

THE IMPACT OF THE DECISION-MAKING AUTONOMY ON THE MULTI-
CAMPUS UNIVERSITIES' OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the Leaders and Scholars in Higher Education who persist in their pursuit of excellence despite many complexities that characterise the sector. It is my hope that these efforts will contribute to strengthening institutions and advancing systems that upholds integrity while serving both students and society with greater effectiveness.

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF THE DECISION-MAKING AUTONOMY ON THE MULTI-CAMPUS UNIVERSITIES' OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

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The study explores the influence of decision-making autonomy on the operational efficiency of multi-campus higher education institutions in the South African higher education system. Its main objective is to find out the effects of decentralization of decision-making authority on responsiveness, resource distribution and service delivery among campuses located in various locations. A qualitative approach was employed, using a single-embedded case study design. The semi-structured interviews with the institutional leaders and university managers of the chosen university of technology were used to collect data. Thematic analysis revealed common trends and relationships between decision-making practices and operational performance. The result suggests that multi-campus universities tend to be bureaucratic and hierarchical and have delays and lower agility in responding to local operational requirements. It is then established that campuses that have higher autonomy will be able to attain higher turnaround time, better resource allocation and service delivery. But the difficulties arise in case autonomy is not followed by any clear guidance or effective systems of monitoring performance. Overall, the study demonstrates that decision-making is an important element in influencing the efficiency of operations in multi-campus institutions. Realising the attainment of meaningful decentralisation entails a balanced model that reflects autonomy and accountability, capacity and institutional priorities at large.

Keyword: *Decision-Making Autonomy, Multi-Campus Universities, Decentralisation, Operational Efficiency, Higher Education, Higher Education Governance.*

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Universities with multiple campuses are not a novel concept altogether but are becoming popular in the present-day higher education system all over the world (Pinheiro & Berg, 2017). Universities with multiple campuses are progressively emerging as a widespread global trend in the development of higher education. In 1994 following the establishment of a new Government of National Unity, the country's higher education system underwent reforms to rectify the disparities created by the apartheid regime (Chetty, 2010). Subsequent to the research conducted of the feasibility of upgrading the higher education system many institutions were as a result merged. The reform of the higher education system led to a significant rise of the multi-campus arrangements around the whole of South Africa (Delpont et al., 2014). Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that due to the limited experience of leaders in managing this new setting of universities, various challenges arose (Mohuba & Govender, 2016).

In light of this context, the study aims to explore the relationship between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency, while also highlighting the unique challenges faced by a multi-campus university. This study will use single embedded descriptive case study research focusing on a selected university of technology in South Africa. This implies that the data will be analysed using within-case (one selected university) within the multi-campus universities environment (Yin, 2018). The selected university of technology was established in 2004 and has two campuses, one in a metropolitan city and another in a rural area. The metropolitan campus has always been referred to as the main campus hence, the repositioning of the rural campus in terms of relevant and responsive services and operations has become a strategic imperative for the Institution. The selected university of technology initiated a repositioning project for the rural campus to become relevant and more responsive to its mission and objectives as a multi-campus university.

With the advent of multi-campus within the university system, understanding how decision-making autonomy affects operational efficiency is crucial to enable for good governance and resource allocation. To explore the theoretical and practical effects of the decision-making autonomy on different elements of operational efficiency in a multi-campus university, the study utilized literature review and empirical analysis. The study's results have contributed to the existing scholarly work and offered useful insights for university administrators and legislators.

1.2 Background

The landscape of South African Higher Education underwent a restructuring between 2002 and 2005 as guided by the National Plan for Higher Education (Badat, 2009). As noted by the Council on Higher Education, these institutions were given the responsibility of institutional mergers and incorporations to dismantle the unequal and racially divided structure created by the apartheid system (Hall, 2015). Consequently, public higher education institutions dropped from 36 to 26, creating large, geographically dispersed multi-campus universities. Managing multi-campus universities has become increasingly complicated, and this has created a need to rethink how these institutions are governed. Additionally, this then intensified the challenge of managing institutions effectively through a centralized decision-making model, as such making autonomy at campus level a critical area of inquiry (Hall, Symes & Luescher, 2004).

The Department of Higher Education and Training through policies like the White Paper for Post-School Education Training, encourages universities and colleges to strengthen their governance, improve accountability and ensure efficient performance (DHET, 2023). Differences in the setting of different campuses especially between campuses in cities and smaller campuses have also brought the question of autonomy into sharper focus. Additionally, the topic is receiving attention as many countries are moving towards decentralised systems of governance and the approaches in higher education (Bleiklie, 2020). There is also an absence of enough empirical research concentrating on the relationship between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency in multi-campus universities in South Africa.

The study is therefore important in both practical and academic ways. On a practical level, it aims to guide university leaders, policymakers and administrators on how to improve governance systems so that multi-campus institutions can run more efficiently. The results may help create management approaches that are more flexible, responsive and suitable for different campus environments. Socially, making universities operate more efficiently can improve student success, increase equal access to quality education and support development in under-resourced regions.

1.3 Research Problem

The vastness of the landscape of higher education and its complexities particularly around the multi-campus universities setting still poses a significant challenge with regard to connection between autonomy in decision-making and operational efficiency (Rothchild, 2011). As such, though there are studies around the multi-campus universities, there is still a need for the exploration of the specific challenges identified by other scholars especially in a situational context (Kamsteeg, 2008). All the studies available have not ventured into the investigation of how decision-making autonomy affects operational efficiency using a single case study methodology.

The body of knowledge available around the multi-campus universities has focused more on developed institutions and less on other diverse geographics with distinct demographics. If we are to carefully analyse the balance between centralization and decentralization in decision-making, it is important to examine the impact of decision-making autonomy on resource allocation, curriculum development, faculty management, student services and stakeholder engagement within the multi-campus institutions (Meyer & Bushney, 2008). A complete understanding of this complex relationship is important for academics, administrators, legislators and all stakeholders to improve the operational efficiencies of multi-campus institutions thoroughly while ensuring high quality service delivery tailored to a specific situation.

1.4 Purpose of Research

The study aims to develop both theoretical and practical solutions by connecting governance structures with operational performance, as a result contribute to improved efficiency, better responsiveness and long-term sustainability of multi-campus universities of higher education especially in the context of the selected university of technology under study. To achieve this, the study will highlight the texture of the existing governance structures within the multi-campus universities' setting and its decision-making processes.

Additionally, the investigation will realize its objective by identifying the key elements that influence the level of decision-making autonomy in multi-campus universities. Furthermore, by studying how the current governance structures facilitate decision-making and its influences on operational aspects such as how quickly the system responds to queries, how well resources are used, the quality of service provided and how efficiently administrative tasks are handled.

Additionally, it should be emphasised that there is a considerable shortage of recommendations made by researchers on the challenges experienced within the multi-campus universities to help develop models and processes that are efficient. The selection of a single case study approach will assist us to probe deeper and make a meaningful contribution to the existing scholarly work. The study will deeply investigate the relationship and produce outcomes that may be shared as strategic interventions particularly within institutions that share the attributes of the selected university of technology. The objectives of the study will be to:

1. To assess the process of decision making at multi-campus universities.
2. To determine the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities.
3. To evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency
4. To make recommendations to the framework of decision-making at multi-campus universities.

1.5 Research Questions

The primary objective of undertaking this study is to thoroughly investigate the complex relationship between decentralised decision-making and operational efficiency in multi-campus universities. This scholarly work is intended at providing insight into the implications, challenges and potential advantages linked to different levels of autonomy allocated to individual campuses within a multi-campus university system. In particular, it is necessary to tackle the following research questions:

RQ 1. What existing decision-making structures and processes are used in multi-campus universities?

RQ 2. What are the determinants of the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities?

RQ 3. How to evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency?

RQ 4. How to link decision-making autonomy to operational efficiency to establish a framework of decision-making at multi-campus universities?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The research aims to offer important perspectives that would improve the understanding of higher education management, organisational theory and governance models. The study will also shape the policy direction of multi-campus universities and enable administrators to establish efficient governance models. Moreover, it will help explore methods to improve operational efficiency and the impact of decision-making autonomy on various stakeholders. Finally, the study findings will ultimately contribute to the existing knowledge base and recommend other areas to be investigated further.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Introduction

The study uses several important terms to effectively capture the core of the investigation, to ensure there is conceptual clarity and coherence throughout the investigation as such, defining them is essential to ensure proper comprehension. These terms are commonly used in higher education governance, organizational theory and institutional management,

though they can be understood differently from different settings. As a result, this section gives clear and contextually relevant explanations of important terms employed in this research to help in establishing limits and ensuring that readers share the same understanding of terminologies.

Definitions of key terms

A single case study is an empirical research method that deeply examines a contemporary issue in its real-world setting—especially in cases when the boundaries between the subject of investigations and its context are indistinct (Yin, 2018).

Administrative efficiency is defined as the "internal technical efficiency" of the bureaucracy. It involves the optimization of "back-office" processes to ensure that frontline services (like teaching) are not hindered by administrative delays (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017).

Centralization refers to the level of hierarchy where the authority to make decisions is located. Centralization occurs when the majority of decisions are made by the upper level of an organisation (Hall, 1991).

Decentralization refers to how widely decision-making authority is distributed throughout the organisation (Mintzberg, 1979)

Decision-making autonomy is the actual ability of an organization or a subunit to make decisions on its own, which is reflected in the internal distribution of power and the formal rules of governance (Kohtamäki, 2019).

Governance models consist of a set of guidelines, procedures and methods that an institution employs to manage and oversee its activities. It determines who makes decisions, how authority is delegated and how stakeholders are held accountable (Cornforth, 2003).

Higher education reform is a deliberate attempt to change the goals, the structures, or the functions of a higher education system or of an individual institution (Cerych & Sabatier, 1986).

Institutional merger refers to the process where two or more previously independent institutions are integrated into a single organizational entity, operating under a unified governance structure and administrative system (Harman and Meek, 2002).

Multi-campus universities refer to those campuses that are situated in various geographical locations, yet they are governed and managed as one institutional unit (Nicolson, 2004).

Operational efficiency of contemporary HE is said to be so-called managerialism, where the emphasis is on minimizing the "bureaucratic drag" and increasing the rate at which decisions are made to satisfy the stakeholders (students and staff) (De Boer, Enders & Schimank, 2007; Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

Resource allocation is defined as the way decisions are made regarding what is going to be funded and what is not, what departments get more people and how the overall strategic direction of the firm is converted into operational reality by allocating capital (Bower, 1970).

Responsiveness is viewed as the degree to which a system or organization reacts to the preferences or demands of its constituents (Friedman, 1992).

Service delivery is said to depend on responsive decision-making, resource allocation and operational coordination across units (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007).

1.8 Summary

The research is predicated on the background of the reformation of the higher education system and merger of many of the institutions of higher learning which led to a significant rise of the multi-campus arrangements around the whole of South Africa (Delpont et al., 2014). The research aims to explore how decision-making autonomy affects operational efficiency, while also highlighting the unique challenges faced by a multi-campus university. As such, produce both theoretical and practical solutions by connecting governance structures with operational performance, to contribute to improved efficiency, better responsiveness and long-term sustainability of multi-campus universities of higher

education especially within the framework of the selected university of technology under study.

To achieve these objectives, this enquiry will employ a qualitative research approach. It aims to address the research questions outlined in this investigation, using 'single embedded descriptive case study' research focused on a selected university of technology in South Africa. Data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with important stakeholders of the institution, which will also be complemented by internal policy documents. This study will identify patterns and develop themes related to decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency using 'thematic analysis'. Finally, the findings will be interpreted through 'governance models', 'conflict theory' and 'agency theory' to guide policy-making, governance-design and operational strategies in the South African higher education sector.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of the decision-making autonomy on the operational efficiency of multi-campus universities with the aim of producing both theoretical and practical solutions by connecting governance structures with operational performance, as a result contribute to improved efficiency, better responsiveness and long-term sustainability of multi-campus universities of the higher education especially within the framework of the selected university of technology under study. To achieve that objective, this section of the literature review looks at previous scholarly work on decision-making processes, autonomy in higher education, operational efficiency and the multi-campus university environment.

This chapter is structured to facilitate the reader's comprehension of the study area. It begins with explaining key concepts and definitions of the study such as decision-making autonomy, centralisation and decentralization, leadership in higher education, operational efficiency and multi-campus universities. It then discusses the key theories used to analyse the relationship between governance and organizational performance. Furthermore, it reviews the empirical studies that examine decision-making and their effects on organizational efficiency with examples from both global, regional and the South African context. Finally, it points out the gaps in the current literature, demonstrating why this study is necessary and it's fitting into the broader scholarly discourse.

There are three types of higher education institutions classified according to their geographical organisations: single-campus universities, universities with a main campus and one or more smaller sub-campuses, and multi-campus universities—which are composed of multiple campuses located in different geographical locations and which have a large number of students (Niu, 2021). In a multi-campus setting, academic services, resources and support facilities are often shared across different campuses and sometimes duplicated; These are managed through a centralized administrative structure rather than

being concentrated in any one location (Groenwald, 2018). Making decisions, depending on the situation, can be enjoyable or stressful. Decision making is often a solo activity as well as a collaborative effort.

The expectation is that these decision-making processes will take place in face-to-face settings, frequently in a shared room (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020). People can stare into each other's eyes under these circumstances and pick up on things like body language, physical intensity, aloofness, engagement, caution, preparation or avoidance. People have information about themselves that they bring to the situation, information about the circumstances that they are in and varied levels of self-awareness regarding their nonverbal communication (Nwanah *et al.*, 2019).

Most organisations frequently experience meetings with these traits. Most decisions are supported by a multicampus system, however, other cultural factors also come into play, including how the organisation views and exercises authority as well as whether it engages in participatory decision-making. So, there are people and their habits in any room of decision-makers, as well as an organisational culture that has standards for decision-making (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019). To whom does one bow down? How much planning should one expect to accomplish before the meeting? How much freedom do you feel to express yourself? When a decision is being made, who is making it and was it decided by the group in the room or beforehand?

This section aims to explore and comprehend the influence of the decision-making autonomy on the operational efficiency of a multicampus. The literature review highlights the existing gaps in knowledge and contentious challenges that this study aims to tackle, providing new insights to further the objectives of the research. Two primary concepts surfaced from the topic that the literature review seeks to analyse and enhance understanding regarding the study of decision-making autonomy and multi-campus system management.

Nevertheless, talks among researchers on the subject revealed more significant elements. The management of connections and demands becomes more difficult when a college or university operates in various locations and communities. To address this complexity, relatively unproven technology-assisted decision-making methods are frequently used. This research addresses two questions: What are the common problems with decision-making in multi campus higher education and how might organisational design help reduce the effects of those problems?

2.2 Documentation/Inclusion Criteria

This study undertook a systematic and rigorous approach to find suitable academic sources related to decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency in multi-campus universities. Employing a comprehensive approach, the search synthesized existing literature focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents and institutional reports published between 1990 and 2025 with more attention given to studies published from 2010 onwards to ensure the information was current and relevant. The main databases and digital libraries used included Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and EBSCOhost.

Additional material was gathered from the institutional repositories of South African universities. Policy documents and reports were also sourced from organisations such as the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The search involved the use of a combination of keywords using OR and AND operators, e.g. decision-making autonomy, multi-campus universities, higher education governance, decentralization, operational efficiency, and South African higher education, to have a broad coverage.

The inclusion of sources was based on their alignment with the study's objectives, the credibility of the authors or institutions, as well as their fit with the theories and concepts underpinning the research. Priority was given to studies focusing on governance structures, institutional autonomy and efficiency in higher education. Sources were excluded if they were not scholarly or did not relate directly to higher education or organisational efficiency.

Table 2.1 Summary of the Nature and Sources of References

Author(s)	Nature of references	Sources
Adams, Martin, & Boom, (2018).	University culture and framework	<i>Journal of cleaner production Social Responsibility Journal</i>
Pinheiro & Berg, (2017)	Multi-campus universities	<i>Tertiary Education Management International Journal</i>
Nwanah, Sylvester & Okafar, (2019)	Participatory decision-making	<i>International Journal of Business, Economics & Management</i>
Lukman, Balkaran & Makiwane, (2022)	Conflict theory	<i>International Journal of Higher Education</i>
Kivistö & Zalyevska, (2015).	Agency theory	<i>Palgrave International higher education policy and governance</i>
Janssen & Van Der Voort, (2016)	Adaptive governance	<i>Government Information Quartely</i>
Glatter, Bush & Bell, (200).	Governance, autonomy & accountability	<i>The principles and Practice of Education Management</i>
Davies, Hides & Casey, (2001)	Leadership in higher education	<i>Total Quality Management</i>
Claxton-Freeman, (2015)	Operational efficiency	<i>Doctoral Dissertation</i>
Carl & Kapp, (2015)	Performance management	<i>South African Journal of Higher Education</i>

Table 2.2 Documentation of Literature Sources

Source Type	Description of Content	Database/Sources Used
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Empirical and theoretical studies on governance, autonomy, and efficiency in higher education	Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science,
Academic books	Foundational theories (e.g., institutional theory, decentralisation theory)	ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost
Policy documents & reports	National and institutional policies on higher education governance and efficiency	JSTOR, university libraries, Google Scholar
Conference papers, Theses & dissertations	Emerging research and case studies in higher education governance In-depth academic studies related to governance and institutional performance	DHET, CHE, government websites Google Scholar, institutional repositories University repositories, Google Scholar

2.3 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This section contains a theoretical framework covering key theories used as lenses that will help explain how decision-making autonomy influences organizational performance such as the agency theory, governance models and conflict. It further presents the conceptual framework which identifies and defines the study's main variables such as multi-campus university, decision-making, autonomy, operational efficiency, centralization and decentralization and how they find expression within the framework of multi-campus universities in the realm of higher education sector. Both the theoretical and conceptual framework will be used as foundations for interpreting the study's findings and their alignment with the research objectives.

2.3.1 Theoretical framework

AGENCY THEORY

This theory provides the basis through which we are able to understand the connection between principals (main campus) and agents (individual campuses) (Ebuka & Simon-Jude, 2025). It helps with the analysis of how autonomy or lack thereof may lead to conflict of interest in situations decision-making (Kellermanns & Hoy, 2016). It also looks into how agents could act independently without undermining the objectives of the principal. The theory is widely applied in multiple research fields including business, management and accounting to address issues related to corporate governance (Payne & Petrenko, 2019).

GOVERNANCE MODELS

With the governance model as applied to this study, the objective is to understand and improve the processes of governing within the multi-campus universities. The theory will also help to explain how authority, responsibility and decision making operates in an institution (Glatter, Bush & Bell, 2002). It will further assist to develop perception for analysing process, gaps and outcomes linked to organisational decision-making framework in as far as centralisation or decentralisation is concerned. Centralised governance provides standardisation and coordination, enhancing operational consistency but potentially limiting local adaptation.

CONFLICT THEORY

Conflict theorists believe that institutions are environments where interests differ, leading to competition among groups for power, resources and control (Dinye, Boon & Ageboba, 2024; Bosch, 2010; Oberschall, 2010). The theory will be applied to study how power moves between the central office and the campus leaders. It will also help assess whose interests shape decisions, identify where conflicts hinder decisions or create frustration and how such effects operations.

2.3.2 Conceptual framework

MULTI CAMPUS UNIVERSITIES

A multi-campus university can also be referred to as a multi-campus system in this study. At the dawn of the 20th century, multi-campus arrangements started to appear on the organisational landscape of higher education and their development continued up to World War I (Hjelsvold & Bahmani, 2019). Then, because of economic difficulties during the Great Depression, the formation of multi-campus systems soared. Nevertheless, the 1960s were the decade in which multi-campus systems proliferated the most (Pineiro & Berg, 2017). Currently, multi-campus systems predominate in the higher education organisational landscape. Groenwald (2018) said “Students who attend institutions that are a part of a multi-campus system make up at least three-quarters of those who are enrolled in public colleges and universities”.

Multi-campus systems, which are common in countries such as the USA, Australia, and South Africa, are one of several options for organizing the functioning of higher education (Pineiro & Berg, 2017). In the USA alone, a decade ago, nearly 80% of total enrollments in higher education were in multi-campus institutions (Szutz, 1999). According to Dhliwayo (2014), multi-campus universities include higher education institutions that operate two or more campuses; these campuses are located in different geographical areas and together form a single university system. Universities with multiple campuses are context-specific. Sometimes, they develop through the merger of institutions that are legally autonomous and also geographically quite distant from one another (Pineiro, Geschwind & Aarrevaara, 2016).

