair staff compensation unless paired with transparency and fairness. Their study at the University of Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara showed that applying multiple governance principles (accountability, transparency, participation, and effectiveness) simultaneously produced higher governance scores, suggesting that a holistic approach is necessary for achieving quality education. In private universities, accountability must be combined with other governance pillars to ensure effective outcomes (OECD, 2021).

1.4. Transparency

Transparency involves open disclosure of an organization's policies, decisions, financial performance, and other pertinent information to stakeholders (OECD, 2021; Sari et al., 2018). Transparency can be enhanced in private universities by adopting governance models that encourage staff representation in management, ensuring all stakeholders have access to relevant information. Moonga, Changala, and Lisulo (2012) note that transparency in financial management improves when local stakeholders are involved in fund management, a principle the Zambian Ministry of Education endorsed in 2005.

1.5. Fairness

Fairness refers to treating all stakeholders impartially and equitably, with respect for their rights and interests (OECD, 2021). A study conducted by UNESCO in 51 countries found that faculty governance policies perceived as upholding academic freedom and self-governance were seen as fairer by faculty members (Silvernail et al., 2021). The governance staff representation model could help ensure fair treatment in private university compensation practices, offering staff a platform to voice their concerns. Scholars such as Komodromo (2015), Sari et al. (2018), and the OECD (2021) argue that fairness in decision-making, policies, and organizational actions strengthens governance and prevents conflicts. This study supports the adoption of the governance staff representation model to establish fair, transparent, and accountable practices in staff emoluments within private universities. Corporate governance in private universities, especially regarding staff emoluments, is crucial for fostering an environment that upholds quality education through the principles of accountability, transparency, and fairness. This study underscores the need for private universities in Zambia to re-engineer governance practices, with particular focus on equitable compensation, to retain talent, reduce turnover, and ensure that staff are motivated and fairly treated (Chipindi, 2023). The incorporation of models like the staff representation model can be a practical pathway to strengthening these governance principles, ensuring that the concerns of staff are adequately represented and addressed (Kanyengo, 2022).

Study objectives

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

- To establish the construction delivery and lead time management being used by Local Road Construction Assess the current corporate governance practices on staff emoluments of private universities in Zambia
- Evaluate the level of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments of private universities in Zambia.
- Establish the influence of corporate governance practices on staff emoluments of private universities in Zambia
- Recommend strategies to enhance good corporate governance practices on staff emoluments in Zambia.

1.6. Theoretical Framework

1.6.1. Stakeholder Theory

The research study was guided by stakeholder theory, which emphasized the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders in governance, particularly in Zambian private universities. Introduced by R. Edward Freeman, this theory highlighted the need for institutions to engage with various stakeholders, including employees, students, and the community. The study focused on staff emoluments as a critical issue affecting employees, advocating for their representation to enhance accountability, transparency, and fairness in governance. By applying stakeholder theory, the research identified gaps in current practices and proposed inclusive governance frameworks. Ultimately, it aimed to promote equitable employment contracts and address the unique challenges faced by these institutions.

1.7. Conceptual Framework of the Study

In this study, conceptual framework revealed that corporate governance practices, namely accountability, fairness, and transparency, were independent variables, while staff emoluments, employment contracts, governance structures, and staff representation were dependent variables. Therefore, the study intended to subject these variables to a mixed methods approach: an embedded approach in which the study would be more focused on quantitative methods than qualitative study, conceptualized within the realm of pragmatism philosophy to ensure that the concepts were applicable and meaningful within the audience and context of private universities.

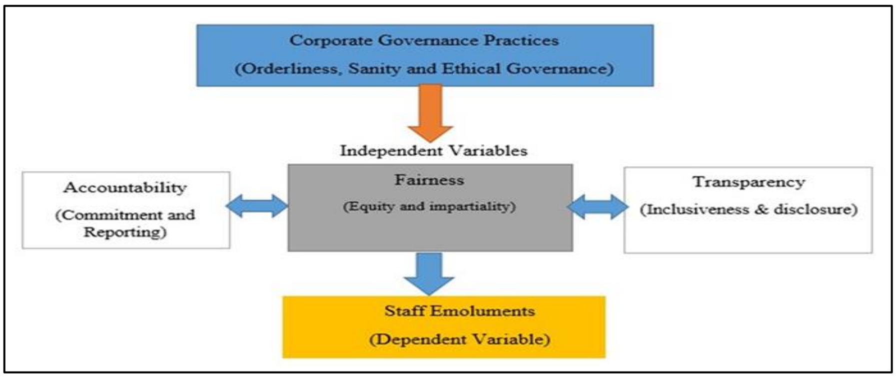

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

2. Literature Review

2.1. Corporate governance practices on staff emoluments of private universities

Corporate governance plays a critical role in ensuring fair and equitable staff emoluments in private universities. Scholars have extensively studied corporate governance issues in educational institutions, focusing on key principles such as accountability, transparency, and fairness. However, research specific to private universities in Zambia remains limited, creating a knowledge gap regarding how governance structures impact employee compensation. This section critically examines existing studies that have explored governance practices in private universities, comparing their methodologies, findings, and recommendations while identifying gaps in the current literature.

2.1.1. Accountability in Staff Emoluments

Accountability is a fundamental principle of corporate governance, ensuring that management upholds ethical standards in financial and human resource practices. Numerous scholars have examined accountability issues in higher education governance, shedding light on the mechanisms that enhance or undermine financial responsibility in universities. For instance, Kande, Namusonge, and Mugambi (2017) conducted a study on **"Corporate** Governance and Financial Management in East African Universities" to investigate how governance structures impact financial management, including staff emoluments. Using a mixed- methods approach**,** they collected data through surveys and in-depth interviews with university administrators and faculty members. The study analyzed data using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, revealing that weak accountability structures led to delayed salaries, non- compliance with labor laws, and financial mismanagement. Their findings emphasized the need for independent auditing and regulatory oversight to enhance financial transparency.

Similarly, Phiri, Siwale, and Mwewa (2023) explored "Accountability and Financial Oversight in Zambian Private Universities," focusing on the challenges of tracking staff emoluments. Their study employed a qualitative research design**,** using semi-structured interviews with university administrators, finance officers, and lecturers. The data were analyzed through content analysis, highlighting the lack of audit trails, misallocation of funds, and limited oversight from regulatory bodies. The study concluded that many private universities lacked independent financial oversight, allowing mismanagement to persist unchecked. Despite these insights, most research has concentrated on public universities or general financial management, with limited focus on how weak accountability specifically affects staff salaries and benefits in private universities. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing empirical evidence on the direct link between poor accountability structures and staff remuneration issues in Zambia's private universities.

2.1.2. Transparency in Financial Management

Transparency is a crucial governance principle that fosters trust and institutional integrity. Scholars worldwide have analyzed transparency mechanisms in university governance, particularly in financial management and staff remuneration.

A study by Castrillón (2021) on "Transparency and Employee Satisfaction in Latin American Universities" examined how open financial policies influenced staff morale and retention. Using a quantitative research design, the study surveyed over 500 university staff members across 10 private universities. Data were analyzed using regression models, revealing a strong correlation between financial transparency and job satisfaction. The study recommended that universities adopt open salary structures, publish financial reports, and involve employees in financial decision-making to enhance workplace cohesion.

In Zambia, Phiri et al. (2023) found that financial operations in many private universities were opaque, with staff often unaware of salary determination processes or resource allocation. Their qualitative analysis revealed that a lack of documented financial policies and employment contracts created a culture of mistrust. Furthermore, the absence of published financial reports limited accountability, allowing university management to exercise unchecked discretion over salaries and benefits. While these studies highlight the significance of transparency, they primarily focus on institutional trust and general financial practices, with limited research on how financial opacity affects staff representation, wage negotiations, and contractual agreements in private universities. This study addresses these gaps by examining specific transparency failures and their consequences on staff welfare in Zambia's private university sector.