At other times, single-campus institutions located in large urban areas establish new, geographically dispersed campuses, thereby creating multi-campus universities (Leihy & Salazar, 2012; Pineiro, Charles & Jones, 2017). There are also other examples in which the government establishes an entirely new multi-campus institution or system (Schiller, 2022). Multi-campus arrangements are relatively common, but the scholarly work available on this organisational structure is quite limited, and there is no single, universally

accepted definition or description of multi-campus systems. The definition of a multi-campus university or system can be found in the section below.

MULTI-CAMPUS DEFINITION

A multi-campus system is defined as a group of separate campuses that are brought together under a common governance structure (Lee & Bowen, 1971). According to this definition, multi-campus systems can exist in various forms. An institution with multiple campuses may have campuses that are geographically far apart from each other. In universities with multiple campuses, there may be both large, complex campuses and smaller, more specialized campuses (Lee & Bowen, 1971).

In universities with multiple campuses, the term “campus” refers to a cohesive institutional unit that encompasses all of its main functions within a strategically coordinated framework. According to Pinheiro and Berg (2017), the term “campus” is crucial in the context of multi-campus universities or settings, as it pertains to the coordination at the organizational level for particular functions, activities and strategic alignment. Lee and Bowen (1971) note that universities with multiple campuses consist of “distinct communities” functioning under a single management framework.

Notwithstanding contextual variances, meeting numerous objectives and enhancing coordination under a single management structure are the two main reasons why multi-campus institutions exist. Priority one expectations for multi-campus colleges are to promote specialisation, variety, and coordination (Lee & Bowen, 1971). Diversity in this context refers to the various approaches used by different campuses within a multi-campus university to accomplish common organisational objectives, such as various degree programs. Because of specialisation, each campus is allowed to create its own identity without directly competing with the others.

Through coordination, a multi-campus university can pool resources and create academic and administrative synergies that are not achievable in a single-campus institution. Several scholars categorise the different multi-campus systems into typologies to bring structure and aid in the examination of this organisational model (Pinheiro & Berg, 2017). This

overview provides a concise description of the typologies, highlighting the intricate nature of the multi-campus system organization. Creswell et al. 's (1985) typology is founded on four distinct organisational and administrative characteristics. “The first characteristic is whether the system is under public or private control.

The second characteristic concerns the authority of the governing board. If the multi-campus system operates on a statewide level, it will fall under the authority of a governing board at the state level. If the multi-campus system is not state-wide, it and any other existing multi-campus systems will be coordinated solely at the state level, with each system maintaining its own governing board. The third characteristic in Creswell et al. (1985)’s typology pertains to the comparability of campuses within the multi-campus system. A diverse multi-campus system would consist of institutions with varying missions.

A multi-campus system that includes both doctoral-granting institutions and community colleges can be viewed as a heterogeneous system (Creswell et al., 1985). A uniform system would consist of similar institutions. Creswell et al. (1985) uphold this characteristic by confining the typology to two categories: institutions that encompass both junior and senior level institutions, or those that include only junior or solely senior level institutions. The fourth and final characteristic of Creswell et al.’s typology pertains to the administrative structure of the system and whether the flagship chief executive officer heads the system office or if it is headed by a separate entity with its own chief executive officer.”

MULTI-CAMPUS SYSTEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Since 1994, the higher education sector in South Africa has experienced substantial changes. By a number of mergers and incorporations, the national policy environment has reduced the number of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 (Miranda & Mgijima, 2014). In South Africa, higher education reform has led to a considerable increase in multi-campus universities. However, due to these universities’ limited management skills, providing skills with high quality education might be difficult (Atibuni, 2019).

The Cabinet of National Unity promoted restructuring the nation's higher education system in response to political changes in South Africa in 1994 to address historical inequities (Chetty, 2010). Investigations into the possibilities of reforming the higher education system led to a wave of mergers across the industry (Zinkovsky, & Derkachev, 2018). Universities, Technikons, and colleges in South Africa were combined between 2001 and 2007 as part of an effort to enhance the nation's higher education system (Lethoko, 2016). The reform of higher education in South Africa has led to a notable rise in the number of multi-campus universities in the country. These universities, however, lack managerial experience with such systems, which can present several difficulties (Mohuba & Govender, 2016).

However, the national merger and incorporation policy document offered a general perspective on the importance of effective governance as seen by institutional leaders, yet it did not specify the kind of leadership required to guide the process (Chipunza & Gwarinda, 2010). This study focused on a selected university of technology in South Africa. The selected university of technology was established in 2004 and has two campuses, one in a metropolitan city and the other in a rural area. The metropolitan city campus has always been considered to be the main campus hence, the repositioning of the rural-based campus in terms of relevant and responsive services and operations, has become a strategic imperative for the Institution. This university initiated a repositioning project to become relevant and more responsive to its mission and objectives as a multi-campus university.

2.4 Functions and Roles of Multi-Campus Universities

Pinheiro, Charles and Jones (2017) highlights that the focus in this context should not be on debating the existence of multi-campus universities, but rather on the design and structure of these systems to effectively encourage, assist and maintain higher education institutions characterized by both volatility and diversity. Furthermore, within a multicampus university, the system should set well defined goals that align with both external (state and society) and internal (system) priorities. It is essential to strive for a

balance between these two roles: advocating for societal interests within academia, while also conveying the academic perspective to society.

Johnstone (1999) presents a more optimistic perspective, highlighting that the primary role of the central administrative entities within a multi-campus university/system are to:

- “hire and dismiss senior management (chief executive officers) responsible for both the system (central level) and the campuses (local level);
- represent the system’s interests to external actors like government, industry, etc.;
- articulate, centrally and locally, the core premises (e.g. equity, efficiency, etc.) behind governmental regulations;
- assign financial resources to the various campuses;
- arbitrate disputes between campuses, e.g. around local programs and missions;
- ensure quality control and the efficient management of resources targeting teaching, research and support activities;
- stimulate collaboration between campuses when it comes to measures aimed at cutting costs and increasing efficiency, but also to allow students greater choices by ensuring that certain types of studies (e.g. arts and humanities) are retained within the system”.

Johnstone’s (1999) mainly looks at multi-campus institutions. Nonetheless, we find it informative in relation to the different tensions that exist between central office and the satellite (campus) within multi-campus universities. Johnstone (1999) asserts that a key function of central management is to delegate responsibilities to individual campuses, thereby fostering local autonomy and shaping distinct profiles in areas such as student demographics, educational offerings, research initiatives and outreach efforts. A fundamental challenge faced by multi-campus universities is achieving an appropriate equilibrium between centralisation and the independence of each campus (Pinheiro & Berg, 2017).

2.4.1 Multi-campus university characteristics compared with single-campus universities.

The following characteristics distinguish multi campus universities from those with a single campus:

- In addition to having at least two additional campuses, multi-campus institutions also include geographically separated campuses.
- The universities' mergers and expansions have made the discipline more comprehensive than it was previously. More subject coverage and a greater variety of disciplines are typically indicators of rising discipline numbers. Also, universities are more thorough.
- In multi-campus colleges, the managerial complexity and cultural variety are apparent. Each of the amalgamated universities had developed its own campus culture as a result of the differences in tradition, disciplinary organisation, and management style. It would be very distinct from other campuses.
- The magnitude of multicampus institutions is typically much larger than that of single-campus universities due to the merging and expansion. In multi-campus universities, both the staff and student populations have significantly increased.

Therefore, multi-campus universities may be characterized as distributed, comprehensive, intricate, and expansive. This speaks to universities with decentralized campuses, comprehensive academic programs, complex organizational structures and a substantial faculty. The strategic planning, management and development of multi-campus universities should be guided by the aforementioned characteristics. It is an essential prerequisite for the attainment of coordinated development within multi-campus universities.

2.5 Challenges in Multi-Campus Universities

Ensuring uniformity in actions across the institution and articulating a vision and strategy that connects with every tier of the business, irrespective of its structure, presents significant challenges for leaders (Serfontein, 2010). Managing from a distance presents clear challenges, including overseeing facilities, personnel, students and communities that are not within the leader's immediate view. Within the framework of a university or institution with multiple campuses, these challenges are further compounded. However, the more nuanced issues related to authority, autonomy, communication and culture tend to be the most frustrating, difficult and often the root causes of dysfunction or failure. These represent various challenges encountered in the administration of multi-campus universities. The conclusions regarding those issues are as follows:

2.5.1 Power and autonomy

According to Fraser and Stott (2015), the primary issue is the level of autonomy or the extent of decision-making power that campus leaders possess regarding their respective campuses within the multi-campus university setting. The organisational structure of the institution, as well as its culture and operating procedures, all influence the level of autonomy. Decision-making and the idea of autonomy are the most commonly mentioned difficulties in the literature addressing leadership issues in multi-campus institutions, which are the multi-institution systems (Pinheiro & Berg, 2017).

Challenges related to power and autonomy can lead to conflicts in systems where a central office manages multiple campuses, particularly within the arrangement of multi-campus, multi-state universities or in the dynamics between a main campus and its satellite campuses. The primary issue at hand revolves around who has the authority to determine the allocation of resources. When a central figure or entity makes financial decisions that do not align with the needs or desires of the campuses, tensions arise (Hartman, 1977).

2.5.2 Centralisation and decentralisation of decision making.

The issue of supervising patterns centres on the decision-making process regarding centralisation versus decentralisation in the management of multi-campus universities. The management theory suggests that the centralisation mode offers the benefit of a cohesive arrangement of district resources across the entire university (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2016). Nonetheless, this may lead to a considerable rise in management expenses associated with overseeing the range. If campuses are granted enough autonomy this would substantially improve institutional operational performance. Among the most significant challenges of a multi-campus university is the unequal distribution of resources and program quality mix that does not speak to the context of the campuses and ultimately undermines the vision of one institution but multiple campuses.

2.5.3 Quality assurance

The execution of educational standards, as well as continuing evaluation and adjustments to programs, curricula, and courses, are all the leader's responsibility. This responsibility is exacerbated by the fact that there are several campuses. The services and education provided by the campuses must adhere to the national standards and requirements. Universities with a central administration demand that all campuses share a common objective and vision as well as a consistent student experience, value of the degree and services.

Without a robust central leadership or well-established processes and communication, campuses tend to cultivate their own distinct cultures and interpretations of policies. This phenomenon can lead to inconsistencies in teaching practices, academic results and the enforcement of academic policies at different sites (Fraser & Stott, 2015). The evaluation of initiatives, programs and outcomes presents increased difficulties in the presence of inconsistencies across campuses.

2.5.4 The approval of campus requests to add or dissolve academic programs.

It is as if academic administrators and faculty aim to develop programs that align with changes in academic disciplines and the workforce, as well as their perception of shifting

student demand (Cox, 2019). The academics and institutional leaders are also in the most excellent position to determine when such a change should be implemented. Yet, the system board and management must take into account other interests. The enrolment of another member university, or even enrolment at colleges or universities outside the system but serving the state's greater public interests, could be significantly impacted by the proposed new program, for instance. Insufficient resources might hinder the establishment of a program that meets academic standards, or reallocating the proposed resources could potentially undermine other existing programs (Dinye, 2018).

2.5.5 Resources integration and running costs.

The primary objectives of multi-campus universities involve resource reorganization and enhancing operational efficiency. The personnel, financial resources, equipment, literature, and physical space of schools contribute to the growth of multi-campus universities, yet the primary objective of management remains the pursuit of economies of scale. Throughout the period of expansion and merging, investments exceeding a billion dollars are allocated to land expropriation, construction planning, design, and building activities. Upon the establishment of universities, substantial financial resources are required for transportation between campuses, the repeated acquisition of equipment and books at each location, the organization of quality educational activities, and the construction of communication facilities (Dinye, 2018).

2.6 Leadership and Culture

One of the difficulties in a multi-campus environment is integrating diverse cultures. Institutional cultures are by themselves a representation of their brands (Adams, Martins & Boom, 2018). This brand is shaped by tangible aspects like distinctive buildings, the campus environment and teaching and research facilities, as well as intangible factors such as renowned faculty and the established styles of learning and instruction that have developed over time (Hamed, Jamil & Rafiq, 2022). The presence of an effective leader is important for ensuring that everyone in the organization understands and spreads the organisation's mission, values and vision (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). It's common for

people who share the same space to benefit from each other by exchanging ideas and information (Becker, 2001). As a result, a leader functioning in an institution with one campus can more efficiently utilize the shared context to direct individuals towards a common understanding of goals and strategy.

If there is no proper leadership and communication, multi-campus institutions may fail to achieve their common objectives (Groenwald, 2018). It must also be understood that individual campuses are able to develop their own contextual cultures different from the one of the institutions. This is due to the fact that faculties and students at remote campuses, every now and then experience a sense of disconnection from the culture and mission of the main campus (Nunez, Cisneros & Pena, 2024). Most times, leadership at the main campus seem not to appreciate the distinct nature of challenges that confront the satellite campus (Groenwald, 2018). Students in remote campuses who share programs with the main campus may feel differently treated and supported and academic staff as well may not feel unappreciated. As such instead of working together, campuses may end up competing with each other which leads to hostility between two campuses which in turn result in inability to achieve strategic objectives of the institution (Fraser & Stott, 2015).

2.6.1 Leadership in higher education.

The role of Higher Education institutions in shaping learners who eventually assume leadership positions in broader society has received heightened scholarly attention in recent years (Black, 2015). This interest has been fuelled by the shifting nature of leadership within these institutions and the global pressures influencing the sector. In recent decades, the Higher Education sector has undergone significant changes. These transformations include the internationalisation of universities, the expanding global market for education, the emergence of private for-profit providers, reductions in public funding and the accelerating movement of students and academics across the borders. Together, these developments have reshaped how leadership is understood, practiced and studied within the higher education landscape (Black, 2015).

Leaders in HE institutions must find the finest leadership approach as they consider how to manage their teams better and which techniques work best in the HE setting. This is not simple, though as there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of leadership and the concurrent and occasionally entwined development of leadership philosophies further complicates the situation (Gigliotti, 2019). While traditional senior executive positions, such as vice chancellor, chief executive, president, vice chancellor, and pro-vice chancellor, are popular with executives and frequently have issues like the transient nature of role-holders, there are several anomalies in leadership roles in academic institutions (Gonaim, 2019).

Additionally, historically, a senior or established professor may be assigned an academic function as "first among equals" under particular circumstances, practically on an honorary basis (Davies, Hides & Casey, 2001). According to Astin and Astin (2000), faculty jobs typically mix the roles of educator, scholar, researcher and institutional citizen, all of which include some type of leadership obligation that is either officially or implicitly stipulated within the function. Scholars may also take on further external leadership positions within subject discipline peer groups, research collaboration project teams and external professional organizations (Gonaim, 2019).

Management and higher education experts are paying more attention to leadership in higher education institutions (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). For many years, experts have crafted various methodologies to elucidate (and cultivate) effective leadership, emphasizing individual characteristics alongside diverse behavioural patterns and strategies, or considering them as influenced by distinct contextual elements. Various leadership principles have surfaced approximately every ten years, reflecting trends in management theory alongside shifts in society. In the words of Taylor and de Lourdes Machado (2008): "Leadership is a complex process consumed by the complications of timing, circumstances and individuals".

Without any formal qualifications or training for such jobs, senior managers and leaders in higher education institutions are still frequently selected from the ranks of the academic community. Both administrative leaders and professorial leadership, which focuses on

intellectual leadership and mentoring by senior academics, can be said to possess this quality. For professional higher education managers, there is a relatively active job market in nations like the US, UK, and Australia. Formal training programs and advanced degrees are available for management and leadership within the higher education sector. Esen et al. (2020) demonstrate in their literature review of prominent higher education journals over a span of 20 years (1995 – 2014) that most articles originate from authors based in the US, the UK, and Australia, highlighting a geographical imbalance in the representation of leadership within higher education.

With the growing emphasis on leadership roles and the necessity for well-prepared leaders in higher education, it is important for higher education institutions to undertake the responsibility of equipping academics with leadership development skills. More investigation is also required on how performance evaluations and organisational outcomes in higher education are related to leadership development (Dopson *et al.*, 2019). Of course, there are issues with leadership in higher education institutions both locally and worldwide, including in South Africa.

2.6.2 Higher education leadership in South Africa

While South Africa has some history of universities with more than one campus, many other African countries such as Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, still face serious challenges in their higher education systems (Dinye, 2018; Langa, 2017; Munene, 2015; Dhliwayo, 2014). The difficulties encompass a range of factors, including heightened demand for access, the utilization of technology, financial limitations, competition both within and between institutions and governmental requirements. There is sufficient evidence to show that the growth of higher education has primarily involved the establishment of institutions and programmes which are similar to the existing ones, as the required technology and finance to diversify is lacking (Langa, 2017).

It has increasingly become difficult to run higher education institutions in South Africa (Mabelebele, 2013). To serve humanity and society, higher education institutions lay the

foundation for successful employment while instilling social responsibility in their students and staff as they also contribute to the body of knowledge (Gumede, 2015). A study involving several higher education institutions reveals that a budget is needed for the personal development and capacitation of multi-campus leaders (Leibowitz et al., 2015). According to Teferra (2015), many of such institutions do not take leadership development seriously which then in turn leads to poor leadership competencies displayed.

Well known researchers and academics in higher education studies in South Africa such as Badat (2009), Pityana (2008) and Habib (2019), explains the concept of social justice as a critical tool for the transformation of the post-apartheid university in addressing challenges related to poverty, underdevelopment and inequality. South Africa as a society has deep rooted forms of inequality mostly based on race, gender, class and gender. As such, for the country to redress the ills of the past system of government widely and effectively, it needs to strategically make higher education and training accessible especially to the previously disadvantaged people's group as proposed by public participation outcomes (National Development Plan 2012).

The South African universities landscape with its legacy of colonialism and apartheid presents unique and complex challenges to those who are saddled with the responsibility of leading and managing these institutions especially also considering the systemic segregation thereof (Seale & Cross, 2016). In order to secure economic growth and development, societal equity and stability, the higher education sector in South Africa had to undergo broad and comprehensive reform in response to the nation's developmental, economic, and societal needs (Seale & Cross, 2016). Although South Africa's higher education policy structure may not be much different from other higher education systems across the world, the historical setting and current socioeconomic disparities have led to a unique set of issues in South African higher education (Walters & Helman, 2020).

If left unattended, this can and frequently does result in situations of chaos and disorder, which are frequently seen as threats to the university. Chaos and disorder, when seen from a complexity perspective, are inevitable occurrences that create favourable circumstances for effective leadership (Clarke, 2013). In the university setting, complexity should be

recognised as essential because this perspective will enable leaders to transcend bureaucracy and enable leadership, which is a complex interaction dynamic through which adaptation is performed (Walters & Helman, 2020).

2.6.3 Collaboration and communication

Institutional leaders based at the main campus need to ensure that they promote collaborations between two campuses to enhance campus integration and develop a common vision. In order to secure support from campuses, the institution needs to form committees across campuses as an effective strategy for decision-making, collaboration and communication (Lu, Laux & Anthony, 2017). To promote an inclusive and participatory culture, it is important to develop a process that will allow the committees to collect data across the faculty to inform decision-making while ensuring that these decisions are communicated across every campus (Gillies & Dupuis, 2016).

This they can do by developing information and communication technology systems such as institutional intranets, employee portals, mobile technology and web-based communications, eliminating geographical, temporal and organizational barriers, to ease knowledge transfer and communication between faculty, staff and students (Dintoe, 2018). The process of capturing information in a knowledge management system alone is not sufficient, it is also essential to make it available to decision-makers (Becker, 2001). The overall success of an intervention is thus dependent on how well users are able to absorb and adapt the information.

2.7 Blended Learning Approach to Teaching and Learning in Multi-Campus Institutions

The teaching and learning through ICTs in multi-campus universities is mostly associated with the methodology of blended and hybrid learning (Okoye & Pillay, 2022). The modern conception of blended learning is an integrated learning approach that combines the two modes of instruction which is face-to-face and online (Niyomves, Kunacheva & Sutadarat, 2024). This can be done through both face-to-face modes as well as through virtual

activities in course design and is ultimately dependent on the educational context and the information technology tools (Okoye & Pillay, 2022).

There are several platforms through which blended learning can be administered such as Moodle, Google, Blackboard, Microsoft Teams, Rcampus, and Learnopia and can be accessed through computers, tablets and mobile devices (Poon & Tang, 2024). The blended learning method can support different educational technologies such as pre-recorded video lectures, collaboration software, electronic forums, mixed reality, video games and simulations (Poon & Tang, 2024). Both traditional and multi-campus universities in South Africa have adopted the blended learning methodology though others are still facing some resource constraints (Majola, 2021).

2.8 Decision Making

As traced by Gigalová (2017) for many years decision-making has often been regarded as a result of creativity, intuition and past experience. Formerly, effective decision making was erroneously attributed only to good interpersonal skills as opposed to a thorough process of logical and analytical thinking (Turban *et al.*, 2010). As historically seen, decision making plays has been crucial to an organisation's performance and as such, serves as a determinant for either its success or failure. In decision making, we systematically identify not only gaps but also opportunities to inform our course of action in determining the best alternative which will minimise the risks and employ resources efficiently (Aliev & Huseynov, 2014). According to Aven (2009) decision making should be classified based on the envisaged impact, how often the event under scrutiny occurs and the risk involved in carrying out a particular decision.

Again, it is equally critical to highlight that decision making is a key factor in how organisations perform, how innovative they are and determine if they have leverage in as far as competitive advantage is concerned (Wingwon, 2012). Additionally, it is how institutions translate vision into a reality, uses its resources optimally and manage the risks involved thereof. Furthermore, strong decision-making aptitude will ensure the success of an institution whereas weak decisions can collapse even the most promising of all

enterprises (Amankwah-Amoah, 2015). Consequently, a thorough decision must consistently rely on factors evaluated within a specific level of uncertainty (Aliev & Huseynov, 2014).

2.8.1 Decisions in a multi-campus university

Leading a multi-campus university presents complex challenges as decision makers need to accommodate differing interests of all the campuses not only in the decision-making process but also through the outcome of the decision without compromising on institutional strategic goals (Groenwald, 2018). So, an ideal decision-making framework is that which finds a balance between system integration and local responsiveness (Pinheiro & Berg, 2017). Centralization and decentralization have both advantages and disadvantages that is why it is important for leaders of multi-campus universities to strike a balance on the autonomy given to satellite campuses and the institutional strategy (Timberlake, 2004).

Additionally, how decision-making structures are composed also plays a significant role in the quality and effectiveness of the decisions taken (Shrestha, Ben-Menahem & Von Krogh, 2019). Thus, those managing multi-campus universities need to ensure that both operational and strategic decisions are well conceived and executed (Dinye, 2016). To get people on board, improved planning mechanisms are needed as strategic decision-making output. Moreover, to make effective operational decisions, you need an environment that allows for rapid and timely decision-making (Elugbaju, Okeke & Alabi, 2024). Timberlake (2004) asserts that a determinant that distinguishes leaders of multi-campus institutions in decision-making is their adherence to: a) the significance of cultivating relationship-building skills; b) the capacity to oversee participatory decision-making and its components and c) the skill to handle paradoxes or polarities.

In the words of Delport (2008), “attracting and retaining the best staff and students requires an allocation system that rewards excellence, allows for decentralised decision-making and makes bottom-up growth of centres of excellence possible. It is a delicate balance that can be reached not by top-down command but by inspiring leadership of the flag-waving type.

Such steering is driven by a broadly shared vision over the years, slowly embedded in the corporate culture of the institution”.

2.8.2 Autonomy and authority in the multi-campus universities

In addition to these physical characteristics of decision making, the cultural norms and organisational quirks, organisational structure is an additional challenging issue in comprehending decision making. In certain businesses, decision-making is centralised and organised hierarchically, frequently in areas where key decision-makers can interact face-to-face. Some businesses with several locations will decentralise decision-making, giving local employees more freedom (Ifeanyi, 2023). Successful organisations will consciously or not choose a path somewhere on this suggested continuum and develop structures and practices that work because people agree to make them work either through willing acceptance of the norms, through coercion or because of forces within those two extremes.

Successful organisations develop clarity about which kinds of decisions can be made by whom and what responsibilities individuals have to other individuals (Morgan & Strong, 2003). Within the realm of public higher education, autonomy signifies the delegation of authority from the state to the institution—or, as will be explored in this chapter, to a network of institutions representing the state (or the collective interest), which may subsequently pass this authority (or not) to the individual institutions or campuses that comprise the system. Hence, autonomy in public higher education is fundamentally a requirement for freedom from governmental control (Wang, 2010).

Every educational institution, regardless of its specialisations, should have as its primary purpose the development of a learning environment that provides students with opportunities to acquire meaningful and easily accessible knowledge and skills. The development of such an environment, the distinctive goal of colleges and universities, is a significant function of leadership. How much autonomy should be allowed to the administrator who seeks to build a learning environment?

Decentralised decision-making typically arises as a new multi-unit system recognises and develops these activities, starting with role definition and moving on to more difficult tasks

like balancing internal and external power structures. The administrative group is initially given less autonomy by the chief executive and his board of trustees and is subjected to stricter oversight. When the staff demonstrates, for instance, that it can withstand both external pressures (doubts and misperceptions circulating in the greater community) and internal jealousies from within the organisation, more responsibility and authority are awarded as the staff develops in its assignment.

2.9 Summary

The literature review of this research addresses questions such as: What are the common problems with decision-making in multicampus higher education, and how might organisational design help reduce the effects of those problems? The research highlights the organisation of the academic side of a multicampus system and its association with decision-making processes throughout the entire organisation. Autonomy and centralisation are a polarised dynamic that creates tension in multicampus higher education environments, and this tension can be unproductive and destructive. Leaders exert a tremendous influence on the culture of multicampus higher education institutions. This chapter looked at the difficulties encountered by leaders in multi-campus institutions and how they impact on performance. The next chapter will then focus on the methodology, data collection methods, data analysis, validity and reliability of the study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research method employed to examine the effects of decision-making autonomy on the operational efficiency of multi-campus universities at a selected university of technology in South Africa. Due to the vastness of the landscape of higher education and its complexities particularly around the multi-campus universities setting, there still exists a significant challenge regarding the connection between decision making autonomy and operational efficiency (Rothchild, 2011). Managing multi-campus universities has become increasingly complicated, and this has created a need to rethink how these institutions are governed.

Additionally, this then intensified the challenge of managing institutions effectively through a centralized decision-making model, as such making autonomy at campus level a critical area of inquiry (Hall, Symes & Luescher, 2004). As such, though there are studies around the multi-campus universities, there is still a need for the exploration of the specific challenges identified by other scholars especially in a situational context (Kamsteeg, 2008). All the studies available have not ventured into the investigation of how decision-making autonomy affects operational efficiency using a single case study methodology.

The study aims to develop both theoretical and practical solutions by connecting governance structures with operational performance, as a result contribute to improved efficiency, better responsiveness and long-term sustainability of multi-campus universities of higher education especially within the framework of the selected university of technology under study. To achieve this, the research seeks to highlight the texture of the existing governance structures within the multi-campus universities' setting and its decision-making processes.

This chapter introduced the concept of research methodology implemented in this study. It provides a narrative on the research design, target population, sample size, sampling methods, data collection methods, questionnaire design and data analysis used in the study.

Additionally, it discusses ethical compliance, validity and reliability to ensure and enhance the credibility and integrity of the research process. Ultimately, the section shows how the choice of the methodology aligns with the objectives of the study. The following research questions need to be addressed:

RQ 1. What existing decision-making structures and processes are used in multi-campus universities?

RQ 2. What are the determinants of the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities?

RQ 3. How to evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency?

RQ 4. How can decision-making autonomy be linked to operational efficiency to establish a framework for decision-making at multi-campus universities?

3.2 Research Method and Design

To address the research questions outlined in this study, a qualitative approach is employed. There is not much scholarly work on the subject of multi-campus let alone the aspects of autonomy in decision making and how it affects operations. The literature gaps and the subject of investigation led to the obvious choice of a qualitative design which enabled the exploration and interpretation of complex governance processes, leadership experiences and institutional practices. The phenomenon of decision-making autonomy is inherently subjective, context-dependent and shaped by organisational structures, individual perceptions and institutional culture and as such, quantitative methods alone would have been insufficient as they focus primarily on measurement and generalization rather than depth and meaning.

The paradigm underpinning this study is interpretivism which emphasises the comprehension of the meaning, experiences and perspectives of individuals within their social and organisational contexts (Saunders et al., 2018; Creswell, 2013). Through this method, the researcher gained insight into how campus principals, administrators and academic heads interpret autonomy, what meanings they attach to it and how these meanings shape their responses to institutional challenges. The paradigm acknowledged

that multi-campus universities in South Africa function within a diverse socio-economic and cultural context as such was able to avoid overgeneralization by ensuring that results are based on the real-life experiences of the respondents. The researcher could not employ positivism as it only assumes that organisational realities can be measured. Furthermore, critical theory was not applicable for this study as it was going to be confined to uncovering inequalities and power struggles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

A single case study complements this paradigm by situating findings within the lived realities of one university, thereby producing contextually rich and interpretive knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The choice of the selected university of technology was motivated by the fact that it is undergoing repositioning at its satellite campus and as such, it is willing to self-reflect and examine its challenges in a one comprehensive institutional context, making it a rich information intensive example. The research approach enables the researcher to look into the various units of the multi-campus university due to how participants are selected for sampling which affords expression to differing perspectives. Due to the fact that the study does not want to generalize findings through statistical determinations, it is therefore important to adopt this in-depth approach to the profoundly contextual process of decision-making to offer theoretical and practical insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The study will use semi-structured interviews to gain a more comprehensive insight into how decision-making autonomy affects operations to unearth complex issues which are based on a specific context which could not be investigated through structured interviews (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Additionally, the researcher will employ exploratory research to unpack complex decision-making processes in a multi-campus university. The study's results will provide a basis for the subsequent work and will also offer a blueprint for the implementation of practical solutions (Sakyi, Musona & Mweshi, 2020).

In the research, a triangulation strategy is used to enhance the study's credibility. The approach is used to improve the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings (Cohen, 2000). Using a range of techniques, triangulation aids in the exploration and explanation of complicated human behaviour to provide readers with a more impartial understanding of the subject (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023).

3.3 Population and Sample

3.3.1 Population

Following the definition Mills and Gay (2016), the study population is defined by individuals and elements which possess unique attributes that are critical for this study. For this research, the target population involves academic and administrative personnel stationed at a satellite of the multi-campus of the selected university of technology in South Africa, with its main campus located in a metropolitan area whereas its satellite campus is based in a rural area. This population was selected because it comprises individuals in leadership and management roles at this university who are directly involved in governance processes, policy implementation and decision-making structures that shape the institution's operational efficiency. As such, they represent the most appropriate group to respond to the study's problem and purpose, which aimed to explore the impact of decision-making autonomy on institutional efficiency in a multi-campus university context.

The population included 50 leaders and managers in the academic and administration sections of the campus. This consisted of campus principals, deans, academic and department managers, senior administrators, support service directors and governing forum members. It was felt that as part of different layers of university governance, these individuals had understanding of how the autonomy (or lack of it) manifested itself in a number of areas of daily operations, through to long term planning and the service provision to the students, therefore their roles provided the research team with an informed view of multi-campus issues around autonomy.

It is important to differentiate between the population and the sample. While the population encompassed all of the selected university of technology's academic and administrative

leaders involved in decision-making, the sample consisted of few purposely selected participants. These included campus principals, departmental managers, administrators and governing body representatives who were selected for their strategic positions and ability to provide rich, diverse and relevant insights into governance and operational practices. This purposive sampling approach ensured that participants were information-rich cases capable of addressing the research questions in depth (Patton, 2015).

The selected population therefore was ideally suited for this study, which had as its undertaking to explore the relationship between decision-making autonomy and the efficiency of the multi-campus university's operations. Making institutional leaders who served within the governance structures of the selected university of technology the target population of the study, was therefore appropriate as it led to the generation of contextually rooted perceptions elucidating the reality of decision-making processes in South African higher education multi-campus universities.

3.3.2 Sample

In this research, the participants were chosen from the population of academic and administrative leaders at the selected university of technology in South Africa, using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique that enables the researcher to deliberately select information rich participants who are most knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Given that the research aimed to investigate perceptions, experiences and practices of institutional leaders who are directly engaged in the decision-making and operation management processes, this approach was suitable.

From the study population, 15 (N=15) study participants were purposely selected to reflect the diversity of perspectives across institutional roles who can provide reliable and useful information to answer the research questions or fulfil research objectives (Hassan, 2024). Potential participants were approached through formal invitations, and only those who expressed a willingness to engage in in-depth interviews were included. They were made

to commit through the invitation letters and the signing of an informed consent form. Participants included:

- Campus Principals (responsible for governance at satellite campuses)
- Departmental Managers (in charge of academic and administrative units)
- Faculty Administrators (deans stationed at satellite campuses)
- Members of Governing Bodies (e.g., institutional forum chairpersons)
- Senior Administrators (e.g., directors of support services, employee relations specialists)

As part of being selected for this study the respondents were required to be in leadership or management positions in the selected university of technology and be able to represent their unit as diversity of views, be responsible for decision making (direct or indirect) and have at least five years of working in higher education in a multi-campus environment to have a reasonable knowledge of the university setting.

Purposive sampling was justified because the study's objective was not to generalize findings to all higher education institutions but rather to obtain in-depth, context-specific insights into decision-making autonomy at the selected university of technology. A sample size of 15 participants proved adequate for achieving data saturation, which is characterized by the point in data collection where no additional themes or concepts emerged during the interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The sample size aligns with the purposive sampling guidelines for qualitative case studies, which advocate for smaller, information-dense samples (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Participants were identified by the researcher who had access to the institutional email directory as an employee of the same organisation. Recruitment was conducted through formal email invitations sent to potential participants' institutional addresses. The study's purpose, confidentiality measures and voluntary participation were detailed in the email. Phone calls were subsequently made to verify the participant's willingness and arrange interview times. Before data collection, informed consent forms were distributed to all

participants. The study employed the abbreviation "SP" for study participants to denote the officials and utilised alphanumerical "1,2,3, etc" characters to distinguish them from each other. The SP will be utilised in the results section to do a thorough analyses of the adopted categories for participation.

This sampling procedure could be repeated by another researcher using the same method to verify results as follows:

1. Find a multi-campus university with a similar governance structure.
2. Use institutional directories to find leaders in academic and administrative areas.
3. Employ the criteria (leadership/management roles, decision-making responsibility, ≥ 5 years' higher education experience).
4. Send the institutional email invitations and follow any consent procedures required.
5. Sample until data saturation has been achieved, which is often at 12-15 participants, although may be larger. The resulting sample was deemed purposively relevant to the research aims and realistically accessible within the limits of ethical and organizational considerations.

3.4 Instrumentation

Through the triangulation of a number of data sources and instruments, the study sought to provide a thorough analysis of how decision-making autonomy impacts the operational efficiency or performance of multi-campus universities. Instruments included archived institutional data, a researcher's developed semi-structured interview protocol and supporting institutional documents. This triangulation strengthened the validity and credibility of the findings (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Content analysis of records produced by the selected university of technology for governance, accountability and compliance with South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was employed. Records included policy documents, annual reports, strategic plans and governance documents. This helped to contextualize the views of the research participants. The study's validity was supported by using archival

sources to triangulate the information obtained through interviews (Bowen, 2009) and the reliability of the findings was improved by the use of official, standardized documents produced in university processes.

The study did not use any standardized published survey instruments since it was qualitative and exploratory in nature. Because the constructs were studied in this qualitative exploratory research, measurement scales were not used for the individual constructs. Thus, the contents of the interview guide were constructed based on published literature and theoretical frameworks to ensure content validity (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The principal instrument developed for this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to channel conversations with campus principals, academic heads, administrators and governing body members. The interview guide was development through the following three steps process:

1. Literature Review: Existing literature review on multi-campus universities, decision making, autonomy and efficiency (e.g., Pinheiro & Berg, (2017); Groenwald, 2018) were reviewed to identify relevant constructs.
2. Alignment with Research Questions: Questions were mapped to the study's three core research questions that lead to the five thematic domains.
3. Expert Input: The interview instrument was reviewed by two academic mentors in higher education management for clarity, scope and alignment with qualitative interviewing best practices.

The final product consisted of 15 semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to elicit rich descriptions of participant experiences. A copy of the interview questions is provided in Appendix C.

The instrument successfully enabled the researcher to remain focused, organised and flexible during the interviews. It provided the participants with the space to speak openly and clarify their responses, which made it possible to gain deeper insight into decision-making autonomy in multi-campus university and its influence on operational efficiency (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This approach also supported the researcher in gathering the

knowledge and experiences of institutional leaders and in interpreting the meaning behind their accounts. The questions were constructed to reflect the conceptual framework (agency theory, governance models & conflict theory) and to allow participants to discuss both challenges and opportunities in decision-making autonomy. This approach enhanced content validity by ensuring coverage of all major themes while also allowing for emergent, participant-driven insights.

The study did not require any specialised devices except for the standard qualitative data collection tools. The data collection exercise was facilitated through Microsoft Teams on a Dell 5330 laptop leveraging its built-in scheduling, recording and transcription functions. To ensure efficiency and accuracy in data capturing, the digital records were also supplemented with manual field notes. The recordings were later transcribed word-by-word into Microsoft Word for formal analysis. The data files were also kept through secure cloud storage and encrypted external drives for safeguarding recordings and transcripts. Transcriptions were analysed manually to facilitate systematic coding, theme development and retrieval of relevant text segments. This apparatus contributed to reliability by ensuring consistency in the storage, retrieval and coding of qualitative data.

3.5 Data Collection, Processing and Analysis

3.5.1 Data collection

Prior to starting the field work, the researcher initiated the process of searching and contacting the potential participants within the selected university of technology. The exercise was for the researcher to proactively obtain respondents' approval and confirmation to participate in the study prior to scheduling appointments with the selected individuals for conducting interviews. Though the process was met with challenges of officials declining the invitation to participate and some not fulfilling their commitment.

Nevertheless, being employed at this institution enabled the researcher to access email address books for identifying potential participants. However, the fact that the researcher is an employee at this institution assisted with access to email address books for potential participants. All the participants were provided with a survey cover letter to give them the

background of the study and the significance of the choice of their participation as well as the consent forms declaring their free will participation, conditions of participation and the assurance of the confidentiality of their participation.

To gather data for this investigation, suitable interview questions were formulated and administered throughout the empirical study to collect data. The interviews were conducted over an extended duration of Six (6) weeks. These interviews were conducted for an average of Forty (40) minutes. The study employed semi-structured interviews, document analysis and literature review to ensure methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). To ensure credibility, data from three sources (interviews, documents and literature) were triangulated as illustrated below:

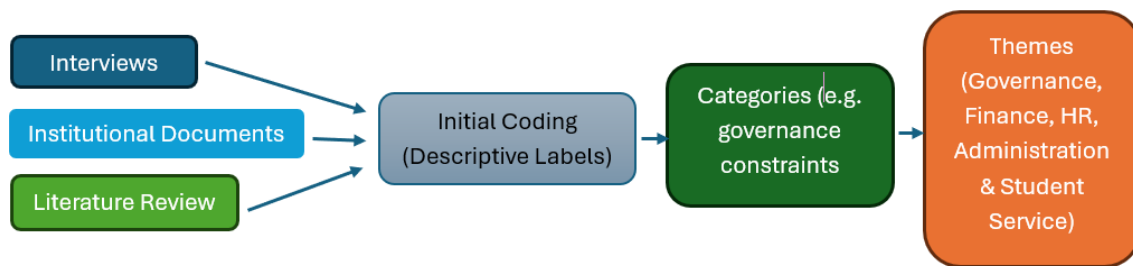


Figure 3.1 Triangulation process

The above figure illustrates the analytical framework employed in this study. Data collection process involved interviews with administrators, review of literature and document analysis. Using the manual coding approach, the text segments of the data collected were then given descriptive labels. The codes were then classified into groups that reflect patterns and themes commonly identified in the analyses. Thus, these classes were synthesized into the following overarching themes: governance, financial autonomy, administrative efficiency, human resource autonomy and student service, which aligned directly with the study's research questions and conceptual framework. The diagram shows how using triangulation with data from more than one source made the results more credible, valid and trustworthy.

1. Semi-Structured Interviews:

Fifteen participants were purposively selected, representing campus principals, departmental managers, administrators and governing body members. Online interviews were carried out using Microsoft Teams through a Dell laptop as the main device, as it has allowed the platform to record and transcribe data, which has facilitated the process of capturing data accurately. The interviews that were conducted took between 30 and 50 minutes and were carried out using a semi-structured interview guide, which had 15 open-ended questions that were used to answer the research questions and the conceptual framework. Participants were informed by an informed consent form about the problem of confidentiality and voluntary participation before the interviews.

2. Document Analysis:

The selected university of technology archives were searched to obtain institutional documents such as strategic plans, governance policies, annual reports and decision-making guidelines. Though these documents were initially developed for administrative and compliance reasons, the researcher also used them to qualify and verify the claims made in interview findings and for richer contextual framework for the study.

3. Literature Review:

In addition to institutional documents, literature review was conducted as a source of secondary data. Both South African and global perspectives were considered in the review of secondary data sources such as peer-reviewed articles, policy documentation and scholarly literature especially on topics like higher education governance, multi-campus, decision-making, system autonomy and institutional efficiency to synthesize data. The literature review had two important objectives to fulfil, which is first to frame the results within the wider academic fields and secondly, it allowed for the triangulation of interview findings against existing literature, as suggested by Bowen (2009).