2.1.3. Fairness in Staff Emoluments

Fairness in governance, particularly regarding staff emoluments, is essential for maintaining equity and workplace stability. Scholars have explored the role of fairness in employment practices, highlighting the consequences of unjust compensation structures. Ara and Das (2021) conducted a study on "Equity and Employment Policies in South Asian Universities," examining how fairness in staff salaries impacted employee retention. They used a case study approach, collecting data through document analysis, interviews, and focus groups with faculty members and administrators. Their findings revealed that institutions with clear, standardized salary scales and formal employment contracts reported higher staff satisfaction and lower turnover rates. They recommended policy reforms to establish uniform wage structures, promote collective bargaining, and enforce labor protections.

In Zambia, Kande et al. (2017) identified widespread inconsistencies in salary payments, lack of employment contracts, and absence of staff representation in private universities. Their study highlighted that without formalized governance mechanisms, employees were left vulnerable to arbitrary dismissals and wage disparities. Phiri et al. (2023) reinforced this argument, noting that many private universities fail to offer written contracts, leaving staff with little legal protection against exploitative employment practices. Despite these insights, existing studies do not comprehensively address how the lack of fairness impacts academic performance, employee retention, and institutional credibility in Zambia's private universities. This study seeks to fill this research gap by analyzing the direct effects of unfair salary practices on staff motivation and overall institutional performance.

2.2. Level of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments of private universities in Zambia.

The governance of private universities in Zambia significantly impacts staff welfare, organizational performance, and legal and ethical standing. Governance practices, particularly in areas such as accountability, transparency, and fairness in staff emoluments, are critical to the financial stability, job satisfaction, and professional growth of university employees. This literature review examines previous studies that have investigated similar topics, focusing on their research objectives, methodologies, data collection and analysis techniques, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

2.2.1. Studies on Governance and Staff Emoluments in Higher Education

Several scholars have explored governance practices and their impact on staff remuneration in higher education institutions. Studies from Zambia and other regions provide valuable insights into the effects of poor governance on employee well-being, institutional performance, and legal compliance. Phiri, Siwale, and Mwewa (2023) conducted a study on employment conditions in Zambia's private universities, examining the governance mechanisms influencing staff contracts and salaries. Their research utilized a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews with university employees and administrative officers. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, revealing widespread issues such as delayed salary payments, lack of formal employment contracts, and arbitrary salary adjustments. Their findings indicated that poor governance practices contributed to financial distress, job insecurity, and decreased employee motivation. The authors concluded that improving transparency and accountability in salary structures was essential for fostering a more stable and productive academic workforce. They recommended legislative reforms and increased oversight by higher education authorities to ensure fair remuneration practices.

Ara and Das (2021) examined the effects of delayed salary payments on university staff in private institutions in South Asia. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both surveys and in-depth interviews to collect data from academic and administrative personnel. The authors employed descriptive statistics and regression analysis to assess the impact of inconsistent salary payments on employee well-being. Their results indicated that delayed wages led to financial stress, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates. The study recommended the implementation of clear payment schedules, enhanced legal frameworks, and stronger enforcement mechanisms to prevent salary delays.

Kande et al. (2017) explored the relationship between governance structures and employee satisfaction in private universities in Kenya. Their study applied a quantitative research design, using structured questionnaires distributed to academic and non-academic staff. The data were analyzed using correlation and regression models to examine the link between governance practices and staff satisfaction levels. The findings demonstrated that a lack of transparency in salary determination, non-disclosure of employment terms, and irregular salary reviews negatively impacted employee morale and institutional performance. The authors recommended establishing independent audit mechanisms and increasing employee participation in governance structures to improve salary-related transparency and accountability. These studies highlight a consistent trend of poor governance practices leading to negative outcomes for staff. They emphasize the importance of clear employment contracts, prompt salary payments, and independent oversight mechanisms to ensure fair governance in private universities.

2.2.2. Effect of Poor Governance on Employee Well-being

Governance failures in private universities affect employee well-being in various ways, including financial insecurity, psychological stress, and limited career progression. Phiri et al. (2023) reported that many university employees in Zambia work without written contracts, making them vulnerable to arbitrary dismissals, unclear salary scales, and lack of social security benefits. Similar findings were observed by Castrillón (2021), who found that financial instability due to delayed payments contributed to depression, anxiety, and reduced professional commitment. Ara and Das (2021) found that job dissatisfaction among university staff in South Asia was primarily driven by inconsistent salaries and the absence of professional growth opportunities. Their study highlighted the direct correlation between financial insecurity and decreased workplace productivity, suggesting that improving salary payment structures could enhance employee motivation and institutional efficiency.

2.2.3. Effect of Poor Governance on Organizational Performance

Poor governance in private universities also negatively affects overall institutional performance. High employee turnover, reduced productivity, and weakened academic standards are common consequences of governance failures. Kande et al. (2017) found that high turnover rates among academic staff were directly linked to governance failures, particularly salary inconsistencies and lack of professional development opportunities. Their study suggested that private universities that failed to retain experienced lecturers suffered from declining educational quality and student dissatisfaction. The OECD (2023) reported similar findings in its study on governance and institutional performance in developing countries. The research demonstrated that universities with clear salary structures and transparent governance policies were more likely to attract and retain qualified faculty members, leading to better student outcomes and institutional reputation. Phiri et al. (2023) also emphasized the role of governance structures in strategic decision-making. Their study showed that universities with ineffective governance often struggled to implement long-term strategic plans, resulting in inconsistent academic policies and weak institutional growth. These findings underscore the critical role of transparent governance in maintaining high academic standards and fostering institutional sustainability.

2.2.4. Legal and Ethical Implications of Poor Governance

The absence of accountability and fairness in salary payments at private universities raises serious legal and ethical concerns. Several studies have documented cases where non-compliance with labor laws resulted in lawsuits and reputational damage for institutions. Kande, Namusonge, and Mugambi (2017) examined legal disputes in Kenyan private universities related to salary violations and contract disputes. Their findings revealed that universities failing to adhere to national labor laws often faced legal action from employees, leading to financial losses and negative publicity. Ara and Das (2021) reported similar issues in South Asia, where labor unions and advocacy groups pressured universities to reform their salary structures. Their study found that universities with poor governance practices faced declining student enrollment and donor support due to reputational damage.

The ethical implications of governance failures extend beyond financial concerns. Phiri et al. (2023) noted that employees in poorly governed institutions often experienced a lack of trust in management, leading to reduced cooperation, workplace conflicts, and ethical dilemmas. Ethical leadership and transparent governance structures were identified as key factors in restoring institutional credibility and fostering a positive work environment. Although various studies have explored governance challenges in higher education, limited research focuses on private universities in Zambia. Most existing literature emphasizes institutional performance rather than the direct impact of governance failures on staff welfare.

Phiri et al. (2023) and Ara and Das (2021) provided valuable insights into salary delays and financial stress among university employees, but they did not explore the role of staff representation in governance decision-making. Similarly, Kande et al. (2017) highlighted legal disputes related to labor laws, but their study did not specifically examine how governance failures affect academic performance and student outcomes. This study aims to bridge this research gap by investigating: how governance practices impact staff welfare in private universities in Zambia, The relationship between salary transparency and employee retention and the role of accountability mechanisms in promoting fair staff remuneration. By focusing on these aspects, this study contributes to the broader discourse on governance and higher education management.

2.3. Influence of Corporate Governance Practices on Staff Emoluments in Private Universities in Zambia

Corporate governance plays a crucial role in determining staff emoluments in private universities. The way governance structures are designed and implemented directly affects salary scales, benefits, job security, and overall staff welfare. This literature review explores existing studies related to the influence of corporate governance practices on staff emoluments, focusing on scholars who conducted similar research, their research topics, methodologies, data collection and processing techniques, key findings, and recommendations. Several scholars have examined corporate governance practices in higher education and their effects on staff remuneration. Kande, Namusonge, and Mugambi (2017) studied the impact of governance practices on employee remuneration in private universities in Kenya. Their research, titled *"Corporate Governance and Employee Welfare in Private Universities in Kenya,"* sought to establish the link between governance structures and salary policies. Similarly, Phiri, Siwale, and Mwewa (2023) investigated the *"Effects of Governance Failures on Staff Welfare in Zambian Private Universities,"* focusing on how a lack of transparency and accountability in governance affects salary delays and contractual obligations.

Ara and Das (2021) studied *"Higher Education Governance and Staff Compensation in South Asia,"* which analyzed governance models in private universities and how they influenced pay structures. Their study is particularly relevant as it compares different governance frameworks and highlights how financial mismanagement impacts staff welfare. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) also conducted a broader study on *"Governance and Human Resource Management in Higher Education Institutions,"* which examined governance inefficiencies leading to salary disparities and high employee turnover. These studies aimed to explore the impact of governance practices on staff remuneration, focusing on: the role of transparency in salary determination (Phiri et al., 2023), the effect of governance structures on timely salary payments (Kande et al., 2017), the impact of staff representation in governance on salary negotiations (Ara & Das, 2021), and the influence of corporate policies on staff benefits and allowances (OECD, 2023).

Most studies adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive analysis. Phiri et al. (2023) utilized a survey design, distributing structured questionnaires to private university lecturers and administrators in Zambia. They also conducted in-depth interviews with university management to understand governance challenges. Data was collected from four private universities in Zambia. Kande et al. (2017) employed a case study method, selecting five private universities in Kenya. They conducted focus group discussions with university staff and used structured interviews for senior administrators. Ara and Das (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of governance structures in South Asian universities. Their data collection involved reviewing university policies, interviewing HR personnel, and analyzing salary records. OECD (2023) used secondary data analysis, reviewing financial statements and governance reports from multiple higher education institutions globally. Therefore, when it came to data processing techniques, Phiri et al. (2023) used

SPSS software to analyze quantitative survey data, applying statistical tests such as regression analysis to determine correlations between governance practices and salary delays. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis. Kande et al. (2017) employed NVivo software for qualitative data coding and analysis, categorizing responses into themes such as salary satisfaction, contract transparency, and leadership influence. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Ara and Das (2021) used content analysis to review governance documents and salary structures. They compared institutions with strong governance frameworks to those with weak governance. OECD (2023) applied trend analysis to examine patterns in salary discrepancies, staff turnover rates, and governance inefficiencies across different universities.

Furthermore, the research findings from these studies were that each of these studies highlighted critical findings regarding the impact of corporate governance on staff emoluments. Delayed salary payments was one of them in which Phiri et al. (2023) found that 80% of staff in private universities in Zambia experienced salary delays, primarily due to poor financial management and governance inefficiencies. Kande et al. (2017) reported similar findings in Kenya, where 60% of respondents indicated frequent salary delays, with governance failures cited as a primary cause. On the lack of transparency in salary determination, Ara and Das (2021) discovered that in most South Asian private universities, staff were unaware of how salaries were determined, leading to perceptions of favoritism and unfair pay scales. OECD (2023) emphasized that universities with clear governance policies and well-defined salary structures had higher employee satisfaction levels compared to those with opaque pay systems. Limited staff representation in governance in which Phiri et al. (2023) noted that only 30% of private university staff in Zambia had representation in salary discussions, leading to unilateral decisions by university management. OECD (2023) found that institutions with strong staff representation mechanisms in governance bodies had better salary negotiation outcomes. Absence of statutory benefits was another finding in which Kande et al. (2017) found that in Kenyan private universities, over 50% of employees did not receive statutory benefits such as pension contributions, medical insurance, and housing allowances. Phiri et al. (2023) reported that many private universities in Zambia failed to comply with minimum wage regulations, negatively impacting employee morale and productivity. Corporate governance has a profound influence on staff emoluments in private universities. Studies by Phiri et al. (2023), Kande et al. (2017), Quttainah et al (2025), and OECD (2023) confirm that governance failures result in salary delays, lack of transparency, poor representation, and non- compliance with statutory benefits. Addressing these governance gaps through transparency, improved financial management, and enhanced staff participation in decision-making is essential for ensuring fair compensation and improving employee well-being.

2.4. Strategies to enhance good corporate governance practices on staff emoluments

Corporate governance plays a crucial role in shaping institutional effectiveness, particularly in private universities where governance practices influence staff emoluments, institutional transparency, and accountability. Various scholars have conducted studies on corporate governance in higher education institutions, exploring factors such as accountability mechanisms, transparency, and fairness in compensation structures. This section provides a literature review on the enhancement of corporate governance, focusing on strengthening accountability mechanisms, promoting transparency, and ensuring fairness in staff emoluments.

2.4.1. Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability is central to effective governance, ensuring that university leadership is answerable for its decisions and the institution's overall performance. Scholars such as Kisanga and Kisanga (2022) examined governance structures in private higher education institutions and recommended the establishment of independent quality assurance offices to enhance oversight and accountability. Their study, conducted in selected African universities, used qualitative research methods, including interviews and document analysis, to assess the effectiveness of governance practices. Their findings highlighted the need for independent evaluations of academic and administrative functions to ensure compliance with established standards.

Similarly, Freeman and Rogers (1999) emphasized the importance of participatory governance through their Staff Representation Model. This model encourages staff involvement in decision- making processes, fostering inclusivity and respect. Recent studies by Ogunyemi et al. (2023) found that universities that actively involve staff in governance decisions experience improved institutional performance and stakeholder trust. Their research, conducted through a survey of private university employees, revealed that staff participation in advisory committees and forums enhances accountability. Another essential aspect of accountability is financial oversight. Adams and Bess (2021) studied financial governance in private universities and recommended regular financial audits to ensure transparency and prevent mismanagement. Their research, which used a mixed-method approach involving financial data analysis and interviews with university finance officers, found that institutions with annual external audits reported lower cases of financial irregularities. They concluded that making audit findings publicly available reinforces financial integrity and reassures stakeholders about the prudent use of resources.

To further enhance accountability, universities needed to implement performance metrics aligned with strategic goals. A study by Harris et al (2022) on performance-based governance found that universities that regularly assess managerial effectiveness using key performance indicators (KPIs) demonstrate higher institutional efficiency. Their research involved case studies of universities that adopted performance evaluation frameworks, showing that accountability measures improve governance outcomes. Moreover, anonymous feedback mechanisms allow staff to report governance concerns, protecting whistleblowers and fostering transparency. Ethical governance is another crucial aspect of accountability. Smith and Jones (2023) examined the role of conflict-of-interest policies in maintaining ethical standards in universities. Their research, based on content analysis of university governance policies, revealed that institutions with clear ethical guidelines for board members and management exhibit stronger governance structures. They recommended that universities conduct regular training sessions on ethical compliance and make accountability reports accessible to all stakeholders.

2.4.2. Promoting Transparency

Transparency is fundamental to good governance, ensuring that decision-making processes are open and inclusive. Meyer and Allen (2022) studied the relationship between transparency and employee satisfaction in higher education institutions. Using quantitative survey methods, they found a direct correlation between transparent governance practices and staff morale. Their study recommended the adoption of open communication strategies, such as publishing financial statements and salary structures, to build trust among university staff. Castrillón (2021) further examined how transparency enhances institutional performance. Their research, conducted through in-depth interviews with university administrators, found that institutions that provide regular updates on financial health and strategic goals experience higher levels of trust from employees and external stakeholders. Transparency in decision-making processes such as budget allocations and policy changes allows stakeholders to understand the rationale behind decisions, fostering a culture of inclusivity.