3.5.2 Data Processing

To ensure that the researcher thoroughly engages with the contents of the output of the study, data collected from the empirical study, institutional documents and scholarly literature was manually processed. As a mechanism to safeguard the credibility of the interviews, all recordings were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word within 48 hours of the interview session. Transcripts were then carefully checked against the initial recordings and field notes to ascertain accuracy. To satisfy the ethical norms, all the empirical data of the participants (SP1-SP15) and institutional records (DOC1-DOC2) were anonymised and coded.

These documents were filed and organised into a hierarchical folder system by type and source to ensure procedural consistency and study replicability. The researcher utilized Microsoft Word's "comment" and "highlight" functions to mark the digital copies of the transcripts with margin notes and memos documenting preliminary impressions and codes that come up. Peer-reviewed studies, policy reports and theoretical sources were also coded manually. These sources were regarded as secondary data as such, the study was able to verify and triangulate findings from the interviews and institutional documents.

3.5.3 Data analysis

In line with the use of the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative case study, the study was able to use manual thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes across the multiple data sources. The process followed six structured steps of the data analysis process.



Figure 3.2 Data analysis process

1. Familiarization with Data:

The researcher thoroughly studied and re-scrutinised recordings, institutional documents and literature excerpts to fully engage with the data. Significant statements and repeated expressions were recorded in a researcher's journal.

2. Initial Coding:

Text segments were identified and labelled with concise descriptions of the data, frequently encapsulating the principal themes or patterns (e.g., "restricted financial autonomy," "centralized human resources processes," "delays in student services"), while considering the various potential interpretations for each line of data. The information has been summarized in a table of coding with the help of Microsoft Excel, with a row for each quotation and the columns such as the code of the quotation, and the source of the quotation, like interview, document or book.

3. Searching for Themes:

Codes of nearly the same root words were put under the sub-categories like: financial decision-making constraints or administrative inefficiencies. These categories were then

organised into themes that align with the research questions such as governance models, financial autonomy, administrative efficiency, human resource autonomy and student services.

4. Reviewing Themes:

The unearthed themes were then checked against the transcripts to confirm that they represent the participants' views and opinions rather than lean on the researcher's prejudice. A cross-reference check of the identified themes against various data sources (interviews, documents, literature) was undertaken to further legitimize triangulation.

5. Defining and Naming Themes:

Every theme was carefully distinguished and clearly identified by the researcher and linked to the established theoretical framework. Every theme was distinctly articulated and connected to the conceptual framework of agency theory, governance model and conflict theory. Each theme was then qualified with a relevant quotation from the transcripts as well as from the literature review.

6. Reporting:

The study adopted the narrative reporting style to present results and substantiated the findings with direct quotes from participants, institutional records and academic literature. The integration of literature analysis was to identify points of convergence or contradiction from the empirical data to further verify findings. Consequently, the overall procedure culminated in the tabulation example illustrated below, demonstrating the development of themes:

Table 3.1 Sample Coding Table

Raw Data (Participant Quote)	Initial Codes	Categories	Themes
Decision-making is often centralized, and we have to wait for approval from	Centralized decision-making	Governance constraints	Governance Models and Decision-Making Autonomy

the main campus before acting.			
Our budget allocations are rigid, which limits flexibility in addressing urgent campus needs.	Rigid budget allocations	Financial limitations	Financial Autonomy and Resource Optimization
Administrative processes are slow because decisions need to pass through too many levels of approval.	Slow administrative processes	Administrative inefficiencies	Administrative Efficiency and Institutional Operations
We have little say in staff recruitment; most decisions are made at central offices.	Limited HR autonomy	Human resource restrictions	Human Resource Autonomy and Leadership Dynamics
Students often complain that their issues take too long to resolve because decisions are escalated.	Student service delays	Student support challenges	Student Service and Experience
When decisions are taken at the campus level, we are able to respond to urgent needs without unnecessary delays, which improves our ability to deliver services efficiently	Autonomy-efficiency linkage	Operational efficiency	Decision-Making Autonomy as a Driver of Operational Efficiency
Many processes are slowed down by duplication of administrative	Streamlining processes	Bureaucracy removal	Process Optimization and Administrative Efficiency

procedures.
Simplifying
workflows and
removing repetitive
approvals would
improve
operational
effectiveness.

The institution
should introduce
clear Key
Performance
Indicators (KPIs)
linked to the
responsibilities of
each campus so that
autonomy can be
measured against
actual performance
outcomes

Performance
monitoring systems

Performance
Appraisal

Accountability and
Performance
Governance

The university
needs a hybrid
governance
structure where
strategic decisions
remain centralised,
but operational
decisions are
delegated to
campuses.”

Need for hybrid
governance model

Governance Model

Hybrid Governance
and Matrix
Autonomy

3.6 Role of the Researcher

As established by Creswell and Poth (2016) in conducting qualitative research, the researcher served as the principal instrument for both data collection and analysis including manually reading, coding and interpreting all data. In this study, the researcher’s role involved:

- Developing the interview guide based on research questions and existing literature.
- Building a connection with the participants during interviews to encourage honest and in-depth responses.
- Systematically document personal reflections, biases and assumptions that could influence data interpretation through the use of a journal.
- Adhering to the confidentiality principles and ensuring all contributions are voluntary while capturing the true essence of the responses.

This measure prioritised participant's lived experiences and institutional context over the researcher's prior assumptions.

3.7 Design Support for Analytical Strategy

The use of thematic analysis and a single case study design was supported by some leading scholarly experts. Yin (2018) emphasises that systematic data organisation and triangulation are important for establishing credibility within a single case study design. Braun and Clarke (2015) also allude to the fact that though the thematic analysis approach is laborious yet is the most effective and appropriate for interpretivist paradigm. Additionally, Patton (2015) asserts that the use of purposive sampling and thematic analysis is an effective strategy for exploring a complex setting like an institution of higher learning.

3.8 Research Design Limitations

This study was specifically undertaken at a selected university of technology in South Africa as a single embedded descriptive case study. As such, the findings may possess limited transferability to other universities or nations because of differences in context, culture and policies. Furthermore, the study's narrow scope prevents a comparative analysis across different settings or contexts which may limit depth and profoundness of its conclusion. For this reason, establishing a conclusive causal relationship between variables will continue to be a challenge as single case studies do not include comparison groups or control conditions. It is difficult to determine if reported outcomes are unique to

this selected university of technology or represent a broader system of multi-campus universities in higher education if there are not more than one context to compare.

Limiting research between universities and one country may hinder access to a diverse array of data sources, possibly neglecting crucial contextual elements or differing perspectives that could enhance the analysis of the study. However, the results of a single case study cannot be verified, replicated or extended to a different setting. Obtaining, analysing and interpreting qualitative data requires time, money and logistical support in a particular university and country and as a result, there are some limitations on the generalization of the conclusion drawn from the study.

3.9 Ethical Assurance

The integrity of this study hinges on ethical compliance, as it explores the impact of decision-making autonomy on the operational efficiency of multi-campus universities through a qualitative case study approach. The research was done in alignment with globally acknowledged ethical research standards, incorporating the principles of respect for individuals, beneficence and justice as explained by Bitter, Ngabirano, Simon and Taylor (2020) and following the regulations established by the selected university of technology.

3.9.1 Informed Consent Procedures

The study required the participants to join on a completely voluntary basis, with no obligation to do so. All prospective respondents received an informed consent form (see Appendix B), detailing the study's objectives, research methods, possible risks and benefits, confidentiality protocols and the option to withdraw at any point without any repercussions. The consent forms were sent through email before scheduling interviews and the signed copies sent through electronic means were returned to the researcher. To ensure that the participants understood their rights, they were informed of the same in the opening of every interview, which included the option to decline to respond to certain questions or the right to terminate the interview whenever they choose to.

3.9.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

In transcripts, coding and reporting of findings, participants were given pseudonyms (SP1 to SP15) to ensure confidentiality. Verbatim transcripts and analysis documents did not contain identifying information such as names, departments or other identifiers. Audio files were stored in password protected files on a personal computer and encrypted cloud storage accessible solely by the researcher. Transcriptions and coded data receive the same protection. After the study concludes, all recordings will be permanently erased, whereas anonymized transcripts will be kept for five years to adhere to institutional guidelines.

3.9.3 Formal Approvals

To gain access to participants and pertinent institutional data, the researcher requested authorization from the campus principal at the selected university of technology. Approval from the Institution was requested prior to the commencement of any data collection.

3.9.4 Compliance with Research Standards

The research adhered to ethical standards for qualitative research which includes:

- Assuring respondents of their voluntary participation.
- Ensuring no harm comes to the participant.
- Transparency concerning the purpose of the study and use of data.
- Respect for confidentiality and independence.

3.10 Reliability and Validity of the Study

Yin (2018) explains that the strength of a qualitative study depends on its ability to establish reliability and validity. In this study, these standards were upheld by addressing the key elements of dependability, transferability, credibility and confirmability as outlined by Shoaib and Mujtaba (2016). Together, these components supported the overall trustworthiness of the research. noted that the quality of qualitative studies relies on their ability to endure the scrutiny of reliability and validity.

To establish trustworthiness outside of the traditional reliability and validity measures, the study used a combination of member checking, transcript analysis and data triangulation. According to Birt et. al (2016), member checking is an important tool to strengthen the consistency and credibility of the research data. The interview transcripts were made available to the participants, enabling them to verify the details and make any needed adjustments to accurately represent their experiences.

3.10.1 Reliability

Pandey and Patnaik (2014) denote reliability as the accuracy with which the study, if conducted within the same setting can produce similar results. Their study has adopted the more flexible qualitative approaches as suggested by Fusch and Ness (2015). The focus of the investigation was to ensure data consistency and dependability through an intensive and transparent analytical process. The researcher avoided ambiguity in the design of the interview guide to ensure that participants are able to respond well to questions and also gave them the transcripts to verify that their viewpoint were accurately represented.

In accordance with Yin (2015) the study employed member checking to ascertain that data analysis remains accurate and reliable. As earlier alluded by Fusch and Ness (2015), member checking is the greatest tool for improving the reliability of the study's results and researchers undertaking a qualitative study are encouraged to use it. The researcher ensured that all participants were given sufficient time to review their transcripts and verify the accuracy of the interpretations. Copies of the transcribed responses were shared with each participant and their feedback confirmed their agreement with the findings. The repeated process of member checking together with the ongoing review of transcripts, strengthen the reliability and consistency of the study.

3.10.2 Validity

For the research finding to be considered reliable, it is essential for the researcher to follow recognised academic standards and maintain integrity, transferability and reliability (Haq, Rasheed, Rashid & Akhter, 2023). Yin (2015) emphasises that the integrity of the study is diminished if validity is undermined at any point during the research process. Validity thus continues to be a key measure of research quality since it helps in the accurate interpretation of data and coming up with valid conclusions (Rolfe, 2006).

Lim (2025) argues that qualitative research is built on information that is subjective, interpretive and varies with context. Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to maintain the stability, reliability and adherence to rigorous enquiry principles in the study's findings. For this reason, research outcomes should be coherent, credible, applicable and convincing to both readers and other scholars, as noted by LeBel, McCarthy, Earp, Elson and Vanpaemel (2018). To achieve this level of scrutiny, researchers are required to uphold key standards such as integrity, transferability and confirmability through the research process (Ahmed, 2024). As captured by Patton (1999) the study should focus on quality over volume as far as the data is concerned to realise credibility.

As noted by Meydan and Akkas (2024), triangulation is critical for ensuring accuracy as it is used as a method of validating multiple views and sources of data. The incorporation of member checking in this study reinforces the study's credibility and ensures the accuracy of data analysis through ongoing interaction, continuous observation and external job audits, thereby demonstrating the study's credibility (Motulsky, 2021). As emphasised by Lim (2025), for the study to achieve transferability, sufficient contextual details must be provided to ensure findings can be meaningfully applied to different settings.

The investigation meticulously documented all irregularities and emergent discrepancies to make the findings clear and help future investigators who may want to repeat them for consistency. Additionally, the researcher maintained analytical impartiality by intentionally distancing the process from personal biases and the subjective preconceptions of participants. The investigation also upheld adherence by preserving impartiality during

the analytical process and setting aside the biases of the study participants (Wood & Kahts-Kramer, 2023). Malterud et al. (2015) warned that the achievement of data saturation is dependent upon intensity of the participant's engagement with the research questions.

By employing standardisation, the study allowed for a consistent manner of engaging with the same questions by all participants thereby ensuring also that responses are interpreted uniformly. Mack et al. (2005) stresses the importance of highlighting that ethical consideration in research aim to uphold professionalism and foster trust in the research process. The researcher has examined and implemented multiple dimensions of ethical research throughout this study, which are outlined as follows:

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology used in this study. The qualitative research approach used is closely linked to a constructivism research paradigm. The qualitative research approach was carried out by means of a case study. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, and ethical consideration such as informed consent and confidentiality will be taken into account. Research design, approaches, sampling methods and sampling procedures and research instruments adopted in this research were outlined in this chapter. The target population, sample size, instruments design, data collection and analysis methods and validity and reliability were discussed. The next chapter deals with the results of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the study's results on how granting campuses autonomy to make decisions affects the operational efficiency of multi-campus universities. The begins by examining the demographic details of the participants, which includes among other things, the roles, experience and educational background of university administrators across different campuses. The demographic data is presented graphically to further enhance the understanding of the distribution of sample participants across the multi-campus setting. This data was collected through 15 semi-structured interviews with the campus principals, campus administrative executives and faculty, who were key stakeholders in the participating universities.

4.2 Overview of Study Participants

The study used SP to represent participants and alphanumerical (1, 2, 3, etc.). In this section of the study, the demographic profile of the participants is presented as well as the duration of their interviews as conducted through the semi-structured interview protocol of the study. As confirmed by Baskarada (2014), adopting a qualitative single case study design improved the accuracy and depth of the empirical evidence. In accordance with Fink (2019), the findings of the study were fused with relevant literature review to respond to the primary research questions. The results are also organised around the emergent themes, with a comprehensive illustrative view of the impact of autonomy or lack thereof on operational efficiency across different campuses. The interview schedule with the study participants was between June and December 2024. The duration of the interview was between 30 to 50 minutes long with an average of 38 minutes.

4.3 Demographic Findings

The research process included a demographic profile component, requiring the participants to furnish their study with their personal background information. A thorough analysis of the attributes of the participants was fundamental to this study thereby enhancing the

interpretive depth of the findings. According to Kreyenfeld and Willekens (2015), by examining key variables of the demographics such age, gender, socio-economic status, educational background and race, the researcher is able to identify underlying factors that can affect the outcomes of the study. Treiman, Lu and Qi (2012) has also confirmed that the integration of demographic data allows for the comparison between the study sample and the broader population, thereby improving the capacity to assess the generalizability and validity of the research findings. Below is a series of graphic illustrations of the demographics of the research participants.

Table 4.1: Demographic findings

SP Number	Gender	Educational Background	Job Category	Work Experience	Interview Duration
SP1	M	PhD	Departmental Manager	25yrs	38:41
SP2	M	Prof	Campus Principal	27yrs	50:11
SP3	F	PhD	Departmental Manager	26yrs	50:40
SP4	M	Masters	Campus Principal	26yrs	44:15
SP5	M	Masters	Deputy Director: Library Services	28yrs	35:04
SP6	F	Masters	Departmental Manager	14yrs	40:48
SP7	F	Masters	Departmental Manager	8yrs	39:46
SP8	F	PhD	Departmental Manager	24yrs	30:36
SP9	F	PhD	Departmental Manager	18yrs	30:57
SP10	M	Prof	Assistant Dean	24yrs	30:57

SP11	F	PhD	Chairperson: Institutional Forum	14yrs	30:04
SP12	M	Masters	Employee Relations Specialist	20yrs	44:44
SP13	M	PhD	Campus Principal	30yrs	34:52
SP14	F	PhD	Departmental Manager	17yrs	39:33
SP15	F	Masters	Office Manager: Campus Principal	7yrs	35:06

4.3.1 Gender of participants

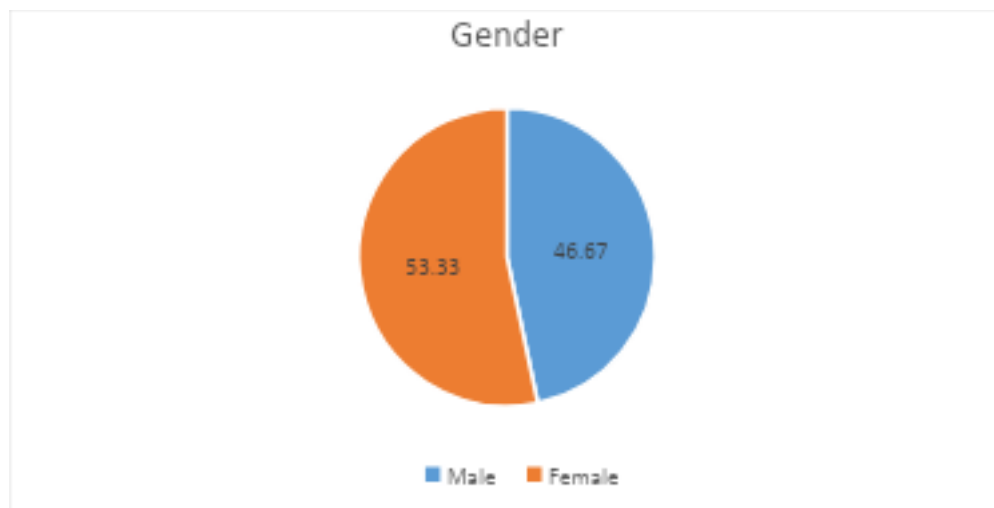


Figure 4.1: Gender of participants

The gender based demographic distribution indicates that male participants (53%) in the study slightly outnumbered the female participants (47%). Such an imbalance is a reflection of overall systemic patterns in the higher education system in which top-level decision-making is largely carried out by males, especially in a multifaceted environment

such as a multi-campus university. These gender disparities can eventually influence the institution in key areas like autonomy, leadership styles and modes of operation.

4.3.2 Educational background

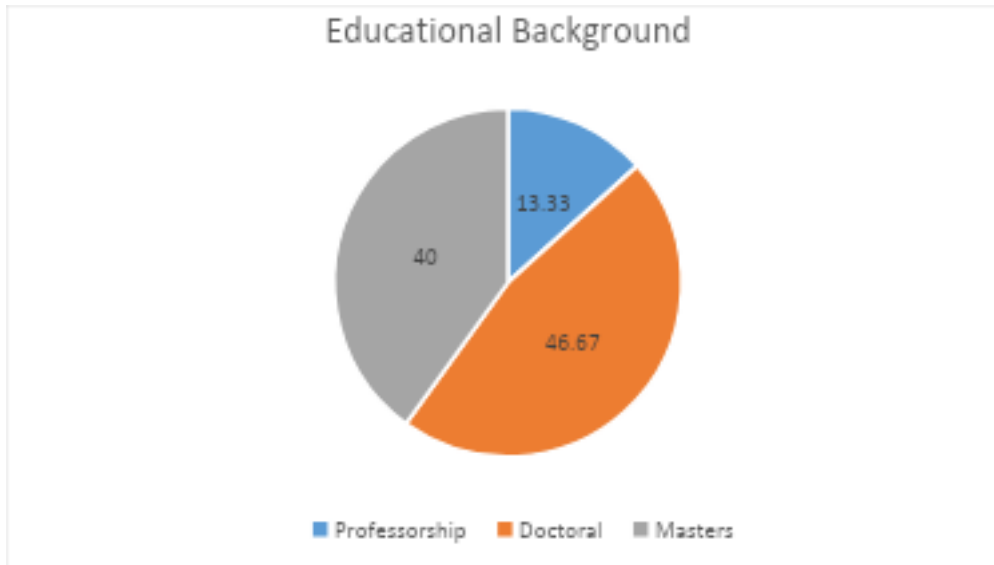


Figure 4.2: Educational backgrounds of participants

The degree of professionalism and academic achievement of the participants is extremely high, with 47% of the respondents having a doctoral degree and 40% having a master's degree, and 13% being professors. It is this very degree of achievement of participants that demonstrates that they have more than the necessary administrative savvy and broad leadership experience to be conversant with the dynamics of a multi-campus university and to effectively inform the investigative results of this study.

Because of participants' experience and academic acquisition, their perceptions shared in this study are deemed more credible and legitimate. Doctoral and professorial graduates will guarantee a solid grounding in both theory and practice. Both of these scholars are likely to have served at the executive level of strategic decision-making and policy interpretation. In the meantime, master's degree holders have on-the-job experience of how autonomy is implemented into operational, practical results and cross-campus partnerships.

4.3.3 Job category

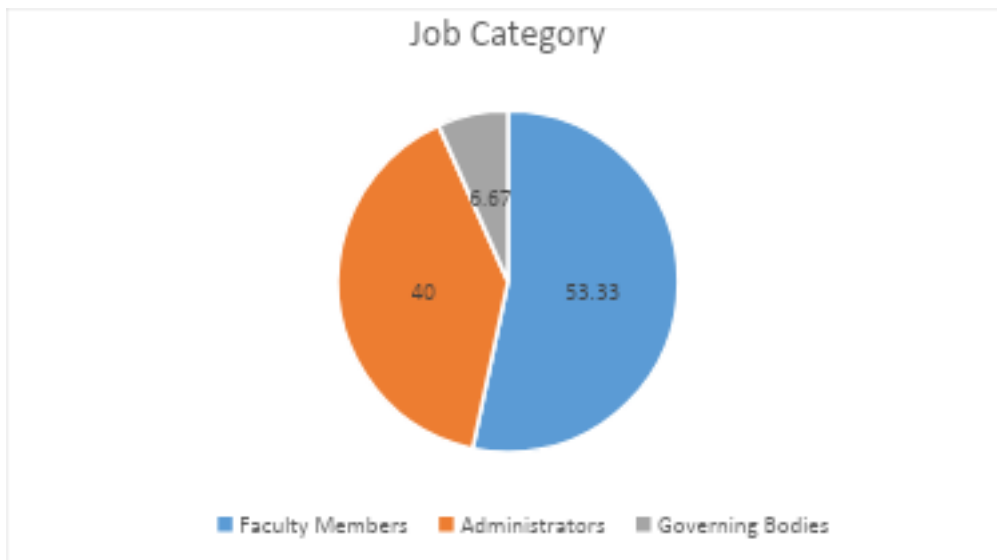


Figure 4.3: Job Category of participants

The job category indicates that there is a differentiated participation indicator between the academic respondents and the administrative respondents. As shown, academia showed 53% of the respondents, 40 percent of the entire involvement was on administrators and 7 per cent on the governing bodies. Such a general representation will make sure that the analysis of the autonomy of decision-making is based on a wide range of perspectives of reliable voices representing various levels of the university hierarchy. It also certifies that the analysis of the study results is complete and can be applied to all the various layers of the structure.

Most of the participants who contributed some deep input on the effects of decision-making autonomy on the matters of governance, efficiencies in administration, human resources, student services, financial efficiency and optimization of resources were from the faculty. Centralized or decentralized decision-making structures affect the morale and academic productivity of the academic through their feedback. This was also balanced with the perceptive opinions of the administrators who were stirring the policy matters, resource distribution and day-to-day operational matters.

The addition of the 7% governing body representatives, albeit a small group, provides the study with a much-needed high-level strategic credibility perspective. This cohort provided a specialized knowledge on policy direction, oversight framework and governance decisions whether centralized or decentralized across campuses. The multi-dimensional analysis from the three categories of participants (academic, administrative and governance) strengthens the validity of the study's conclusions and offers a holistic comprehension of how decision-making autonomy impacts on multi-campus university operations.

4.3.4 Work experience

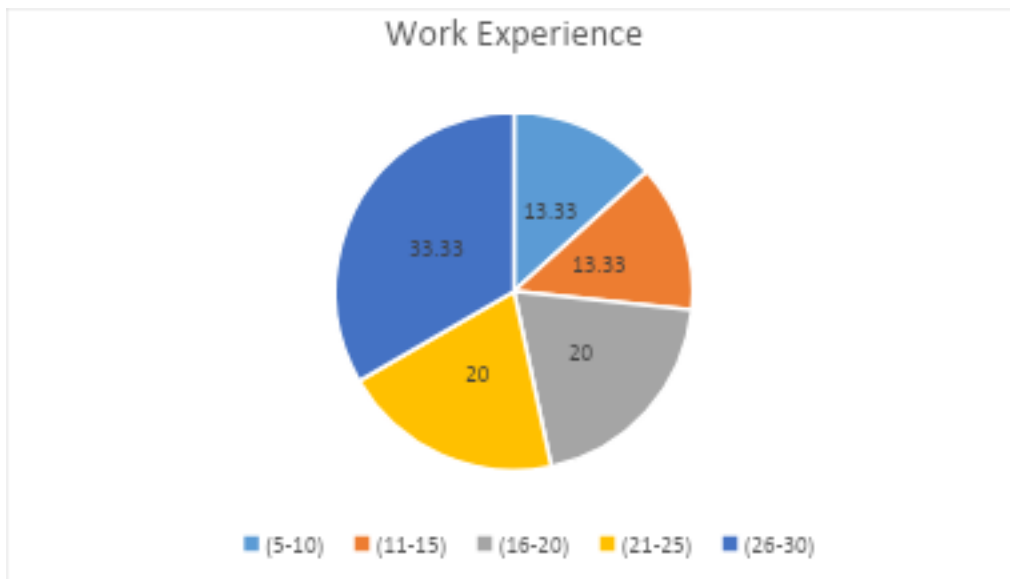


Figure 4.4: Work experience of participants

An analysis of the work experience demographics of participants shows how long they have been in the employment of the higher education sector particularly within the multi-campus university setting. Participants in the category of 5-10 years of experience accounted for 13.33%, those who served for 11-15 years of experience also reported 13.33%, 20% of the participants accumulated 16-20 years of experience and lastly 20% represented those in the category of 21-25 years of experience. A significant majority of the participants, accounting for 70%, have 15 years of relevant experience while one-third

of them have been in service for more than 25 years. This extensive experience suggests that participants have a high level of institutional memory and command deeper understanding of the dynamics of a multi-campus university environment.

While participants with 5 to 15 years of experience highlighted contemporary factors to the recent developments in policy and leadership and how they affect operational efficiency in that multi-campus university, the veterans with 16-30 years of experience shared much on how long-term institutional patterns, structural changes and leadership philosophies have evolved over the decades. So, their experiences are then used to evaluate how decision-making autonomy has transformed over time, how does it translate into the operations efficiency of the multi-campus universities.

4.4 Coding and Thematic Analysis

In this study, data gathered via a qualitative research method was interpreted using thematic analysis. Participants' feedback was thoroughly processed for emerging themes which particularly focused on how decision-making autonomy shapes operational efficiency in a multi-campus universities setting. To ensure data gathered from semi-structured interviews remain authentic and is with integrity, every audio recording was transcribed word-for-word into a Microsoft Word document. As such, participants' responses and the interview content were preserved. Presented below is a detailed analysis of the qualitative data, highlighting the main patterns and themes identified during the coding phase.

Table 4.2 Codes and themes for RQ1.

RQ1. What existing decision-making structures and processes are used in multi-campus universities?

Sub-question(s)	Code(s)	Description	Theme(s)
SQ1. How are decisions made at	Centralized approvals	Decisions often require approval from main campus before	Governance Models and Decision-

your campus or department?		implementation, leading to delays.	Making Autonomy.
SQ2. What challenges do you face in the current decision-making process?	Limited autonomy	Campus leaders lack authority to make context-specific decisions, constraining responsiveness.	Governance Models and Decision-Making Autonomy.
SQ3. To what extent do you have autonomy in managing human resources (e.g., staff appointments, promotions, and performance) and how does leadership influence this autonomy?	Restricted HR authority and Leadership discretion	Staffing decisions (appointments, promotions, performance management) remain centralized. Leadership style moderates how much discretion is exercised.	Human Resource Autonomy and Leadership Dynamics.

Table 4.3 Codes and themes for RQ2.

RQ2. What are the determinants of the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities?

Sub-question(s)	Code(s)	Description	Theme(s)
SQ4. To what extent do you have control over financial allocations at your unit.	Rigid budget structures	Funds are allocated centrally with little flexibility at the campus or departmental level.	Financial Autonomy and Resource Optimization.
SQ5. What factors determine the level of financial or resource autonomy you experience?	Policy-driven allocations	Autonomy is shaped by institutional policies and regulations from higher authorities (e.g., DHET)	Financial Autonomy and Resource
SQ6. How does financial autonomy or lack thereof affect your ability to deliver services effectively?	Resource constraints	Limited discretion restricts ability to address urgent needs and hampers operational efficiency.	Financial Autonomy and Resource Optimization

Table 4.4 Codes and themes for RQ3

RQ3. How to evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency?			
Sub-question(s)	Code(s)	Description	Theme(s)
SQ7. How does decision-making autonomy influence administrative processes?	Bureaucratic delays	Slow processes due to multiple approval layers reduce efficiency.	Administrative Efficiency and Institutional Operations.
SQ8. What is the impact of decision-making structures on student services and experience?	Student service delays.	Centralized processes delays responses to student needs and complaints.	Student Service and Experience.
SQ9. How does autonomy or lack thereof influence overall institutional efficiency?	Operational inefficiencies.	Lack of delegated authority affects resource use, staff productivity and student satisfaction.	Administrative Efficiency and Institutional Operations/ Student Service.

Table 4.5 Codes and themes for RQ4

RQ4: How to link decision-making autonomy to operational efficiency to establish a framework of decision-making at multi-campus universities?			
Sub-question(s)	Code(s)	Description	Theme(s)

SQ10. What relationship exists between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency at your campus?	Autonomy -efficiency linkage	Increased autonomy at campus level leads to faster decision-making, improved responsiveness, and better service delivery. Conversely, limited autonomy results in inefficiencies and delays	Decision-Making Autonomy as a Driver of Operational Efficiency
SQ11. How can decision-making processes be improved to enhance efficiency?	Streamlining processes	Reducing approval layers and simplifying procedures improves turnaround time and operational effectiveness.	Process Optimization and Administrative Efficiency
SQ12. What institutional mechanisms are required to sustain autonomy while ensuring accountability?	Performance monitoring systems	Use of KPIs and dashboards ensures accountability while allowing autonomy.	Accountability and Performance Governance
SQ13. What governance practices or structures could improve both autonomy and efficiency?	Need for hybrid governance model	Participants advocate for a balance between central control and local autonomy to enhance efficiency without compromising compliance.	Hybrid Governance and Matrix Autonomy

The findings highlighted critical concerns over decision-making autonomy particularly regarding its influence on administrative processes, faculty engagement, resource distribution and overall institutional success. This shows how decision-making autonomy affects operational efficiency, faculty morale and the realisation of the university's overall strategic objectives. In the process of the empirical research, some themes have been identified that focus on the effects of decision-making autonomy on the operational efficiency of multi-campus universities:

Theme 1: Governance models and decision-making autonomy

Theme 2: Financial autonomy and resource optimization

Theme 3: Administrative efficiency and institutional operations

Theme 4: Human resource autonomy and leadership dynamics

Theme 5: Student service and experience

Theme 6: Decision-Making Autonomy as a Driver of Operational Efficiency

Theme 7: Process Optimization and Administrative Efficiency

Theme 8: Accountability and Performance Governance

Theme 9: Hybrid Governance and Matrix Autonomy

4.5 Findings for the Research Questions

Findings are organised by research questions, using data source (interviews & content analysis of relevant documents) to answer each one of them. The empirical evidence from participants provided insights into the existing decision-making framework, factors influencing autonomy and the influence of decision-making autonomy on operational efficiency. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data and this was supplemented with institutional documents and secondary literature and systematically organized into coherent categories via thematic analysis. The presentation of the findings herein, is predominantly descriptive, focusing on the verbatim and thematic analysis of the participants' report of the interview rather than the theoretical interpretation of the analysis.

4.5.1 Findings for RQ1. What existing decision-making structures and processes are used in multi-campus universities?

The study conducted institutional documents analysis of the selected university of technology, especially drawing from the Revised Institutional Statute (2025), Governance Framework and Organisational Charts which revealed that the current governance model is a formally centralized, hierarchical structure. The governance structure is primarily headed by the University Council and Senate with the executive powers residing with the Vice-Chancellor and the Management Committee (MANCOM). The current organizational model of “hub-and-spoke” reveals how the main campus retains much of the autonomy as the central node with the satellite campus having limited authority through its local management committee composed of entry level managers with zero decision-making authority.

Critical units for operational efficiency such as Procurement, Finance, Human Resources and Student Services are administered and regulated through Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) instituted with the intent to prioritise control, accountability, mitigation of risks and ensuring uniformity which still requires central approval, aligning with a Weberian bureaucratic model. The documentation also highlights the need for strong institutional alignment and adherence to regulations, presenting centralisation as a means to maintaining sound financial controls and audit preparedness.

On the other hand, interview findings have shown that decision-making in practice is overly centralised and marked by operational bottlenecks and delayed responsiveness particularly at the satellite campus. This is confirmed by participants’ responses as they alluded to the systems’ dependence on central approvals by MANCOM especially in critical operational activities which are time sensitive like procurement, infrastructure management and staffing. However, they also reported that some decisions are sometimes passed down to the campus level but only when central offices are under pressure and this only happens in an unplanned way and it also depends on circumstances rather than clear rules. Most of the leaders who are based at the satellite campus largely feel that the campus

is treated as a remote administrative extension instead of being given a semi-autonomous status that affords it the right to make decisions based on its own needs.

This creates a sense of being overlooked and makes harder for the campus to respond quickly and effectively. There is a noticeable gap between how governance is designed and structured on paper and how it actually works in practice. Official documents describe a well-organised, central system of governance meant to improve control and efficiency. However, interviews show that this rigid adherence to centralised hierarchies often slows down decisions and makes day-to-day operations less responsive. While the current system works well for compliance and control, it also creates delays that affect smooth operations, especially at the satellite campus which is far from the main offices.

SQ1. How are decisions made at your campus or department?

Several respondents reported that strategic decisions are delayed due to multiple approval layers. *“At a campus level we have departmental managers who are reporting to heads of department at the main campus but are doing the same job; the only difference is that they are based at main campus.”* SP9 and SP15 stated. *“The campus is not represented at the executive and council level to influence decisions, especially as far as the operations at the campus level are concerned,”* said SP13. *“There are dotted and straight lines of reporting between the campuses, which brings confusion,”* SP5 raised this. SP2 commented that *“We need a federated model where each campus operates semi-independently but remains aligned to the overall vision.”*

SP8 and SP12 explained that *“Most decisions are made centrally at the main campus. We receive directives and implement them. Only routine operational matters, like scheduling or logistics, can be handled at the campus level.”* SP3 reported that *“Decision-making is hierarchical in nature whereby strategic and financial decisions are made by the executives at the main campus while satellite focuses on the implementation of those decisions.”* SP1 and SP14 shared that *“Though there is a structure for managing operations at the campus level, the final authority resides with the central office at the main*

campus. Permission is always needed to implement recommendations for any process. "We participate in consultative meetings, but the real decisions are made higher up,"

SP6 said. SP11 emphasized that *"Decision-making is hierarchical. Many of the units in campuses report to the central executive and approvals must move through several levels before implementation can be authorized."* SP7 highlighted that *"the flow of institutional information is through circulars and memos from the main campus as finalized and not proposals for inputs from the satellite campus."* SP5 and SP4 reported that *"we do not have any autonomy at all, even library services are delayed due to issues like renewal of subscriptions, authorization is to be obtained from the main campus."* SP10 has voiced that *while the campus is represented in some institutional committees, the final authority still rests with the main campus effectively relegating the satellite campus to merely implementers."*

SQ2. What challenges do you face in the current decision-making process?

The research has noted that there are certain structural problems, particularly in the aspects of bureaucratic slackness, limited autonomy and insensitivity to contextual demands. Reports by departmental and campus-based leaders showed that even primary essential operational issues like procurement and staffing are subject to mandatory central approval. For instance, SP3 emphasized that *"We cannot finalize even basic procurement decisions until the main campus approves."* SP14 remarked that *"decisions making often take weeks or even months due to duplicate multiple layers of reporting and approval"*. SP6 pointed out that *"urgent needs at the campus level are frequently delayed because local managers lack the authority to act promptly"*.

SP2 described the situation as *"having responsibility without power," illustrating the frustration leaders feel when accountable for outcomes without sufficient decision-making authority.* SP5 also highlighted *"the other problem is of double reporting which affects decisiveness as there is confusion sometimes as to whose prerogative it is to authorise certain actions"*. SP15 also advanced *"certain units which are critical for rapid responsiveness to operations are still only housed at the main campus like procurement*

and HR". SP13 and SP10 protested that "every attempt at being proactive in dealing with immediate challenges that could not await consultation is deemed as insubordination". SP4 had this to say "The biggest challenge is the delay in approvals. Even minor operational decisions must go through the main campus, and by the time we get the green light, the opportunity or need has already passed."

According to SP8, there is excessive bureaucracy, decisions must pass through several committees and departments, and this slows down our reaction to urgent issues. SP1 said that politics and hierarchy usually affect decision-making. It is not necessarily about what is best in the campus or department, but just a combination of steps that have to be meticulously followed. According to SP11, there has been a deficiency in consultation in the major decision-making processes. By the time information gets into our hands, most decisions are made, hence making staff feel less of ownership and motivation. As SP7 explained, the centralized process brings about bottlenecks. Requests are sent to multiple offices and sometimes they get lost or delayed because no one takes immediate responsibility." SP9 and SP12 narrated that "The decision-making process is reactive rather than proactive. We spend more time responding to directives than planning for long-term development."

SQ3. To what extent do you have autonomy in managing human resources (e.g., staff appointments, promotions, and performance) and how does leadership influence this autonomy?

When considering human resource autonomy participants emphasized that staff appointments, promotions and performance management were overwhelmingly controlled by central HR structures. Departmental managers and principals had only advisory or recommendatory roles. For instance, SP11 stated that *"Staff from the main campus are mostly dumped at our campus without allowing us to determine the kind of skills specifically needed for our dynamics"*. SP2 and SP13 reiterated that *"the filling of vacancies is not consistent with the objectives of the Repositioning Strategy of the selected university of technology rural campus but rather the dumping of people from the other campus as favour"*.

SP15 furthermore confirmed by saying *“In some cases, people from the main campus are assigned to the sister campus without the knowledge of the campus management”*. SP5 also highlighted the fact that *“promotion for academic personnel is universally articulated across campuses as a matter of policy however, with support staff most of them who are based at the rural campus have stagnated and there is no career path development for them as opposed to those at the urban campus”*. SP1, SP6 and SP8 noted the following regarding appointments *“It takes months to get a replacement for a staff member who has resigned,”*. Leadership style was found to significantly shape the extent of decision-making autonomy experienced at the campus or departmental level.

SP10 observed that *“Some managers allow flexibility, but others insist everything goes through them, so autonomy differs by leader.”* SP4 affirmed that *“I used to have control of my budget with my previous boss, unfortunately the current one has withdrawn that privilege”*. SP3 and SP7 protested *“Many people might think that it is the current Principal who is unable to take the campus forward, but without resources and decision-making power, there is only so much you can do”*.

SP14 asserted that *“We have the responsibility to ensure staff performance, but without the power to make personnel decisions, accountability becomes meaningless. Leadership trusts us to run the campus but not to manage people fully.”* According to SP12, the HR processes are dictated by institutional policy, which is the same in all campuses, therefore, in areas where we can handle the staff locally we are not able to because the policy centralizes control. SP9 decried that they cannot attract or promote employees even when the demand is pressing. This makes delivery of services slow down. Leadership assistance helps, but the system itself is too centralized to be flexible.

4.5.2 Findings for RQ2: What are the determinants of the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities?

A review of the selected university’s Delegation of Authority (DoA) framework and the Strategic Plan (2021-2030) shows that risk management and financial control are the two

most primary determinants of decision-making autonomy. In practice, campus units are only given more decision-making power if they can demonstrate that they:

- Have capable and reliable management
- Comply with institutional rules and policies
- Are ready for audits and meet accountability standards and
- Work within established reporting lines

This governance model advocates giving autonomy based on performance with authority being given gradually as trust is built in a unit's ability to manage risks and resources effectively. As a result, autonomy is treated as something that must be earned and tightly controlled, rather than a normal part of how multi-campus institutions operations works.

Interview feedback show that decision-making autonomy is influenced less by official policy and more by relationships and local circumstances. Some important factors such as the level of trust between central leadership and campus management, the physical distance between the main and the satellite campus and the concern around their limited insight into day-to-day campus operations all play a role. In addition, the satellite campus is still viewed through the lens of its past as a dependent campus, which affects how much responsibility it is trusted with.

Participants explained that because leaders are far removed from the campus, they rely heavily on formal procedures rather than a clear understanding of local needs, which results in tighter control. They also pointed to a frustrating cycle “we can't show the performance needed to earn autonomy if we don't have it.” This situation keeps decision-making power centralised, as limited authority leads to limited performance and limited performance is then used to justify further control or centralisation.