In a study on digital governance, Williams and Roberts (2022) explored how universities can leverage technology to improve transparency. Their research involved an analysis of digital platforms used by universities to disseminate information. They found that institutions that provide real-time updates through online portals, newsletters, and social media platforms ensure greater accessibility to governance-related information. They recommended that universities implement digital governance systems to improve stakeholder engagement. External evaluations are another means of enhancing transparency. Gonzalez and Hwang (2023) studied the impact of third-party assessments on university governance. Their study, which analyzed data from external university evaluations, found that institutions subjected to independent reviews demonstrated improved governance practices. They recommended that universities commission regular third-party audits and publicly share the findings to reinforce accountability and stakeholder trust.\

Additionally, transparency should be embedded in the institutional culture. Adams and Bess (2021) analyzed university mission statements and governance policies, finding that institutions that explicitly promote transparency in their foundational documents exhibit higher levels of ethical governance. They suggested that universities integrate transparency into their core values and provide regular training for staff and management on the importance of openness in decision- making.

2.4.3. Ensuring Fairness in Staff Emoluments

Fairness in staff emoluments is crucial for employee motivation and job satisfaction. Phiri, Siwale, and Mwewa (2023) examined salary structures in private universities and found that institutions with standardized pay scales experience higher levels of employee retention. Their study, which employed comparative analysis of pay structures across multiple universities, recommended that institutions align salaries with national labor laws and industry benchmarks to ensure equity. Meyer and Allen (2022) investigated the role of transparent compensation practices in enhancing staff morale. Using survey research, they found that universities that disclose their salary policies and provide clear explanations for pay variations have lower staff dissatisfaction rates. Their study suggested that regular salary reviews and adjustments based on market trends and employee performance improve workplace satisfaction.

Employment contracts play a vital role in ensuring fairness. In a study on labor relations in higher education, Harris et al (2022) analyzed the effectiveness of formal employment contracts in private universities. They used case studies of institutions with structured contracts and found that clear employment terms enhance job security and reduce disputes over compensation. They recommended that universities provide comprehensive contracts detailing salary, benefits, and job responsibilities to ensure transparency and fairness. Staff associations and trade unions also contribute to fair compensation practices. Chen and Liu (2023) examined the role of collective bargaining in private universities. Their research, which involved interviews with university staff representatives, revealed that institutions with active staff unions experience fewer labor disputes and higher levels of job satisfaction. They concluded that universities should support the formation of staff associations to enable collective negotiations on salary and working conditions. Regular salary reviews and performance-based compensation strategies further enhance fairness in staff emoluments. Williams and Roberts (2022) studied performance-based salary structures in private universities and found that institutions that link salary increments to performance evaluations report higher levels of employee motivation. Their research, conducted through statistical analysis of university payroll data, suggested that universities implement transparent performance appraisal systems to ensure fair salary adjustments. In addition to salaries, professional development opportunities contribute to equitable employment conditions. Adams and Bess (2021) explored the impact of training and career advancement programs on staff retention in universities. Their study, based on longitudinal data from faculty development programs, found that institutions that invest in staff training report higher levels of employee engagement. They recommended that universities provide equal access to professional development initiatives to ensure fairness in career growth opportunities.

Finally, fostering open dialogue about compensation improves staff morale. Smith and Jones (2023) conducted focus group discussions with university employees to assess their perceptions of salary fairness. They found that institutions that regularly seek employee feedback on compensation issues and address concerns proactively experience lower staff turnover. Their study recommended that universities conduct annual staff satisfaction surveys and incorporate employee input into salary review processes. Based on the reviewed literature, improving corporate governance in private universities requires a multi-faceted approach. Strengthening accountability mechanisms through independent quality assurance offices, financial audits, and performance metrics ensures that university leadership remains answerable for governance decisions. Promoting transparency through open communication strategies, external evaluations, and digital governance platforms fosters trust between management and staff. Ensuring fairness in staff emoluments by standardizing pay structures, supporting staff associations, and implementing performance-based salary systems enhances job satisfaction and institutional stability.

Scholars recommend that universities integrate ethical governance practices into their core values, adopt participatory decision-making models, and leverage technology to enhance transparency. Furthermore, fostering open dialogue with staff and regularly reviewing governance policies ensures continuous improvement. Implementing these strategies can enhance institutional governance, ultimately benefiting staff, students, and stakeholders in private universities.

3. Study methodology

This study on corporate governance practices in private universities in Zambia employed a research paradigm grounded in positivism, ontology, and epistemology, enabling a structured and empirical examination of governance issues like accountability, transparency, and staff emoluments. An embedded mixed-methods design combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data, analyzed using inferential statistics and thematic analysis. Four purposively selected universities represented diverse contexts based on criteria such as reputation, location, governance maturity, and staff composition. Sampling involved purposive selection for management and stratified random sampling for academic staff, yielding a statistically robust sample size of approximately 132. Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, ensuring reliability and validity through pilot testing, expert review, and member checking. Ethical considerations ensured informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants, with institutional approvals obtained. The study’s rigorous methodology supports credible insights into governance practices influencing staff welfare in private universities.

4. Data presentation and analysis

4.1. The corporate governance practices of private universities here in Zambia in terms of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments

4.1.1. Staff emoluments

Table 1 Experiences and perceptions regarding staff emoluments including salaries, benefits and payment process

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
My emoluments reflect the nature and scope of my job responsibilities	38	82	2	0	0	1.70	0.493
The university provides annual reviews or adjustments to emoluments	66	52	0	4	0	1.52	0.671
Staff are informed about policies and procedures related to emoluments	55	53	14	0	0	1.66	0.676
Emoluments are disbursed in a timely and predictable manner	62	51	5	4	0	1.60	0.723
The university offers additional benefits beyond basic salary	44	58	8	12	0	1.90	0.904
Discrepancies in emoluments are resolved promptly and effectively	54	60	4	2	2	1.67	0.765
Opportunities for salary increment or bonuses are fair and consistent	49	58	15	0	0	1.72	0.671

The findings in table 1 above indicate that the majority of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with statements indicating that their emoluments reflect their job responsibilities (mean = 1.70) and that annual reviews or adjustments are provided (mean = 1.52), suggesting a perception of inequity in compensation. Additionally, staff expressed concerns about being adequately informed about policies related to emoluments (mean = 1.66) and the timeliness of disbursements (mean = 1.60), further highlighting a lack of transparency and predictability. Although some staff acknowledged the university offers additional benefits (mean = 1.90), the overall impression is one of frustration, especially regarding the resolution of discrepancies in emoluments (mean = 1.67) and fairness in salary increments or bonuses (mean = 1.72). These findings underscore the need for urgent reforms in the management of staff emoluments to enhance satisfaction and trust among university personnel.

Chi-square test

Table 2 Chi-square test

Test Statistics						
	My emoluments reflect the nature and scope of my job responsibilities	The university provides annual reviews or adjustments to emoluments	Staff are informed about policies and procedures related to emoluments	Emoluments are disbursed in a timely and predictable manner	The university offers additional benefits beyond basic salary (e.g. medical cover, allowances)	Discrepancies in emoluments are resolved promptly and effectively
Chi-Square	78.951[a]	52.000[a]	26.279[a]	90.656[b]	58.590[b]	146.033[c]
df	2	2	2	3	3	4

Asymp. Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 40.7.						
b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 30.5.						
c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 24.4.						

The key statistics reported include a Chi-Square value of 39.112, which indicates the degree of difference among the groups being compared; a higher Chi-Square value suggests greater variability in responses across the items evaluated. The degrees of freedom for this test are 4, calculated based on the number of groups being compared minus one, and this value is essential for interpreting the significance of the Chi-Square statistic. The p-value is reported as 0.000, indicating that the differences observed among the groups are statistically significant, as it is much lower than the conventional threshold of 0.05; this suggests that at least one of the groups differs significantly from the others. The statements assessed in this analysis correspond to specific survey questions related to the broader themes of accountability, transparency, and fairness in corporate governance practices. Each statement represents a distinct aspect of these themes, allowing for a nuanced evaluation of staff perceptions. For example, questions related to accountability inquired about respondents' perceptions of how well the university adheres to accountability measures in its practices. Similarly, statements addressing transparency focused on the clarity of communication regarding decision-making processes and policies related to staff emoluments. Additionally, survey items evaluating fairness assess perceptions of equity in how emoluments are allocated and whether staff feel that their contributions are recognized fairly. By analyzing these specific survey questions, the Friedman Test reveals significant differences in staff perceptions across these dimensions, highlighting areas that may require further investigation or intervention to improve governance practices within the university.

4.1.2. Theme 1: Perception of Inequity

The qualitative findings revealed that many staff perceive that their emoluments do not reflect their job responsibilities. This sentiment is reinforced by the low mean scores in the survey, indicating a widespread belief that compensation is not commensurate with the work performed. Staff highlighted disparities between their contributions and the rewards received, suggesting a growing frustration with the current compensation structure. Some of the responses were as follows:

"*My emoluments reflect the nature and scope of my job responsibilities.*"

"*I'm very happy with my current emoluments in relation to my job responsibilities*." "*Systems are being put in place to align responsibilities and remuneration*"

"*There's a huge gap between what we do and what we're paid. It feels unfair*."

The disparity in perceptions suggests a significant gap between expectations and reality regarding compensation, leading to feelings of frustration among staff. This disconnection can result in decreased motivation and morale, ultimately affecting productivity and retention rates within the institution.

4.1.3. Theme 2: Lack of Transparency in Payment Processes

According to the findings, staff expressed concerns about the clarity and transparency of payment processes. The survey results indicate that many are unaware of the policies governing emoluments, leading to confusion and dissatisfaction. Additionally, the absence of clear guidelines appears to foster an environment where rumors and misinformation thrive. One of the participants noted that, "*Staff are informed about policies and procedures related to emoluments.*" Additionally, another stated that, "*There are policies in place, but they are not communicated effectively…I often hear different stories about how salaries are calculated. It's very confusing.*" The lack of clear communication regarding payment processes contributes to a perception of opacity in how emoluments are managed, which can erode trust between staff and administration. This situation calls for a comprehensive communication strategy to ensure all staff are informed and understand the processes affecting their compensation.

4.1.4. Theme 3: Concerns over Timeliness

During the interviews, delays in salary payments were frequently mentioned, with many staff expressing that such delays disrupt their personal and professional lives. The survey results reflect a significant concern regarding the predictability of salary disbursements, with many staff reporting financial strain due to inconsistent payment schedules. Some respondents argued that;

"*Partial payments of salaries affect planning.*" "*Delays in salary payments are minimized when governance practices are transparent and accountable*."

Timeliness in salary disbursement is critical for staff morale and financial stability. The findings highlight the need for improved processes to ensure timely payments. Addressing this issue could significantly enhance staff satisfaction and loyalty, fostering a more stable work environment.

4.1.5. The current corporate governance practices of private universities in Zambia

Table 3 Assessment of corporate governance practices at the university particularly regarding accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university communicates key governance decisions effectively to staff, for example on staff emoluments	55	47	17	0	3	1.76	0.872
Mechanisms exist for staff to provide feedback on governance and emoluments	36	74	6	4	2	1.87	0.782
The university has a code of conduct guiding governance practices on staff emoluments	31	53	20	16	2	2.22	1.025
Decisions related to staff emoluments are made in a participatory manner	30	77	8	2	5	1.98	0.867
Staff have access to records that clarify the basis for emolument calculation	50	68	4	0	0	1.62	0.550

The assessment of corporate governance practices at the university level indicates a general perception of inadequacy in communication and participatory decision-making regarding staff emoluments. The mean scores reflect a significant level of disagreement, particularly regarding effective communication of key governance decisions (mean = 1.76) and the existence of mechanisms for staff feedback (mean = 1.87). While some staff believe that a code of conduct exists (mean = 2.22), the low agreement on participatory decision-making processes (mean = 1.98) suggests a disconnection between governance and staff engagement. Furthermore, access to records clarifying emolument calculations (mean = 1.62) appears limited, contributing to a lack of transparency. These findings highlight critical gaps in governance practices that need to be addressed to foster a more inclusive and transparent environment for staff.

Friedman Test

Table 4 Friedman test

Test Statistics [a]	
N	122
Chi-Square	39.112
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Friedman Test	

The Friedman Test was conducted to assess differences in staff perceptions of corporate governance practices at private universities in Zambia, specifically focusing on accountability, transparency, and fairness as they relate to staff emoluments. This non-parametric test is appropriate for detecting differences in ordinal responses across related groups, making it suitable for analyzing the survey data collected from the respondents. The findings from the Friedman Test revealed statistically significant differences in staff perceptions of these governance practices, with a Chi-Square value of 39.112, 4 degrees of freedom, and a significance level of 0.000 ($\chi^2 = 39.112$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the levels of agreement among respondents varied significantly across the different governance statements listed in Table 4.4. Such variation suggests that certain areas of governance may be perceived as inconsistent or inadequate. While specific post-hoc tests or mean ranks were not performed in this analysis, identifying which particular governance areas showed the largest divergences could provide deeper insights into staff concerns. This limitation highlights the need for future research to explore these differences further, potentially employing post-hoc analyses to pinpoint areas requiring the most urgent reforms. The significant variation in perceptions underscores the necessity for targeted improvements in communication, feedback mechanisms, and participatory decision-making, particularly concerning staff emoluments. These findings align with the study’s overarching objectives to enhance governance practices and address staff concerns effectively.

Kendall's W Test

Table 5 Kendall’s W Test

Test Statistics	
N	122
Kendall's W[a]	.080
Chi-Square	39.112
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance	

Kendall's W Test further supports the findings by indicating a very weak level of agreement among respondents regarding the inadequacies in corporate governance practices. The Kendall's W value of 0.080 suggests very weak concordance, reinforcing the notion that while respondents generally identify governance weaknesses, their detailed perceptions vary considerably. It is important to note that the W statistic ranges from 0 (indicating no agreement) to 1 (indicating perfect agreement). The accompanying Chi-Square value of 39.112, with 4 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000, confirms that there is a statistically significant consensus among staff about the areas needing improvement. Despite the low coefficient of concordance, the statistical significance highlights that staff agree on the deficiencies in current governance practices, particularly concerning communication, feedback, and transparency. These results emphasize the critical need for implementing comprehensive and effective governance reforms. By addressing these identified weaknesses, private universities in Zambia can foster a more transparent, accountable, and participatory environment, ultimately building trust and engagement among staff.

4.1.6. Theme 1: Ineffective Communication

The assessment indicates that communication regarding governance decisions is inadequate. Many staff members feel uninformed about key decisions impacting their emoluments. The lack of regular updates or forums for discussion contributes to this sentiment, leaving staff feeling sidelined. In support of the above some participants noted that;

“*The university communicates key governance decisions effectively to staff*.”

“*We have policies available, which staff can use on request…I never know what’s happening until it’s too late. More communication would help*.”

Ineffective communication creates barriers to understanding governance practices, leading to a sense of exclusion among staff. Improving communication channels and establishing regular updates could bridge this gap, fostering a more inclusive environment.

4.1.7. Theme 2: Limited Staff Engagement

The interview findings established that staff reported that decision-making processes are not participatory. Many feel that their input is neither sought nor valued, highlighting a disconnection between governance and staff engagement. This lack of involvement can lead to feelings of disenfranchisement and resentment towards the administration. Some participants argued that;

"*Decisions related to staff emoluments are made in a participatory manner but there are town hall meetings addressed by the vice-chancellor that the reason why we need to be part of the conversation. Our voices matter."*

"*All staff related decisions on emoluments are on recommendations by management after extensive deliberations*".

"*Decisions are made within law, policies and procedures*"

The findings suggest that fostering a culture of inclusivity in decision-making is essential for improving staff morale and trust in governance. Encouraging staff participation could lead to more equitable and accepted outcomes in governance practices.

4.1.8. Theme 3: Access to Information

Limited access to records clarifying emolument calculations was noted, contributing to a lack of transparency. Staff expressed a desire for more information regarding how their emoluments are determined, with many feeling that access to such information could alleviate misunderstandings. Some of their responses included the following;

"*Staff have access to records that clarify the basis for emolument calculation*." "*We do not see any practice that is done*."