Document reviews suggest that decision-making autonomy is earned through strong financial control and effective risk management. However, the findings highlight a clear tension between trust and performance. In practice, autonomy depends more on relationships and trust than on formal measures alone. The system expects campuses to prove their performance before giving them authority, yet local leaders explain that without

that authority, it is difficult to perform at the level required. As a result, the lack of decision-making power makes it harder for local management to build trust and overcome the challenges that come with operating at a distance.

SQ4. To what extent do you have control over financial allocations at your unit?

According to most of the respondents, one of the main causes of autonomy constraint was the financial constraint and control of the central budget. Even small purchases need to be centrally approved, and this introduces delays in the deployment of resources. In the absence of departmental budget control, organisations face various types of operational setbacks, which compromise efficiency, responsiveness and overall performance. SP3 and SP7 stated that *“Financial autonomy would improve efficiency. Our inability to manage departmental budgets results in operational setbacks”*.

SP2 and SP13 said that *“most units' budget for the sister campus is decided by the main campus rather than be based on needs analysis which later impacts the operations”*. Both SP1, SP14 and SP15 further said *“the budgetary allocation is not reflective of the objectives of the Repositioning Strategy”*. SP5 stated, *“Our budget comes already fixed from the central office; we cannot shift it even when needs arise.”* SP6 and SP9 had this to say *“we do not control financial allocations. We simply work within what is allocated to us, even if it does not match our actual needs”*.

SP4, SP8 and SP15 alluded to the fact that *“we have almost no financial discretion. At times, even urgent repairs or student-related expenses must wait for clearance from the main campus”*. SP10 and SP11 confirmed to say *“financial allocations are centralized. We can only recommend or motivate for adjustments, but we cannot authorize them at a campus level”*. The SP12 proceeded to add that we are constrained by institutional and national financial policies. The budget that we are allocated should be enacted as it is. The majority of participants shared the view that campuses have set budgets that they have to work with, and there is no option of realigning budgets when the priorities change.

SQ5. What factors determine the level of financial or resource autonomy you experience?

The key factors that became determinants of the financial autonomy of the participants were policy frameworks, institutional regulations and national higher education guidelines. According to SP10 and SP12, the degree of autonomy we enjoy is the degree to which the central leadership has trust in us. SP5, SP6 and SP7 had the following to say: the governance structure of the university is highly centralised, as such it does not permit the campus to exercise actual financial discretion.

The protest of SP1 and SP11 was as follows: “Institutional culture is a large-scale factor. When the culture of leadership is collaborative, it is possible to negotiate and flex it, but when the culture is hierarchical and rigid, our autonomy is virtually zero. The SP2 and SP15 also put in policies that are institutional, which are the primary factors of financial or resource autonomy. In case policies are strict and compliance has been given priority over service production, then the distribution of resources will not be proportional to the need.

Other respondents pointed out that institutional policy barriers were made to ensure accountability, but they usually created little space to be innovative or responsive on the campus level. Control of financial allocations is largely controlled by internal university statutes and rules. Participants SP3, SP4, SP8 and SP9 noted *“that campuses implement budgets pre-determined by central offices, with little flexibility”*. Financial discretion is partly influenced by leadership culture. SP13 and SP14 noted that *“some senior administrators grant local flexibility, while others enforce strict central control”*.

SQ6. How does financial autonomy or lack thereof affect your ability to deliver services effectively?

A lack of financial discretion was widely reported to undermine effective service delivery. SP6 indicated that *“projects were frequently delayed because of an inability to reallocate funds when urgent expenses arose.”* Similarly, data collected from SP3, SP4 and SP7 suggest that *“student service quality was compromised due to lack of autonomy and the stringent fiscal procedures that hinders operational efficiency.”* There was a collective

consensus among participants that financial inflexibility directly hampers the capacity to respond to local needs, thereby limiting operational efficiency.

SP5 analysed that *“there is alignment between procurement delays and the efficient support of the academic project.”* These delays often translate into compromised maintenance of lecture facilities and shortage or lack thereof of teaching and learning resources. Central budget approval, SP2, SP8 and SP10 observed that both staff and students are frustrated when handling issues that cannot be delayed. In further elaboration, SP1 and SP9 added that despite the budget allocation, the central authorization is still needed, which retards the quick response to the emerging needs and emergent equipment and maintenance demands and consequently leads to stagnation.

The SP5 claimed that centralised approvals slow down the academic calendar, which has negative effects on teaching and learning and student performance. SP11 commented that *“this affects the staff morale and has a psychological effect on campus managers in that the lack of control over financial decisions makes them feel disempowered.”* SP13 pointed out that without autonomy, there would be inefficiency and we cannot match spending with local priorities and the uniform strategy imposed by central administration would fail to account for the various realities of each campus.

SP14 observed that, in case of project delay or equipment failure, we cannot act fast to save the situation because of the slow decision-making process, which decreases the quality of student services. SP12 described that it has an influence on our relationship with staff as well. *When requests for training, development, or resources cannot be approved locally, employees become disengaged because the response is always, “we are waiting for approval.”* SP15 described that *“Even when we manage to save money through efficient practices, we cannot redirect it to other needs. The lack of financial flexibility kills innovation at the departmental level.”*

4.5.3 Findings for RQ3: How to evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency?

Institutional documents such as Vision 2030 and the Integrated Annual Reports mainly views operational efficiency as being achieved through cost savings from shared services, strong central control over resources, increased use of digital systems and common performance measures like audit results and student success rates. Within this approach, centralised services such as Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology are seen as key to improving efficiency by avoiding duplication, applying the same rules across the institution and keeping tighter control over spending. Overall, this reflects a system where efficiency is judged by how well costs are managed and how smoothly the institution operates as a single, unified structure.

On the other hand, interview findings contradict this notion by highlighting inefficiencies at the operational level, particularly at the satellite campus. Participants stressed that centralised processes such as procurement, often slow down service delivery and make it difficult to respond quickly to pressing local needs. They explained that while central offices may become more efficient, campuses sometimes lose valuable opportunities because of bureaucratic delays. One prominent theme highlighted from the interviews is how responding swiftly is critical to affecting students' overall experience, disrupts the academic project and delays important work such infrastructural maintenance.

The findings indicate a conceptual disparity in the comprehension of efficiency. Official documents focus mainly on financial and technical efficiency such as saving costs and meeting audit requirements. In contrast, everyday practice places more value on how quickly and flexibly work can be done and how well services are delivered on the ground. This gap suggests that while the current governance system succeeds in achieving centralised financial efficiency, it does so at the cost of operational agility. As a result, there is a clear trade-off between control and quick response where being efficient at the institutional level does not always mean being efficient at the campus level.

SQ7. How does decision-making autonomy influence administrative processes?

The findings showed that decision-making autonomy or lack thereof, has a direct impact on administrative processes. Participants pointed to bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies as recurring problems. SP14 remarked, *“It can take weeks to get a decision signed off, which slows down even routine tasks.”* SP13 similarly stressed that *“lack of local decision-making autonomy causes administrative processes to take long and therefore makes the institution to be less adaptive.”* SP1 and SP15 expressed that *“due to limited decision-making autonomy, multiple layers of approvals are still required even for simple things like maintenance requests and staff travel which then leads to unnecessary backlogs.”*

SP2 reported that *“due to lack of authority to make prompt decisions, administrative operations become reactive instead of proactive and by the time the campus receives authorisation, the need has either elapsed or compounded.”* SP6 and SP9 advanced that *“as a result efficient performance drops when staff are preoccupied with approval follow-ups. Bureaucracy makes people less likely to take initiatives and service delivery to be sluggish”* SP12 agitated that *“autonomy at campus will allow for the alignment of administrative decisions with local needs rather than depend on standardised processes that ignore varying contexts at campus level”* SP10 and SP11 claimed that *“giving autonomy to campuses could meaningfully enhance turnaround times by bypassing the current hierarchical structure bottleneck.”*

SP5 protested that *“while needs could be identified early, the centralised approval system prolongs the procurement process such that it disrupts the academic cycle as resources are sometimes availed after the semester has concluded.”* SP3 and SP7 claimed *“that lack of autonomy has instilled fear and is promoting a culture of intimidation among staff members at campus level as they avoid even exercising legitimate discretionary power due to a fear of overstepping authority.”* SP4 and SP10 argued that *“a transition towards autonomy could enable the university to streamline workflows, reduce paperwork and make departments more agile as opposed to the current bureaucratic layers that hinders administrative process.”*

SQ8. What is the impact of decision-making structures on student services and experience?

Participants were always referring to how service delivery to the student populace is affected by the current decision-making structures. SP8 and SP12 lamented that *“students’ grievances and requests for support will remain unsolved due to the requisite for central authorisation.”* This often led to a lot of frustration among students and ultimately affected their overall academic experience. SP3, SP7 and SP10 recounted that *“these delays in the system around turnaround times in service delivery, directly affects student experience especially around issues the feel are of significant essence like registrations and funding, moreover when they realise that there can’t be any local intervention.”*

SP9 and SP15 narrated that *“the majority of the students’ dissatisfaction arises from the fact that local authorities on campus lack power to initiate immediate interventions. We end up having to tell them that their queries have been relegated to the main campus and that makes them lose confidence in the local structure.”* SP5 highlighted that *“centralised procurement causes delays in securing learning materials for students on time to allow for the swift start of the academic calendar and as such when the approval is granted and resources finally come it is already the end of the semester.”* SP1 and SP11 asserted that *“the current standardised governance model of student support is not sensitive to the prevailing demographics at campus level and as such fails to cater for the unique needs of each campus’s student populace.”*

SP13 claims that *“80% of student issues could easily be resolved locally if the campus was given the necessary autonomy. Unfortunately, this leads to a situation where they feel that the institution is indifferent towards them and that the system is inefficient.”* SP4 and SP6 lamented that *“students still hold us accountable for the backlogs and delays even though the decision-making powers are residing with the central administration.”* SP2 has noted that the relational element of multi-layered approval has been compromised and that the service of students has become procedural without necessarily having the human touch that ensures that students feel heard and valued. SP14 hypothesized that this non-

responsiveness towards student minor issues that can be addressed locally, because of the power dynamics, results in student disengagement.

SQ9. How does autonomy or lack thereof influence overall institutional efficiency?

It has been depicted that in the absence of proper autonomy, the campus will remain inefficient in its operations, thereby affecting the productivity of the staff, efficiency of resources and satisfaction of students. Systemic inefficiencies that were caused by operational delays were explained by SP8, SP10 and SP13, which indicated that the campus is not able to respond to localized challenges because of systemic inefficiencies. Several participants agreed that structural misalignment between responsibility and authority undermines internal operations and the institutional capacity for timely service delivery. SP3 and SP15 noted that *“the current governance model prioritizes bureaucratic vetting over operational execution thereby creating a system that reduces the institution’s agility. Again, due to lack of autonomy, the system has become so slow and unresponsive to the changing environment.”*

SP2 argued that *“Institutional efficiency is dependent upon decentralized decision-making, noting that the concentration of authority at main campus results in poor turnaround times that ultimately affects institutional performance indicators.”* SP4 and SP6 reported that *“the insistence on implementing central directives even when they are not favourable to the campus has even killed innovation and adaptation at the departmental level.”* SP9 and SP14 commented that *“this results in a wasteful duplication of efforts and inefficient use of human and time resources where documents are repeatedly circulated for external signatures that could have been done at the campus level.”*

SP11 remarked that *“centralised control has a ripple effect on operational flow of work, where a delay in one unit invariably affects the efficient performance of another department.”* SP12 responded that *“Autonomy improves accountability. When people have decision-making power, they take ownership of outcomes. In its absence, employees will only do the job in a non-committal fashion, thus diminishing the efficiency of the whole institution. SP5 complained that efficiency is lost as a decision that can be made in a day*

takes weeks to be made between the campuses, as a result of centralization. SP1 and SP7 shared the view that the system is slow and inflexible, which means that they cannot react fast to opportunities or challenges, and the university seems to be slow in response to them compared to more autonomous organizations.

4.5.4 Findings for RQ4: What recommendations can be made to improve the decision-making framework in multi-campus universities?

The fourth research question examined suggestions designed to improve multi-campus universities' decision-making framework. Persistent calls in the results were to enhance the decentralization of everyday decisions, to enhance the explicit delegation of authority, and to enhance accountability structures. Participants highlighted that central administration should communicate as well as collaborate more with satellite campuses. They said that by doing that, it would foster governance practices which are more responsive, transparent and are inclusive.

SQ10. What relationship exists between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency at your campus?

Several participants emphasised that decision-making autonomy enhances responsiveness to local operational demands, particularly in areas such as procurement, maintenance and student services. SP2, SP6 and SP11 indicated that *“when campuses are given authority to make operational decisions, work moves much faster because there is no need to wait for approvals from the main campus for every issue.”* The participant further noted that decentralisation improves the institution’s ability to respond quickly to urgent operational matters. SP2 and SP14 stated that *“operational efficiency depends heavily on how quickly decisions can be made and this becomes difficult when all decisions are centralised at the main campus.”* The participant highlighted that centralised systems negatively affect turnaround times and reduce institutional responsiveness.

SP3 and SP7 observed that *“there is a direct relationship between autonomy and efficiency because delays are reduced when decisions are made closer to where the problem exists.”* The participant further indicated that local decision-making improves workflow

coordination and reduces administrative backlogs. SP4, SP6 and SP9 argued that *“campus leaders understand the local environment better, so giving them autonomy improves the quality and relevance of services provided.”* According to the participant, context-specific decision-making allows departments to adapt more effectively to campus needs. SP5 and SP10 noted that *“many operational inefficiencies are caused by unnecessary approval layers. A process that should take one day often takes weeks because of centralisation.”* The participant emphasised that decentralised authority would significantly improve institutional responsiveness.

SP6 and SP11 explained that *“decision-making autonomy allows departments to act proactively instead of waiting for instructions from central offices.”* The participant further stated that this flexibility improves planning and operational coordination. SP7 and SP13 remarked that *“the current system is too rigid and inflexible. By the time approval is received from the main campus, the operational need may already have escalated into a crisis.”* The participant linked delayed decision-making to reduced institutional agility. SP8, SP9 and SP10 stated that *“limited autonomy slows down procurement, maintenance, and student support services because everything has to go through the same central structures.”* SP9 and SP11 highlighted that *“centralisation creates duplication of work because documents move repeatedly between campuses for approvals that could have been finalised locally.”* The participants believe that this leads to a wasteful employment of both human and financial resources.

Overall, the result indicate that decision-making autonomy is essential for achieving operational efficiency, particularly in multi-campus environments. The ability to make decisions at the point of need reduces delays, improves service delivery, enhances resource utilisation, and strengthens accountability. However, the success of this autonomy relies on having supportive processes and governance systems that ensure alignment and coordination across the institution.

SQ11. How can decision-making processes be improved to enhance efficiency?

The findings indicate that participants strongly associated operational efficiency with the simplification and streamlining of institutional decision-making processes. Most respondents argued that reducing bureaucratic layers, improving coordination and decentralising operational authority would significantly improve turnaround times, responsiveness and workflow efficiency across campuses.

SP1 and SP6 explained that *“decision-making processes can be improved by reducing the number of approval stages required before action is taken, especially for operational matters that affect day-to-day campus activities.”* The participant noted that excessive approval layers unnecessarily slow institutional processes. SP2 and SP8 stated that *“efficiency improves when decisions are delegated to the people closest to the operational issue instead of routing everything through central offices.”* According to the participant, decentralised approvals would reduce delays and improve responsiveness. SP3 and SP11 remarked that *“many processes are slowed down by duplication of administrative procedures. Simplifying workflows and removing repetitive approvals would improve operational effectiveness.”* The participant further indicated that unnecessary procedural repetition contributes to inefficiency.

SP4 and SP12 argued that *“decision-making can be improved through digital workflow systems that allow faster approvals, better tracking, and real-time communication between campuses.”* The participant highlighted technology integration as essential for process optimisation. SP5 and SP12 indicated that *“the institution should introduce turnaround time standards for approvals so that processes do not remain stagnant for extended periods.”* According to the participant, accountability for delays would improve efficiency. SP7 and SP13 stated that *“decision-making structures should be simplified so that departments know exactly who is responsible for approvals and where accountability lies.”* The participant argued that unclear reporting structures create confusion and delays.

SP9 and SP14 highlighted that *“cross-campus communication platforms should be strengthened so that information flows faster between campuses and decisions are*

coordinated more effectively.” The participant noted that poor communication contributes significantly to inefficiencies. SP10 and SP15 commented that *“decision-making processes should be more flexible and adaptable to the realities of different campuses rather than relying on uniform procedures for all campuses.”* The participant argued that context-sensitive governance improves responsiveness.

SQ12. What institutional mechanisms are required to sustain autonomy while ensuring accountability?

The findings revealed that participants viewed accountability mechanisms as essential for ensuring that increased decision-making autonomy does not compromise institutional performance, compliance, or governance integrity. Most participants agreed that autonomy should be accompanied by clear monitoring systems, performance measures, and structured reporting frameworks to maintain accountability across campuses.

SP1 and SP8 explained that *“the institution should introduce clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) linked to the responsibilities of each campus so that autonomy can be measured against actual performance outcomes.”* The participant indicated that measurable targets would improve accountability and transparency. SP2 and SP9 stated that *“digital dashboards and reporting systems are important because they allow central management to monitor campus performance in real time without interfering in daily operations.”* According to the participant, technology-based monitoring improves oversight while preserving autonomy. SP3 and SP10 remarked that *“performance agreements between the main campus and satellite campuses are necessary to clarify expectations, responsibilities, and accountability measures.”*

The participant argued that structured performance compacts strengthen institutional coordination. SP4 highlighted that *“autonomy should be supported by regular operational reviews and audits to ensure that campuses remain aligned with institutional policies and strategic objectives.”* The participant noted that accountability systems are necessary for maintaining institutional trust. SP5 and SP6 indicated that *“financial accountability mechanisms such as expenditure tracking, audit systems, and transparent reporting are*

essential for sustaining decentralised financial authority.” The participant linked financial transparency to institutional credibility. SP7 and SP13 remarked that *“there should be regular performance evaluations of campus leadership to assess whether autonomy is improving operational efficiency and service delivery.”* The participant argued that leadership accountability strengthens governance effectiveness.

SP11 noted that *“autonomy should be linked to performance outcomes, meaning campuses that demonstrate good governance and efficiency should retain greater operational discretion.”* The participant viewed accountability as performance-driven rather than purely compliance-based. SP12 and SP15 argued that *“there is a need for policy frameworks that clearly define governance structures, reporting relationships, and accountability responsibilities across campuses.”* The participant indicated that policy clarity strengthens institutional consistency. SP14 remarked that *“monitoring systems should focus on outcomes and efficiency rather than excessive procedural control, otherwise accountability itself becomes another source of bureaucracy.”* The participant advocated for balanced accountability systems.

SQ13. What governance practices or structures could improve both autonomy and efficiency?

The findings revealed that participants strongly supported governance practices and structures that balance central oversight with decentralised operational authority. Most respondents argued that efficiency in multi-campus universities can be improved when campuses are granted sufficient autonomy to address local operational needs while still remaining aligned with institutional policies, compliance requirements and strategic objectives.

SP1 and SP4 explained that *“the university needs a hybrid governance structure where strategic decisions remain centralised, but operational decisions are delegated to campuses.”* The participant argued that this balance would improve responsiveness without weakening institutional control. SP2 and SP7 stated that *“campus-based governance committees with delegated authority would improve efficiency because*

decisions could be made closer to the point of implementation.” According to the participant, local structures enhance responsiveness and reduce unnecessary delays. SP3 and SP8 remarked that *“governance systems should clearly separate strategic oversight from operational management so that campuses can function more independently in day-to-day matters.”* The participant indicated that role clarity is essential for efficiency.

SP5 and SP10 explained that *“the institution should adopt a matrix governance model that allows collaboration between campuses while giving local leaders authority over campus-specific operations.”* The participant highlighted flexibility and coordination as important governance principles. SP6 and SP12 stated that *“greater representation of satellite campuses in institutional governance structures would improve inclusivity, communication, and alignment of decisions with local realities.”* The participant linked participation to improved institutional cohesion. SP9 and SP15 indicated that *“governance structures should encourage participatory decision-making where campus leaders, staff, and relevant stakeholders contribute to institutional decisions.”* The participant argued that inclusive governance improves accountability and trust.