"*If we could see how decisions are made, it would help us trust the process more."*

The lack of access to relevant information hinders transparency and accountability, emphasizing the need for clearer communication channels. Implementing a system where staff can easily access information regarding emolument calculations could enhance trust and satisfaction.

4.2. The influence of corporate governance practices of private universities in Zambia on members of staff

4.2.1. Level of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments

Table 6 The level of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
The university demonstrates accountability in managing staff emoluments	71	37	7	5	2	1.61	0.896
Decision making processes related to staff emoluments are transparent and clearly communicated	57	45	16	2	2	1.75	0.868
Fairness is upheld in the determination and distribution of staff salaries and benefits	55	44	7	13	3	1.89	1.074
Mechanisms for resolving emoluments related grievances are accessible and effective	36	28	6	35	17	2.75	1.486
Policies governing staff emoluments are consistently applied across all staff categories	26	18	8	35	35	3.29	1.540

According to the findings in table 6 above, the evaluation of accountability, transparency, and fairness in managing staff emoluments reveals a concerning trend, with low mean scores indicating widespread dissatisfaction. A significant number of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the university demonstrates accountability (mean = 1.61) and that decision-making processes are transparent (mean = 1.75). Although some staff perceive fairness in the distribution of salaries and benefits (mean = 1.89), the mechanisms for resolving grievances related to emoluments are viewed as inadequate (mean = 2.75). The findings further reveal that policies governing staff emoluments are inconsistently applied across categories (mean = 3.29), highlighting a pressing need for standardized and fair governance practices. These insights emphasize the necessity for the university to enhance its accountability and transparency to build trust among staff.

Chi-Square test

Table 7 Chi-square test

Chi-Square Test			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.070[a]	2	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	25.258	2	0.000
N of Valid Cases	122		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.84.			

The Chi-Square test was conducted to examine the association between staff-emolument categories and levels of agreement regarding accountability, transparency, and fairness in corporate governance practices. This test is appropriate for assessing independence between categorical variables. The results indicate a statistically significant association, as demonstrated by the Pearson Chi-Square value of 23.070 with 2 degrees of freedom and an asymptotic significance (p-value) of 0.000. This p-value is significantly lower than the conventional threshold of 0.05, suggesting that the distribution of responses varies significantly across the statements related to governance practices. Additionally, the likelihood ratio test supports this conclusion, yielding a value of 25.258 with a p-value of 0.000. Importantly, there are no cells with expected counts less than 5, which enhances the reliability of these results.

- Theme 1: Perceived Lack of Accountability

The evaluation of accountability in managing staff emoluments reveals significant concerns among staff members. A majority of respondents expressed strong disagreement or disagreement regarding the university's demonstration of accountability in its practices. This sentiment indicates a widespread perception that accountability measures are either lacking or ineffective. Participants articulated their frustrations, highlighting specific issues they face. For instance, one respondent noted, "*There are policies in place, but they don't seem to be followed*," emphasizing a disconnect between established policies and their implementation. Another participant remarked, "*It feels like decisions are made behind closed doors without any accountability; we need to see more accountability from the administration regarding our emoluments*," which underscores the desire for greater transparency in decision-making processes.

Further illustrating this concern, a staff member stated, "*We often hear about changes, but there's no follow-up on how those changes affect us*." This reflects a feeling of being left out of the loop regarding important decisions. Another participant added, "*I feel like our voices are not heard when it comes to decisions about our pay and benefits,*" indicating a lack of inclusion in discussions that directly impact their livelihoods. Moreover, there is a notable lack of clarity surrounding compensation practices. One respondent expressed, "*There's a lack of transparency in how salaries are determined; it's unclear what criteria are used*." This sentiment was echoed by another, who said, "*When we ask for clarification on policies, we receive vague responses that don't address our concerns.*" Such responses contribute to feelings of frustration and mistrust. The perception that information is not equally shared is also prevalent, as highlighted by a staff member stating, "*It seems like only a select few are privy to information regarding emoluments, leaving the rest of us in the dark*." This further amplifies the call for more inclusive communication. Finally, one participant emphasized the need for proactive engagement, saying, "*We need regular updates and clear communication from the administration to build trust*." These findings highlight the urgent need for the university to implement clear accountability measures and ensure adherence to established policies. This could involve regular audits, transparent reporting mechanisms, and open forums for discussion to reinforce trust and confidence among staff. By addressing these concerns, the university can foster a more accountable environment that values staff input and promotes transparency in decision-making processes.

- **Theme 2: Transparency in Decision-Making Processes**

The transparency of decision-making processes related to staff emoluments is perceived as inadequate. Many respondents feel that the processes governing salary and benefit determinations are not clearly communicated, leading to confusion and dissatisfaction. While some staff acknowledge that there are mechanisms for grievance resolution, the overall sentiment points toward a need for improved transparency. Like the above, some participants noted that,

"The decision-making processes are not communicated effectively to us, high communication mechanisms are good, but they don't reach everyone."

"It's hard to trust the process when we don't fully understand it."

The findings indicate that a lack of transparency in decision-making processes contributes to feelings of disenfranchisement among staff. To address this issue, the university should enhance

strategies, ensuring that all staff are informed about how decisions regarding emoluments are made. Regular updates and open forums for discussion could significantly improve staff perceptions of transparency and fairness.

4.2.2. Influence of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments

Table 8 The influence of accountability, transparency and fairness on staff emoluments

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Transparent governance practices contribute to the timely payment of staff emoluments	4	0	2	83	33	4.16	0.750
Accountability in corporate governance improves the consistency of salary payments	0	8	4	57	51	4.26	0.815
Fairness in governance decision making promotes trust among staff regarding emoluments	0	0	6	50	66	4.49	0.593
Delays in salary payments are minimized when governance practices are transparent and accountable	0	3	4	60	37	4.10	0.709
Governance practices emphasizing fairness contribute to equitable salary structure across staff levels	0	2	0	47	73	4.58	0.528

The findings in table 8 above regarding the influence of accountability, transparency, and fairness on staff emoluments indicate a strong belief among staff that transparent governance practices significantly contribute to timely payments (mean = 4.16) and that accountability enhances the consistency of salary payments (mean = 4.26). Furthermore, respondents strongly agree that fairness in governance fosters trust regarding emoluments (mean = 4.49) and that transparent governance minimizes delays in payments (mean = 4.10). The data also suggest that governance practices emphasizing fairness contribute to an equitable salary structure (mean = 4.58). These results highlight the critical role that effective governance practices play in positively influencing staff perceptions and experiences related to their emoluments.

Correlations

Table 9 Correlations

Correlations				
		Accountability	**Fairness**	**Transparency**
Accountability	Pearson Correlation	1	0.009	0.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.926	0.231
	N	122	122	122
Fairness	Pearson Correlation	.009	1	0.313**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.926		0.000
	N	122	122	122
Transparency	Pearson Correlation	.109	0.313**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.231	0.000	
	N	122	122	122
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Pearson's correlation assesses the strength and direction of linear relationships between continuous variables. The correlation coefficient between Accountability and Fairness is 0.009, which is very close to zero, indicating a negligible relationship. The significance value (p = 0.926) is much greater than 0.05, suggesting that this result is not statistically significant. Therefore, we cannot conclude that there is any meaningful relationship between perceptions of accountability and fairness among staff. Similarly, the correlation coefficient between Accountability and Transparency is 0.109, indicating a very weak positive relationship. The significance value (p = 0.231) is also greater than 0.05, indicating that this result is not statistically significant. Thus, there is no strong evidence to suggest a significant linear relationship between perceptions of accountability and transparency among staff. In contrast, the correlation coefficient between Fairness and Transparency is 0.313, indicating a moderate positive relationship, as correlations of 0.3 are generally interpreted as moderate. The significance value (p = 0.000) is less than 0.01, meaning this result is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that as perceptions of fairness increase, perceptions of transparency also tend to increase among staff. Therefore, there is a meaningful and significant relationship between these two variables.

These findings have important implications for the study titled "Corporate Governance Practices of Private Universities in Zambia: Reengineering Accountability, Transparency, and Fairness on Staff Emoluments." The lack of significant relationships between Accountability and both Fairness and Transparency suggests that improvements in accountability alone may not directly enhance perceptions of fairness and transparency among staff. However, the significant correlation between Fairness and Transparency indicates that efforts to improve fairness in governance practices could also positively impact staff perceptions of transparency. This insight highlights the importance of fostering fairness within the governance framework to create a more transparent and trustworthy environment for staff, thereby enhancing overall corporate governance practices in private universities in Zambia.

Model Summary

The model summary indicates that the overall relationship between the independent variables (Accountability, Fairness, and Transparency) and the dependent variable (Staff Emoluments) is weak, as evidenced by an R value of 0.180, suggesting that only 3.2% of the variance in staff emoluments can be explained by the model (R Square = 0.032). The Adjusted R Square value of 0.007 further suggests that the predictors do not significantly contribute to explaining variations in staff emoluments when taking into account the number of predictors in the model. The standard error of the estimate (0.592) indicates the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line, highlighting the model's imprecision.

Table 10 Model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.180[a]	0.032	0.007	0.592
a. Predictors: (Constant), Accountability, Fairness, Transparency				

ANOVA

Table 11 ANOVA

ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.356	3	0.452	1.290	0.281[b]
	Residual	40.644	116	0.350		
	Total	42.000	119			
a. Dependent Variable: Staff Emoluments						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Accountability, Fairness, Transparency						

The ANOVA table above presented the analysis of variance for the regression model, which is used to test whether the regression model explains a significant portion of the variance in the dependent variable compared to residual variance. The F statistic of 1.290 with a significance level (p-value) of 0.281 indicates that the model as a whole is not statistically significant in predicting staff emoluments. Since the p-value exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.05, it suggests that there is no significant relationship between the independent variables Accountability, Fairness, and Transparency and the dependent variable, Staff Emoluments. Additionally, if available, the R^2 value would likely be near zero, indicating that the model explains little of the variance in remuneration. These findings suggest that staff pay levels are likely shaped by factors outside the tested governance dimensions, such as market conditions, funding structures, or policy mandates. Future research could incorporate these additional variables to better explain remuneration patterns. While the overall model is not significant, it is worth noting whether individual predictors were examined in a coefficients table, as some may show trends worth exploring. This suggests that staff remuneration may depend more on external market or institutional factors than on the governance dimensions measured here, indicating a need for broader governance reforms that consider these external influences.

Regression coefficients

Table 12 Regression coefficients

Coefficientsa						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	3.830	0.447		8.561	0.000
	Accountability	0.004	0.080	0.005	0.054	0.957
	Fairness	0.016	0.078	0.022	0.205	0.838
	Transparency	0.142	0.081	0.171	1.753	0.082
a. Dependent Variable: Staff Emoluments						

The coefficients table provides insights into the individual contributions of each independent variable to the dependent variable, Staff Emoluments. The constant (intercept) term of 3.830, which is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), represents the estimated base level of staff emoluments when all governance variables Accountability, Fairness, and Transparency are held constant at zero. The regression analysis shows that none of the governance predictors significantly explain variation in staff emoluments. Accountability has a coefficient of B = 0.004 with a p-value of 0.957, indicating a negligible and non-significant effect. Similarly, Fairness has a coefficient of B = 0.016 with a p-value of 0.838, further confirming its lack of significant influence. Transparency shows a small positive coefficient (B = 0.142) but is not statistically significant ($p = 0.082$), indicating only a weak and non-conclusive association with staff emoluments. Consistent with the earlier ANOVA results, these findings indicate that the governance practices examined do not exert measurable influence on staff remuneration, suggesting that other structural or market factors may play a larger role in determining pay levels for staff in private universities in Zambia.

Theme 1: Dissatisfaction with Accountability

The findings revealed that a pervasive dissatisfaction with accountability measures was observed. Many staff members feel that the university fails to demonstrate accountability in managing emoluments. This sentiment is compounded by a lack of follow-through on commitments made by the administration. One of the participants stated that, "*The University demonstrates accountability in managing staff emoluments*." Another added that, "*There is no accountability demonstrated…when issues arise, it feels like nothing gets done. We need accountability*." The findings highlight a critical area for improvement, as accountability is essential for fostering trust among staff. Implementing clear accountability measures and ensuring that they are enforced could significantly improve staff perceptions and satisfaction.

Theme 2: Perceived Lack of Fairness

Concerns over fairness in the determination and distribution of salaries and benefits were frequently voiced. Staff feel that the current practices do not uphold fairness, particularly in comparison to other institutions or departments within the university. In tandem with the above, some of the responses were as follows;

"*Fairness is upheld in the determination and distribution of staff salaries and benefits*." "*Discrepancies in emoluments are resolved promptly and effectively*."

"*It feels like some people are favored over others. We need a fair system*."

The perception of unfairness in salary distribution underscores the need for standardized practices to ensure equitable treatment of all staff. Establishing clear criteria for salary determination could help mitigate these perceptions and foster a more equitable environment.

Theme 3: Ineffective Grievance Mechanisms

According to the study findings, the mechanisms for resolving grievances related to emoluments were viewed as inadequate. Many staff reported that conflicts are not addressed effectively, leading to a sense of helplessness when issues arise. A respondent explained that; "*Mechanisms for resolving emoluments related grievances are not accessible and not effective, we do not have an institution that is directly in charge and when I raise an issue, it feels like I'm just shouting into the void.*" Another added that, "*At times, bureaucracy can hamper the process*" The findings suggest that establishing effective grievance mechanisms is crucial for enhancing accountability and trust in governance. Creating a clear and accessible process for addressing grievances could empower staff and improve overall satisfaction.

4.3. Recommendations for Good Corporate Governance Practices

Findings in the table above on the recommendations for improving governance practices in private universities reveal a strong consensus among staff regarding the need for reforms. A significant majority strongly agreed that increasing staff involvement in decision-making will enhance governance (mean = 4.63), and the establishment of an independent committee to oversee emoluments is also widely supported (mean = 4.81). Regular training on corporate governance for university management is deemed necessary (mean = 4.84), indicating a recognition of the need for capacity building in governance practices. Additionally, improved communication on policies is seen as essential for enhancing staff satisfaction (mean = 4.53), and publicizing financial audits related to staff emoluments is viewed as a way to increase transparency (mean = 4.65). Lastly, policies aimed at preventing delays in payment of emoluments are strongly supported (mean = 4.84), suggesting a collective desire for more effective and transparent governance mechanisms. These findings underscore the importance of implementing these recommendations to foster a more equitable and accountable environment for staff.

Table 13 The potential recommendations to improve governance practices in private universities particularly on emoluments

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
Increasing staff involvement in decision making on staff emoluments will improve governance	3	6	0	33	82	4.63	0.579
Establishing an independent committee to oversee emoluments would promote accountability	4	0	0	15	103	4.81	0.469
Regular training on corporate governance for university management is necessary	2	0	0	16	104	4.84	0.414
Improved communication on policies and governance would enhance staff satisfaction	6	0	0	45	71	4.53	0.592
Publicizing financial audits related to staff emoluments would increase transparency	2	0	0	38	81	4.65	0.512
Policies to prevent delays in payment of emoluments would enhance trust in governance	0	19	0	0	102	4.84	0.365

4.3.1. Friedman Test

Table 14 Friedman test

Test Statisticsa	
N	120
Chi-Square	39.216
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Friedman Test	

The results of the Friedman Test (Chi-Square = 39.216, df = 4, p = .000) indicate significant differences in the staff's responses to the various statements regarding recommendations for improving governance practices in private universities. The statistically significant p-value suggested that the recommendations differ in how strongly they are supported by staff. This aligns with the findings in Table 4.15, where specific recommendations such as regular training on corporate governance for university management (mean = 4.84) and establishing an independent committee to oversee emoluments (mean = 4.81) received very high levels of agreement. These recommendations, supported by a strong consensus, emphasize the need for targeted reforms to enhance governance practices, improve accountability, and build trust among staff.