SP11 stated that *“effective governance requires strong accountability systems alongside decentralisation so that campuses are empowered but still monitored through performance indicators and reporting structures.”* The participant highlighted the importance of balanced governance. SP13 observed that *“governance structures should allow campuses to manage local partnerships, community engagement, and student support services independently because these areas require context-specific decision-making.”* The participant viewed operational flexibility as essential. SP14 remarked that *“institutional governance should focus less on procedural control and more on performance outcomes, allowing campuses flexibility in how they achieve institutional goals.”* The participant supported performance-oriented governance approaches.

4.6 Summary of Findings

Insights were drawn from interviews with 15 strategically placed university stakeholders, including departmental managers, campus principals, professors, and senior

administrators. A consensus among many of the participants was that the current institutional model is highly centralised as such constrain the capacity of campus-based leadership to address day-to-day operational requirements from a campus-based perspective with a sense of urgency. They also lamented that systemic inefficiencies such as delayed approvals, stringent fiscal control and lack of delegated authority leads to frustrations.

Most participants regarded centralization as the primary barrier to institutional innovation. Many viewed the absence of localized decision-making as an obstacle to innovation, delaying responsiveness and negatively affecting staff morale. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents raised a link between lack of autonomy and diminishing quality of student service, arguing that the inability to customize support to campus context results in poor student experience. Finally, participants advocated for a shift towards operational flexibility and the empowerment of campus leadership with autonomy to ensure that decision-making is timely and contextually relevant.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of Results

In this chapter, a critical synthesis of the results from Chapter 4 in relation to the study's research objectives, questions and literature review is presented. The discussions link these findings to the research questions, theoretical framework and literature review as also illustrated in Table 5.1 below. The qualitative data used in the discussions was obtained through semi-structured interviews with academic leaders and administrators. Key themes of broader dynamics within higher education are reflected in this chapter, more particularly in the decentralised institutional structure. The discussion critically engages with relevant contemporary academic literature. The findings provides insights into how they contribute to the wide conversation regarding the governance and effectiveness of higher education institutions. Moreover, three major theoretical lenses help interpret the findings in the context of autonomy and performance.

Table 5.1 Mapping of research questions to themes

Research Question	Corresponding Themes
RQ1: What existing decision-making structures and processes are used in multi-campus universities?	1. Governance Models and Decision-Making Autonomy 2. Human Resource Autonomy and Leadership Dynamics
RQ2: What are the determinants of the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities?	3. Financial Autonomy and Resource Optimization
RQ3: How to evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency?	4. Administrative Efficiency and Institutional Operations

	5. Student Service and Experience
RQ4: How to link decision-making autonomy to operational efficiency to establish a framework of decision-making at multi-campus universities?	6. Decision-Making Autonomy as a Driver of Operational Efficiency
	7. Process Optimization and Administrative Efficiency
	8. Accountability and Performance Governance
	9. Hybrid Governance and Matrix Autonomy

5.2 Discussion of Research Question One: What existing decision-making structures and processes are used in multi-campus universities?

Theme One: Governance Models and Decision-Making Autonomy

Data analysis has revealed that the participants are worried about how governing structures affect decision-making efficiency. Most participants agree that operations at satellite campuses are frustrated because of the centralized and hierarchical governance models currently in place at multi-campus universities. They pointed out that bureaucracy makes it hard to make decisions because many operational decisions on campus must go through the central office first, even though they are specific to that campus and would make things run more efficiently.

Alignment to the conceptual framework

Agency theory can help to comprehend the imbalance between the central university authorities (principals) and the campus administrators (agents) in a better way. Agency theory is well applied in the analysis and enhancement of organisational structures, governance and performance in applied business research. The theory highlights the fact

that in case agents are not controlled and incentives are not provided, they are likely to be in a wayward manner of the principal in the agent-principal relationship.

Nevertheless, the results of this research indicate the opposite strain, agents are extremely responsible and also grossly disempowered due to the lack of even the ability to execute their mandates. Such a lack of accountability and authority undermines trust, initiative and efficiency. In this way, when leadership is undermined, there is bound to be an effect on performance outcomes. Newman, Rose, and Teo (2016) posit that organisational performance is more effective in a setting where trust-based mechanisms are applicable as opposed to control-based oversight that is inflexible and bureaucratic. This is especially relevant for dynamic environments like multi-campus institutions, where the decisions need to be made contextually and in real time.

Within the framework of this paper, a governance model is conceptualised as a theoretical framework to explain organisational leadership, structural configurations and processes which facilitate effective decision-making, transparency and accountability. Schneider (2002) presents such a model as a model of exercising power and achieving organisational goals through defining the roles, responsibilities and relationships between the leaders and the stakeholders. The results have shown that the existing model of governance in the institution is a central bureaucracy that is ineffective in a multi-campus university since it does not consider the local needs of a campus.

Participants SP6 and SP10 recommended that a federated or a hybrid model be adopted, which provides each campus with a high level of autonomy but is consistent with overall institutional goals. Context-sensitive, decentralised governance frameworks, as Maringe and Ojo (2017) observe, are required to enhance performance in the higher education landscape in South Africa, along with the wider African context, especially within institutions spanning multiple regions. The authors believe that colonial influences are still deeply rooted in the higher education system of centralised control, strict hierarchies and inflexible structures that cripple many institutions throughout the African continent, particularly in innovation.

Moreover, these findings can be correlated with Bahnub (2019), who mentions the models of activity-based management that conceal bureaucratic rigidity by including participative elements. He argues that in order to decentralise, there must be a visible authority along with resources at the sub-institutional levels, which is clearly lacking in the institution under study at the moment.

Discussions related to existing literature

Meyer and Meijer (2018) studied leadership agility through observing decision-making in organisations. They found that having consistency in addition to clear direction does improve how well the organisation performs. However, the findings of this study show the exact opposite: inconsistent delegation, slow decision turnarounds and blurred accountability lines between campus and central authorities have reduced direction and consistency. Likewise, Ogola et al. (2017) stress that granting autonomy along with intellectual stimulation greatly improves institutional effectiveness and employee performance in leadership roles. Creativity and responsiveness were stifled in the present study, as departmental heads and campus managers reported the absence of such stimulation due to constant deferral to central approval.

Additionally, the findings agree with Bahnub (2019) critique of how universities create an illusion of decentralisation wherein they project a decentralised image while still tightly controlling operations. His assessment vividly reflects that “activity-based” governance is a mirage of change. Such is expressed in the frustration of many of the participants around their inability to take meaningful decisions despite holding seemingly significant titles. Furthermore, the study supports Brown’s (2000) findings that warn institutions against failure of cosmetic decentralisation that is not accompanied by reforms in processes, culture and accountability structures. True empowerment of people requires more than structural adjustment, but an honest effort based on a culture of trust and mutual respect.

The results indicate that governance in multi-campus universities is still mostly centralized and as such, does not afford campus leaders the necessary decision-making autonomy. Hierarchical governance models have strongly been criticised by scholars like Jongbloed

(2015) and Bleiklie (2018) for being too rigid to respond to local operational needs. On the other hand, adopting decentralised or federated governance structures would empower local leadership to facilitate decision-making processes that are contextual sensitive.

Theme Two: Human Resource Autonomy and Leadership Dynamics

Participants further observed that satellite campuses are not afforded the right to decide on their staffing plans without the imposition of the main campus through the dumping of their personnel to the satellite. The challenge of excessive centralisation is that both campus and departmental leadership are unable to determine a competent and high performing workforce that is responsive to the strategic objectives of the campus which in this case is the Repositioning Strategy of the selected university of technology. As a result, many of the leaders feel marginalised and powerless, with some describing their roles as purely symbolic. Participants agree that having autonomy over HR matters will enable accountability, boost staff morale and create a culture that values performance which will lead to operational efficiency.

Moreover, lack of autonomy on HR issues has created serious challenges for developing future talent and building strong teams. The success of leaders at campus level is always compromised by among other things limitations of being unable to develop a workforce plan or position the right people where they are most needed. Campus leaders often struggle to address interpersonal or disciplinary issues promptly because of lack of control in key human resources functions. This limitation has led to a breakdown in trust for leadership and the undermining of the satellite campus' strategic goals. Eventually it is justifiable to attribute leadership ineffectiveness, poor team performance and low staff morale to lack of autonomy. For this reason, participants strongly advocated for the decentralisation of human resource functions like recruitment, performance evaluation and disciplinary procedures.

Alignment to the conceptual framework

In the study's conceptual framework, the ability to make independent human resources decisions is considered a key factor that enhances leadership performance, thereby

improving operational efficiency. According to this framework, granting leaders the freedom to make HR-related decisions enables them to team performance with institutional objectives as such minimise bureaucratic delays and encourage a culture of ownership.

Findings from this study when viewed through the lens of Agency Theory, reveal a significant structural weakness in that, the central administration as the principal appoints the campus principal and departmental heads as agents to advance the university's academic and strategic objectives, however they are not empowered with the necessary authority to make hiring decisions, assess staff performance or determine the reward system to enable them to advance the interest of the institution. Decision-making autonomy in HR matters is a functional necessity which allows campuses to carry out their responsibilities effectively while remaining accountable for the results thereof.

From the perspective of governance models, the findings of the study emphasise shared or distributed leadership, where decision-making is spread across different levels rather than concentrated at the centre. Such models of leadership allow institutions to respond more quickly to local needs, encourage flexibility and create space for innovation. However, the absence of autonomy in as far as human resource functions are concerned is obvious evidence of a contrast and a gap between what policies claim to have delegated and the reality of what really happens on the ground.

Additionally, through the lens of Conflict Theory we observe how limiting HR autonomy leads to organisational conflict and a sense of inequality. When staff at the campus feel that decisions about their professional development, growth or disciplinary matters are handled remotely by people without context, empathy, frustration and disengagement can easily set in. Likewise, if leaders are expected to produce results but are yet denied the authority to do so effectively by being given the right to choose their teams' make-up and composition, they find themselves in a serious contradiction. Over time, these challenges result in workplace conflict, low staff morale and eventually paralyzing organisational progress.

Discussions related to existing literature

The findings on human resource autonomy and leadership dynamics mirrors exactly what experts in university management have been warning us about in many studies. Scholars such as Samuel and Umoh (2023) and Gadirajurrett, Srinivasan, Stevens and Jeena (2018) the degree of authority that leaders have over their teams is strongly linked to how effective institutional leadership is. When HR functions are centralised such that campus leaders are unable to recruit, assess or manage their staff effectively, it limits their ability to lead and makes the institution to be less flexible.

Alqahtani and Ayentimi (2021) identify important benefits of having decentralised HR structures at universities especially those operating with multiple campuses. Involving a broader range of people in staffing decisions builds trust among parties, strengthens the authority of campus leaders and allows for quick responses to conflicts that may arise (DHET, 2023). According to the study's findings, many participants agree that allowing campuses to independently make HR decisions will enhance everyday operations and foster a more robust leadership culture at satellite campuses.

In contrast, Martineau, Tang, Chen, Xiaoyun, Zhan, Makhanya and Magongo (2003) warn that giving autonomy without supervision may result in inconsistent practices and even abuse of that authority. As such, they emphasise the need for strong accountability and transparency whilst encouraging decentralised HR systems. Participants in this study also expressed similar views by advocating for a clear, structured and policy-driven autonomy that is responsive to specific circumstances while still aligning with institutional and quality standards.

Agency theory as captured by Kivistö and Zalyevska (2015) point out that, even though decentralization is widely recommended, there still needs to be a way to check performance and make sure that campus leaders (agents) prioritise the welfare of the university at large (principal). The findings indicate that if campus leaders (agents) are limited in their ability to express their work efficiently, there will be no innovation in their work.

Research has progressively shown that shared governance models work better in modern complex institutions (Taylor, 2013). These models are about giving campus leadership the right to take part in setting the direction of the university and managing its resources, especially its people. Without these structures in multi-campus universities, as shown in this study there often exists a gap between institutional policy and what actually happens on ground at individual campuses.

Studies by Lukman, Balkaran and Makiwane (2022) show that centralization of staffing decisions as perceived through the lenses of Conflict Theory can often lead to conflict within institutions especially when people feel that decisions are unfair, disconnected from their reality or applied inconsistently. These findings reflect the tensions also highlighted by respondents in this study who felt sidelined in the decision-making processes that directly affected their teams and their performance.

5.3 Discussion of Research Question Two: What are the determinants of the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities?

Theme Three: Financial Autonomy and Resource Optimization relative

Financial autonomy and resource optimization were raised as key issues of consideration in this study of multi-campus university operations. Participants explained that when campus leaders can have autonomy over their own budgets, this will influence how well and how quick can a campus respond to its operational demands. However, most of the participants pointed out that financial decisions such as approving purchases, monitoring spending and allocating budgets are still controlled at the main campus. Centralization is the greatest hindrance to resource optimization especially in fast moving situations or emergencies where a delay in getting financial approval slows down service delivery and dampens staff morale.

Participants repeatedly raised the concern that campus leaders were expected to deliver outcomes without having control over the financial resources necessary to achieve them. Many departmental heads and campus administrators explained that they often have to send funding requests through layers of central approval which in turn resulted in delays that

made their needs appear less important or time sensitive. Due to the gap that existed between responsibility and authority given, campus operations became very slow resulting in missed opportunities for improvements, delayed maintenance and underutilization of funds.

In cases where campuses had some financial freedom especially when it came to handling small discretionary funds, decisions were made faster, local needs were addressed sooner and resources were used more creatively. The lack of financial independence made it difficult to plan strategically at the campus level. Participants explained that because they could not manage their own budgets, they struggled to run programmes that suited their local needs, hire temporary workers or support students' initiatives that came up urgently. As a result, resources were used reactively, mainly to follow rules rather than being used for long term planning and growth.

Alignment to the conceptual framework

This study's framework considers financial autonomy as a key factor in improving the operational efficiency of multi-campus universities. The framework suggests that when campus leaders have power to oversee their budgets, allocate resources and make their own procurement choices they are likely to respond more quickly to local needs and deliver contextually relevant service as such contribute to overall improvement of institutional performance. However, when too much power is concentrated at the main campus, it slows down decision making, limits creativity and makes it impossible for campus leaders to adapt to changing operational needs.

As analysed through Agency Theory in this study, campus leaders act on behalf of the central office and are in charge of carrying out the university's instructions and meeting its performance standards. However, as noted by Linder & Foss (2013), when these agents do not have autonomy over the financial resources necessary for performing their responsibilities, a disconnection between accountability and authority is eminent. The theory emphasizes that for the agency relationship to work well, the institution must balance between the responsibility assigned to campus leaders and the resources available

to act independently (Ahmad, Farley & Naidoo, 2012). The result of the study shows that financial disempowerment throws off this balance and makes the institution become less efficient.

Regarding governance models, the framework advocates for a system where campuses are given more decision-making powers around financial resources (Lavanya et al. 2024). Sheremet, Chorny, Pshenychna and Domotskyi (2024) assert that when campuses are given adequate financial autonomy, they tend to be more responsive to local needs, can demonstrate creativity and take ownership of their operations. However, if everything is controlled from the main campus, the satellite campuses become reactive, slow and unable to plan or use resources strategically.

Conflict theory helps explain how lack of control over financial decisions, though held responsible for overall results on the side of the satellite campus, leads to frustration. This creates tension between the campuses and the central office making it almost impossible for parties to trust one another, do teamwork and may even cause staff to withdraw or resist decisions. Such tensions are exacerbated when there is unequal allocation of resources and funding priorities seem to be centred around the main campus which is not based on needs assessment.

Discussions related to existing literature

Evidence from earlier research aligns with this study's findings, highlighting the importance of financial decentralization in higher education. Dinye (2016) posits that the distribution of financial authority to campuses enables institutions to control expenditure to reflect local needs in the most effective and relevant ways possible. Pinheiro and Berg (2017) contend that multi-campus universities need to retain financial autonomy at the campus level to support innovation, maintain competitiveness and remain sustainable in a fast-changing environment.

Despite the consensus, other African researchers like Rammbuda (2023) and Mutongoza (2025) argue that for countries like South Africa which underwent an apartheid system it made sense for universities to centralize financial control to enable equitable distribution

of resources and the redress of past inequalities. Unfortunately, over time this system has become the main cause of delays in service delivery and lack of innovation in multi-campus universities. What respondents have repeatedly stated, aligns with the result of this study in the current study as they expressed their frustrations with financial processes which are bureaucratic and not adaptable to changing contexts to allow for seamless decision-making that will improve daily operations.

As further explained by Painsi, Leitner and Rybnicek (2025), financial autonomy is not just about approving transactions only but also about ensuring that finances are used to achieve the strategic objective of the campus. Campus leaders are more likely to make a difference if they have the freedom to direct funds to identified campus needs such as student support programs, facilities upgrades and community focused initiatives to build strong partnerships. This idea of strategic responsiveness also emerged in the empirical study to emphasise the argument that delayed or denied funding is tantamount to lost opportunities to address local issues at a campus level.

Kivistö and Zalyevska (2015) makes an observation through the agency theory that if campus leaders are held responsible for performance or outcomes without being given control over financial resources, this will inevitably create a distorted agency relationship. As a result, managers tend to avoid taking risks but rely heavily on central decision-making processes and lose motivation to be innovative. Participants also echoed the same sentiments that real accountability only works when campus leaders also have financial authority to support the decisions they are responsible for.

According to Shattock (1999) modern universities need governance structures that are adaptable and which respond quickly to changing conditions. Meanwhile, strict control of financial decisions from the central office especially in multi-campus universities causes lack of flexibility which in turn slows down operations. The study's results advocate for a more adaptable strategy which will introduce financial autonomy in staggered phases so that the campus can be more responsive to their needs while maintaining alignment to institutional objectives.

Finally, conflict theory as captured by Kivistö and Zalyevska (2015), helps explain why conflict arises when campuses do not control their finances. It purports that lack of financial authority makes staff feel unequal and marginalised as such demotivated. If campuses believe that they are neglected or underfunded, they may start to distance themselves from the institutional overall objectives. Some participants may even find informal ways to work around the slow central processes.

5.4 Discussion of Research Question Three: How to evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency?

Theme Four: Administrative Efficiency and Institutional Operations

The effectiveness of multi-campus universities depends largely on how their administrative and operational systems work. In this study, participants repeatedly said that when institutional administration is overly centralised, it leads to slow decision-making, redundant processes and systemic delays which weakens operational efficiency. Furthermore, participants pointed out a few challenges such as slow approval for purchases, strict rules for basic administrative tasks and the central office being overwhelmed with issues that could easily be handled at campus level. These problems became especially clear in lack of responsiveness to situations requiring prompt action like campus maintenance, IT support, scheduling facilities and completing campus-based projects.

It was depressing to see campus administrators fail to do their jobs without needing to seek permission regularly from the main campus, according to the participants. According to some of the respondents, major infrastructure maintenance and purchases were postponed for months due to cumbersome and complex procedures at the central campus. Such delays impacted productivity as well as damaged the reputation of the university to students and other interested parties. Most of the respondents emphasized the fact that providing campuses with more power to make their own administrative decisions would accelerate processes, enhance accountability and assist in developing a stronger, performance-focused culture.

Furthermore, because of administrative inefficiencies, the system could not be well coordinated between the satellite and main campus due to centralization such that some tasks were duplicated. In some cases, campuses created their own separate systems to make up for the delays of the central office. As such, participants advocated that certain administrative duties like the approval of vendors, scheduling of activities and internal reporting should be managed directly at each campus, however following the same institutional rules.

Alignment to the conceptual framework

Within the conceptual framework of this study, administrative efficiency was identified as a significant component. In this study's conceptual framework, administrative efficiency emerged as an important element directly linked to and influenced by the level of autonomy in decision-making in a multi-campus setting. This model highlights the need for autonomy in relation to daily and administrative tasks to allow for quick and customized responses to situations arising at a campus level. Without local authority, campus workflow slows down, there is duplication of communication and departments struggle to work together. When campuses wield some level of autonomy, they can act faster, use their resources better and rely less on the central office as it is often inundated with requests.

According to Agency Theory, campus administrators are agents tasked with effectively managing the university's operations on behalf of the central leadership. However, these agents are not adequately empowered to undertake their responsibility even though they are made to account for the outcomes thereof. This is because there is too much bureaucracy in the system, where procedures are long and approval layers are too many to allow for the efficient running of the campus which will then translate into overall institutional performance. This demand of accountability by the central office but denial of resources and authority eventually leads to tension and unhealthy working relationships. On the other hand, giving campus agents autonomy to make operational administrative decisions makes them feel trusted, responsible and motivated.

Administrative tasks are most efficient when they are carried out close to the point of delivery, according to an analysis of governance models particularly those that focus on participatory and distributive governance (Lavanya et al. 2024). Campus-based governance models facilitate the adjustment of administrative procedures to fit local context without necessarily compromising institutional cohesion. A distributed governance model allows for varying levels of authority on different campuses based on capacity, workload and context which ensures the smooth function of campuses and improved overall institutional performance (Lavanya et al. 2024).