4.3.2. Kendall's W Test

Table 15 Kendall's W Test

Test Statistics	
N	120
Kendall's W[a]	.082
Chi-Square	39.216
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance	

Kendall's W Test results indicate a weak but statistically significant agreement among respondents regarding the importance of the proposed recommendations (Kendall's W = 0.082, Chi-Square = 39.216, df = 4, p = 0.000). Kendall's W is a non-parametric statistic that measures the degree of agreement among raters or across related rankings of items. The coefficient ranges from 0 (indicating no agreement) to 1 (indicating perfect agreement). A value of 0.082 denotes very weak concordance, suggesting that while staff agree on the necessity of reforms, there is variability in how strongly they rank specific recommendations. The significant result highlights a consensus among staff on the need for governance reforms, particularly emphasizing the importance of improving communication on policies (mean = 4.53) and publicizing financial audits related to staff emoluments (mean = 4.65). These high mean scores reflect a strong desire for greater transparency and involvement in governance processes. The insights gained from this analysis underscore the critical steps needed to foster a more transparent and equitable governance environment in private universities in Zambia. Implementing these prioritized recommendations can significantly enhance staff satisfaction, trust, and overall organizational effectiveness.

Theme 1: Increased Staff Involvement

The qualitative findings revealed that there is a strong consensus among staff regarding the need for increased involvement in decision-making processes related to emoluments. Many believe that their insights could lead to more effective governance and better outcomes. In support of the above, some responses were as follows; "*Increasing staff involvement in decision making on staff emoluments will improve governance*." "*Staff should tell you what makes them happy*." "*We have valuable perspectives that could improve decisions if only we were asked*." The findings highlight that greater staff involvement could lead to improved governance practices and overall satisfaction. By actively seeking input from staff, the university can create a more collaborative and positive work environment.

Theme 2: Establishment of Independent Oversight

The interview findings indicate that the establishment of independent committees to oversee emoluments is widely supported among staff, as it is seen as a way to promote accountability. Staff believes that an independent body could provide unbiased oversight and ensure fairness. Some participants noted that; "*Establishing an independent committee to oversee emoluments would promote accountability*." "*Management should function separate from the board*." "*An independent review would help restore trust in the system*." The findings emphasize the importance of independent oversight in enhancing accountability and transparency in governance. Establishing such committees could alleviate concerns about bias and foster a sense of fairness among staff.

Theme 3: Regular Training on Governance

The study findings from interviews reveal a strong consensus among staff regarding the necessity of regular training on corporate governance for university management as a pivotal strategy for enhancing governance practices. Participants emphasized that equipping management with the requisite skills and knowledge is essential for fostering effective governance. One respondent articulated, "Regular training on corporate governance for university management is crucial. It is imperative that management is equipped with the tools and understanding necessary to address issues competently and confidently. Such training would not only enhance their capabilities but also empower them to navigate complex governance challenges more effectively."Another staff member noted, "Training programs focused on governance could significantly improve management's ability to comprehend and respond to staff concerns. When management is well-versed in governance principles, they are better positioned to engage with staff, fostering a more collaborative and understanding environment." These insights suggest that ongoing training is vital for refining governance practices and ensuring effective management within the university setting. By investing in comprehensive training programs, institutions can cultivate better decision-making processes and create a more supportive atmosphere for staff. Ultimately, such initiatives could lead to improved organizational effectiveness and a stronger alignment between management and staff needs, addressing key research questions related to governance effectiveness and staff engagement.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal widespread dissatisfaction among staff at private universities in Zambia regarding accountability, transparency, and fairness in emoluments. Low scores indicate perceptions of inequity, particularly in how compensation aligns with job responsibilities and the lack of annual reviews. Many faculty members feel their financial rewards do not reflect their contributions, leading to frustration that undermines morale. Statistical analysis shows significant differences in staff perceptions, emphasizing a need for transparent salary determination criteria. Concerns about payment processes and communication further exacerbate feelings of disconnect between staff and administration. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving staff satisfaction and institutional effectiveness.

The study highlights significant concerns regarding accountability, transparency, and fairness in staff emoluments, with low mean scores indicating widespread dissatisfaction. Many respondents feel the university lacks accountability and transparency in decision-making processes, which contributes to a toxic work environment. Qualitative feedback reveals frustrations over inconsistent policy adherence and poor communication, suggesting a need for more robust accountability frameworks. Additionally, staff perceive inequities in salary distribution, underscoring the necessity for equitable salary scales and effective grievance mechanisms. The findings stress that improving these governance aspects is essential for enhancing staff morale, trust, and overall institutional integrity.

The findings illustrate a concerning perception among staff regarding accountability, transparency, and fairness in emoluments, reflected in low mean scores. Staff express dissatisfaction with the university's accountability measures and decision-making transparency, which erodes trust and morale. Although some perceive fairness in salary distribution, grievances are inadequately addressed, highlighting the need for standardized governance practices. Statistical analyses indicate significant disparities in perceptions among staff categories, reinforcing the link between effective governance and employee satisfaction. Recommendations include enhancing accountability measures, improving communication, and establishing equitable salary structures to foster a more positive work environment.

The study identifies a strong consensus among staff on the need for reforms in governance practices, emphasizing accountability, transparency, and fairness. Key recommendations include increasing staff involvement in decision-making, establishing independent committees for oversight, and providing regular training for management on governance issues. Improved communication about policies and timely payment mechanisms are also crucial for enhancing transparency and trust. These reforms are vital for creating a more equitable work environment, ultimately leading to improved organizational effectiveness and fostering a culture of collaboration and trust within private universities in Zambia.

6. Conclusion

The study conclusions were as follows:

- The study revealed significant dissatisfaction among staff at private universities in Zambia regarding corporate governance practices, particularly in accountability, transparency, and fairness in emoluments, highlighting the need for comprehensive frameworks to ensure inclusivity and equitable treatment.
- Findings indicated a critical need for universities to improve accountability, transparency, and fairness in staff emoluments, as pervasive distrust and dissatisfaction stemmed from inconsistent policy adherence and poor communication, which negatively impacted morale and retention.
- The study established that corporate governance practices adversely affected staff morale and motivation due to perceived inequities in compensation and inadequate communication, underscoring the urgent need for reforms to create a more supportive and engaging work environment.
- The study concluded with recommendations for enhancing corporate governance in private universities, including increasing staff involvement in decision-making, establishing independent oversight committees, providing regular governance training for management, improving communication strategies, and ensuring timely salary payments to foster a more equitable and effective institutional environment.

Recommendations

Based on the research objectives, the following are some of the recommendations:

- Increase Staff Involvement in Decision-Making: Implement mechanisms that actively engage staffs in governance processes related to emoluments, ensuring their voices and insights are considered in decision-making.
- Establish Independent Oversight Committees: Create independent committees to oversee staff emoluments, promoting accountability and transparency in compensation practices, and ensuring unbiased decision-making.
- Regular Training on Governance for Management: Introduce ongoing training programs focused on corporate governance principles for university management to enhance their skills and understanding of effective governance practices.
- Improve Communication of Policies: Develop comprehensive communication strategies that clearly outline policies and procedures related to staff emoluments, ensuring all staff are informed and aware of governance decisions.
- Implement Timely Payment Policies: Establish and enforce policies aimed at preventing delays in salary payments, thereby enhancing trust in governance and improving staff satisfaction.
- Government to establish specific funding opportunities for private universities

Recommendations for future research

- Future research should explore the long-term impacts of improved corporate governance practices on staff retention and institutional performance in private universities. Additionally, studies could investigate the effectiveness of specific governance reforms implemented in response to this study's findings. Comparative studies between private and public universities in Zambia could also provide valuable insights into governance practices and their effects on staff emoluments. Finally, qualitative research focusing on individual staff experiences could deepen the understanding of the nuances of governance practices and their impact on employee morale.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest in the interpretation of the results presented in this article to be disclosed.

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