Conflict Theory, as alluded to by Razak (1967) helps explain the tension that comes up when satellite campuses are blamed for administrative problems that actually come from delays at the main campus. In the case where the leadership has no mandate to act, yet is the face of service delivery, conflict and frustration will arise. This loss of power may result in passive resistance, misconceptions and demotivation over time with staff members who feel that the system is biased or ineffective (Wynn, 1973).

Discussions related to existing literature

A few scholars also confirm the findings of this study that giving campuses more control over their administrative decisions plays an important role in how efficiently a university can operate. Sporn (1999) suggests that universities allowing their different units operational independence are more likely to adapt and be successful, particularly in dynamic environments. This is particularly so in multi-campus universities where each campus must have the autonomy to react promptly to its unique situation.

According to Claxton-Freeman (2015), decentralised decision-making models facilitate customized administration and a quick allocation of resources to satellite campuses. Multi-campus universities are in different locations with different needs, and therefore, a centralised system tends to introduce delays and decisions that are not applicable to the local context. Decentralizing to campus heads enables an improved match between the strategy and operations.

Moreover, decision-making on the basis of performance, coupled with the managers being given the authority over daily operations, enhances quality assurance and accountability (Carl & Kapp, 2004). They also highlighted that administrative work is more effective when leaders are capable of coming up with their own decisions concerning the procurement process, infrastructural development and management of internal processes, since this is significant in ensuring flexibility and smooth operation of a multi-campus environment.

In addition, Tierney and Minor (2003) emphasize the need to make sure that the general vision of the university and the decisions taken at every campus are in line. They pointed out that although freedom of the campuses to run their own day-to-day activities is beneficial, a good institutional culture and effective communication are essential. These factors can ensure that all campuses are striving towards the same standard and do not lose their connection with each other.

When administrative autonomy is given to campus leaders on tasks such as the management of maintenance budgets, the planning of an academic calendar and discretion to act on emergencies, turnaround time is enhanced, delays minimized and this boosts staff morale. Participants in this study attested that a concentrated control of administrative functions to the central office slows down processes that could easily be handled at the campus level.

In summary, administrative efficiency and institutional operations in multi-campus universities are significantly improved by structured and context-aware decision-making autonomy. However, the success of this model relies on clearly established policies, proper training and a strong organisational culture to ensure conformity to standards and accountability.

Theme Five: Student Service and Experience

Student services and the overall student experience are often the most visible indicators of institutional performance in higher education-particularly in multi-campus environments where responsiveness must adapt to different geographic contexts. Participants in this study

repeatedly highlighted that quality of key student services-such as admissions, academic advising, registration, student welfare, career development, and extracurricular activities-was closely linked to the level of decision-making autonomy granted to individual campuses.

When decisions about student affairs had to go through a central office, most respondents felt that campuses experienced poorly aligned interventions, slower service delivery, and a drop in student satisfaction. Due to bureaucratic constraints, campus administrators and leaders expressed frustration at being unable to address student complaints promptly, design locally relevant student development programmes, or respond quickly to disciplinary issues or emergencies. As a result, even though they lacked the authority to provide timely solutions, they often became the ones facing students' frustration.

On the other hand, when campus teams were allowed to make their own decisions in areas like student support initiatives, addressing emerging mental issues, or running campus-specific events, there was clear evidence of better engagement and higher student satisfaction. Participants noted that students often judge the university's effectiveness based on how quickly and compassionately frontline services respond to them. Consequently, the lack of autonomy of campus teams not only led to the slowing of administrative processes but also undermined the credibility of the institution among students and external stakeholders.

Moreover, it was observed by participants that a lack of autonomy meant that campuses were not able to customize their services to reflect the cultural, social and linguistic realities of their student populations. This is especially interesting in South Africa and other regional settings, where campuses have student populations with a wide range of languages, socio-economic backgrounds, and support needs. Campuses are unable to appropriately address the expectations, welfare needs and lived experiences of their diverse student bodies without the capacity to design context-specific interventions.

Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

Within the conceptual structure of this research, student service and student experience are located as an important output measure that indicates the effectiveness of the institutional operation and governance structure (Amoako and Asamoah-Gyimah, 2020). According to the framework, the ability of campus-level units to provide responsive, context-specific and culturally relevant services to students is supported by their meaningful decision-making autonomy. This, consequently, optimizes the overall institutional performance and results in the increased student satisfaction (Nastasić, Banjević & Gardašević, 2019).

Applying the Agency Theory, campus principals and student service directors are the agents of the institution, whose responsibilities are to guarantee quality experiences among students. But in cases where these leaders do not have the power to make important decisions, including resource allocation, event approval, student discipline or academic advising practices, the principal-agent relationship becomes tense (Gailmard and Patty, 2012). Practically, the central university still retains decision-making capacity but still holds campus leadership responsible for service outcomes, which is an imbalance that usually leads to inefficiencies and decreasing student trust (Baar, 2020). For agency relationship in student service to be effective, it is essential for campus leaders to have meaningful operational discretion and have the tools to operate in the best interests of their students (Baar, 2020). The findings suggest a pronounce preference for governance approaches that supports decentralisations, allowing decisions to be made nearer to the place where services are provided- especially to students.

The findings show a clear preference for governance models that support decentralisation, allowing decisions to be made closer to where services are delivered- particularly for students. Institutional responsiveness is enhanced when campuses are able to tailor their own student services and respond more swiftly to local needs by setting local policies and programmes, which enables them to be more responsive (Lavanya et al. 2024). Similarly, participatory governance methods enable students to have a meaningful voice in the crucial decisions, which can assist in making sure that services are inclusive and meet their unique needs (Varnham, Olliffe, Waite & Cahill, 2017).

The Conflict Theory can be a valuable perspective on the tensions that the staff and students undergo when working or studying in centrally managed systems (Wessels and Sadler, 2021). It underscores how structural disparities, in which power is concentrated, and expectations to deliver services are located in remote campuses, are likely to create frustration, dissatisfaction and opposition (Lukman, Balkaran & Gobingca, 2019). In cases where students recognize the existence of unequal service delivery across campuses or are made to feel marginalized by slow administrative procedures, such perceptions tend to create conflict as a type of institutional pushback (Boboyi & Kang'ethe, 2024). These circumstances may decrease the motivation of the staff and students and lead to problems in service delivery. Decentralisation of student services, thus, not only enhances day-to-day functionality but also assists in alleviating the internal tensions and creating more cohesion within the institution.

Discussion of related Literature

The results of the present paper find a close reflection in the literature that it correlates decision-making autonomy with greater student satisfaction in the university. According to Page and Kulick (2016), institutional support services are intimately connected to student retention and academic performance through quality, accessibility, and responsiveness. By ensuring that universities provide student-centred services in a timely manner, university students may develop a strong feeling of connection and commitment to the university, factors that directly determine retention rates, performance, and graduation rates.

Shomotova and Ibrahim (2025) also emphasize that interactions of students with the institutional systems beyond the classroom are a significant factor influencing their student engagement. Academic advising, financial aid, career guidance, and campus involvement services are some of the key aspects that drive the overall student experience. Once such services become inflexible, unresponsive or slow, in many cases because of centralised administrative choke points, the institution can hardly perform its most important role, which is to assist in student development.

Ayuk and Jacobs (2018) have observed that the way students view the quality of services offered gradually affects their opinions on the overall quality of institutions. This is especially difficult in a multi-campus setting since one standardized policy cannot usually be effective in meeting the specific needs of various campuses. Consequently, they support decentralized management models that enable the process of local adaptation of services to make institutions more just and inclusive.

Using the Agency Theory, Lane and Kivistö (2008) believe that campus leaders charged with the responsibility to increase student outcomes must possess adequate decision-making power. Such leaders lose their effectiveness and the feeling of empowerment without such autonomy, and it eventually results in poor service delivery and lower student involvement. Marginson and Considine (2000) highlights the importance of flexible governance in higher education and suggest that the organization of student services at a campus must be designed to meet the cultural and regional background of the campus. The results of this study corroborate this view, showing that the campuses that have decentralised systems and significant service autonomy are more capable of addressing the needs of their varied student bodies.

The application of Conflict Theory by Wienclaw (2021) provides a useful understanding of how the imbalance in service delivery among campuses can result in more institutional tensions. A campus receiving superior or quicker service just because it is nearer to central offices might be viewed as unfair treatment by students at other campuses and may cause resentment or even demonstrations. Such concerns were echoed in this study, where respondents stated that such perceived inequalities tend to put a lot of strain on relationships not only among campuses but also between students and university leadership. Here, decentralisation is not merely a question of administrative decision-it is a way to even more fairness, cohesion, and institutional symmetry.

5.5 Discussion of Research Question Four: How to evaluate the impact of decision-making on operational efficiency?

Theme Six: Decision-Making Autonomy as a Driver of Operational Efficiency

Respondents frequently emphasised the strong relationship between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency within multi-campus universities. Findings indicate that where campus-level leaders, particularly at the satellite campus, are granted meaningful autonomy, the decision-making process has become significantly faster, responsiveness to operational challenges and overall service delivery.

Respondents also highlighted that the ability to make decisions locally, especially in areas such as procurement, maintenance and student support enables campuses to address issues in real-time, thereby reducing administrative delays and improving institutional performance. In contrast, when decisions are required to pass through central structures at the main campus, processes become prolonged, often resulting in inefficiencies, missed opportunities and dissatisfaction among staff and students.

Participants further described this dynamic as a centralisation-efficiency trade-off, where the institutional emphasis on control and compliance undermines operational agility. While centralisation ensures standardisation and financial oversight, it limits the ability of campuses to act swiftly within their specific contexts. As a result, the satellite campus often experiences delays that negatively affect productivity, service delivery and stakeholder confidence.

Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual approach positions decision-making autonomy not only as an independent variable, but also as a vital enabler within the principal-agent interaction, which directly affects operational efficiency outcomes. Drawing on Agency Theory, the university's central administration (principal) delegates responsibilities to campus-level leadership (agents), who are expected to deliver operational outcomes such as efficient service delivery, resource utilisation and responsiveness. The framework assumes a causal chain in which autonomy enables improved process dynamics, which in turn produce

measurable efficiency gains. The study's results empirically confirms this relationship, particularly within the multi-campus context of the selected university of technology.

Firstly, the findings demonstrate that decision-making autonomy directly enhances institutional responsiveness, which can be interpreted as an outcome of effective agency alignment. At the satellite campus, participants indicated that when authority is decentralised, local leadership (agents) is empowered to respond immediately to operational challenges such as procurement, infrastructure maintenance and student service demands. According to agency theory, efficiency is maximised when agents are granted sufficient discretion to operate in the principal's best interest (Spremann, 1987).

The reduction of decision latency observed in the findings reflects a situation where agency costs, particularly delays and inefficiencies arising from excessive monitoring and approval layers, are minimised. In this way, autonomy transforms rigid governance arrangements into adaptive, responsive systems, improving alignment between delegated responsibilities and decision-making authority (Gailmard & Patty, 2012). Secondly, the conceptual framework's treatment of operational efficiency as a multi-dimensional construct aligns with agency theory's emphasis on performance outcomes. The findings show that decentralised decision-making improves:

- Turnaround time, by reducing the need for principal-level approvals, thereby lowering coordination costs;
- Service delivery quality, as agents utilise local knowledge to make context-specific decisions (Eisenhardt, 1989);
- Resource utilisation, by enabling more informed and immediate allocation decisions, reducing inefficiencies associated with centralised control.

These outcomes illustrate that when agents are empowered with decision-making authority, they are better positioned to optimise performance in line with institutional objectives.

Thirdly, the result indicate that the link between autonomy and efficiency is mediated by institutional conditions, reinforcing key assumptions of agency theory. Autonomy alone does not guarantee improved outcomes; rather, it must be supported by mechanisms that ensure alignment between principal and agent interests. These include:

- Streamlined administrative processes, which reduce transaction costs;
- Leadership capacity, which ensures that agents are competent to exercise delegated authority;
- Trust, which reduces the need for excessive monitoring and control (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2000).
- This suggests that autonomy functions as an enabling condition, but its effectiveness depends on the presence of governance mechanisms that balance discretion with accountability.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that the absence of autonomy creates agency inefficiencies. When decision-making authority is centralised, agents are held accountable for outcomes without having the power to influence them. This results in:

- Increased bureaucratic delays,
- Reduced service responsiveness,
- Inefficient resource deployment.

Such conditions reflect a classic principal–agent misalignment, where the principal retains control while expecting performance from agents who lack decision-making power (Lane & Kivistö, 2008). This imbalance undermines both efficiency and accountability, particularly in geographically dispersed institutions.

Importantly, the study introduces the concept of a “threshold effect” of autonomy, which can be interpreted through agency theory as the minimum level of delegated authority required to enable effective agent performance. Below this threshold, agents remain constrained by central controls, limiting their ability to deliver outcomes. This insight is

particularly relevant in multi-campus universities, where symbolic or partial delegation fails to reduce agency costs or improve efficiency.

Finally, the findings confirm that decision-making autonomy contributes not only to operational efficiency but also to broader institutional outcomes, including stakeholder satisfaction, institutional credibility and campus-level performance. From an agency perspective, this reflects improved goal congruence between principals and agents, where decentralised decision-making enables agents to act in ways that align with institutional objectives while responding to local needs (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Discussion of Related Literature

A substantial amount of literature strongly backs the findings of this study, linking decentralised governance arrangements to increased organisational efficiency and responsiveness. Existing scholarship consistently demonstrates that when decision-making authority is devolved to lower organisational levels, institutions are better positioned to respond to contextual demands, optimise resource utilisation and enhance service delivery outcomes (Ohrling, Øvretveit & Brommels, 2021).

From a higher education efficiency perspective, Johnes (2006) argues that institutional performance is closely tied to how effectively decision-making processes are structured, noting that decentralised systems enable resources to be distributed more efficiently based on real-time, localised information. This is particularly relevant in multi-campus settings, where centralised decision-making often lacks sensitivity to the operational realities of satellite campuses. Similarly, De Boer, Enders and Schimank (2007), emphasise that decentralisation promotes flexibility, innovation and responsiveness by empowering organisational units to act independently within defined accountability frameworks.

Further reinforcing this, Faguet (2021), through decentralisation theory, posits that decision-making should occur at the lowest possible level of governance where information is most accurate and relevant. This principle, often referred to as the “decentralisation theorem,” suggests that when local participants can customize their decisions to meet particular requirements and circumstances, efficiency improvements occur. The findings

of this study reflect this proposition, as participants highlighted improved responsiveness and reduced delays when decision-making authority was exercised at the campus level.

Within the framework of higher education institutions, Faguet (2014) argue that increased institutional autonomy, particularly at sub-unit levels enables universities to adapt more effectively to changing environments, thereby enhancing operational performance. This is echoed by Marginson and Considine (2000), who emphasise that modern universities require adaptive governance systems that balance central coordination with local flexibility in order to remain competitive and responsive. Similarly, Lane and Kivistö (2008) argue that granting decision-making authority to institutional sub-units enhances accountability and performance, provided that appropriate monitoring mechanisms are in place.

Empirical studies within the African higher education context further support these findings. Abugre (2018) noted that centralised governance models in African universities often struggle to accommodate diverse institutional contexts, leading to inefficiencies and reduced responsiveness. In contrast, decentralised models are associated with improved operational outcomes, particularly in institutions serving heterogeneous student populations across multiple campuses. Additionally, Naidoo (2016) emphasises that institutional effectiveness in South Africa depends on the ability of universities to align governance structures with their operational realities, particularly in post-merger, multi-campus institutions.

The literature also highlights the limitations of excessive centralisation. Njom, (2025) argues that highly centralised decision-making structures create administrative bottlenecks and reduce organisational agility, particularly in large and complex institutions. This is further supported by Lapsley, Pallot and Levy (2002), who identify bureaucratic centralisation as a key constraint on innovation and responsiveness. These insights resonate with the findings of this study, where centralised approval systems were identified as a major source of delays and inefficiencies at the satellite campus.

In addition, research on service delivery within higher education highlights responsiveness as a crucial measure of how well institutions perform. Page and Kulick (2016) argue that timely and context-sensitive decision-making is critical for enhancing student outcomes and institutional effectiveness. According to Sheremet, Chornyi, Pshenychna, Sheremet and Domotskyi (2024), institutions can better address students needs through decentralised administrative systems, which in turn enhances both engagement and satisfaction.

Finally, the idea of hybrid or matrix governance framework has been attracting more interest lately in literature as a means of balancing central control with decentralised autonomy. Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) suggest that such models enable institutions to achieve both efficiency and accountability by distributing decision-making authority across different organisational levels. This aligns with the study's recommendation for a Matrix Autonomy Model, which seeks to integrate the benefits of decentralisation with the need for institutional oversight.

Theme Seven: Process Optimization and Administrative Efficiency

Participants pointed out that inefficiencies in processes significantly hinder effective decision-making within the institution. The current system, characterised by multiple layers of approval and rigid administrative procedures, was described as overly bureaucratic and time-consuming. Respondents indicated that streamlining decision-making processes through reducing approval layers and simplifying procedures, would significantly improve operational efficiency.

The reliance on central approval mechanisms for routine operational matters was highlighted as a key contributor to delays, particularly at the satellite campus. Participants suggested that introducing digital workflow systems and automating approval processes could enhance transparency, reduce bottlenecks and improve turnaround times. Furthermore, enabling campus-level decision-making within predefined limits was viewed as essential for improving efficiency without compromising accountability.

Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

Process optimization is conceptualized as a critical mediating variable that connects operational efficiency to decision-making autonomy within the conceptual framework of this study. While decision-making autonomy provides the authority and flexibility required for action, it is through efficient administrative processes that this autonomy is translated into measurable performance outcomes. In other words, autonomy without process optimisation remains underutilised, whereas optimised processes enable autonomy to produce tangible gains in turnaround time, service delivery quality and resource utilisation.

From an Agency Theory perspective, process optimisation plays a central role in reducing agency costs, particularly those associated with coordination, monitoring and delayed decision execution (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). In highly centralised systems, multiple approval layers, bureaucratic procedures and fragmented workflows increase transaction costs and slow down decision-making (Mansfield, 1973). These inefficiencies arise because the principal (central management) retains control while agents (campus-level actors) must navigate complex processes to implement decisions. The study's result indicate that when administrative processes are streamlined through reduced approval layers, clearer procedures and digital workflow systems, agents are able to act more efficiently, thereby improving operational outcomes.

The conceptual framework therefore positions process optimisation as a mechanism for enhancing principal-agent alignment. When processes are simplified, the gap between decision authority and execution is reduced, enabling campus-level leaders to act in a timely and context-responsive manner. This aligns with Eisenhardt's (1989) argument that efficient organisational systems minimise information asymmetry and enable agents to make decisions that are better aligned with institutional objectives. Similarly, Brickley, Smith and Zimmerman (2003) highlight that well-designed administrative systems reduce the need for excessive monitoring by the principal, thereby improving organisational efficiency.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that process inefficiencies such as bureaucratic delays and rigid approval hierarchies, act as constraints that weaken the autonomy-efficiency relationship. Even in cases where some level of autonomy is granted, inefficient processes limit the ability of campus actors to translate that autonomy into effective action. This supports the conceptual proposition that process optimisation is not merely supportive but essential for operationalising autonomy.

In addition, the study demonstrates that process optimisation enhances institutional responsiveness, which is a key intermediate variable in the conceptual framework. By streamlining workflows and enabling faster approvals, institutions can respond more effectively to operational demands, particularly in multi-campus environments where geographic distance exacerbates delays. This claim aligns with governance model theory emphasis of the critical nature of aligning organisational structures and processes to achieve efficiency and responsiveness (Jerab, 2023).

The findings also suggest that process optimisation contributes to improved accountability and transparency, particularly when supported by digital systems and clearly defined procedures. Automated workflows and tracking systems allow for better monitoring of decisions without imposing excessive bureaucratic controls. This reflects a shift from control-based governance to system-based governance, where efficiency is achieved through well-designed processes rather than hierarchical oversight.

Moreover, the study highlights that process optimisation requires institutional capacity and leadership competence. Efficient processes must be supported by skilled personnel who can navigate and implement them effectively. This reinforces the idea that process optimisation is embedded within a broader organisational system, where governance, leadership and operational capabilities interact to produce efficiency outcomes.

Discussion of Related Literature

The results of this study are firmly substantiated by a significant amount of research highlighting the negative effects of bureaucratic complexity on organizational efficiency, particularly in large and multi-layered institutions like universities. Bureaucratic systems

characterised by multiple approval layers, rigid procedures and centralised control mechanisms are widely associated with administrative delays, reduced responsiveness and increased transaction costs (Mansfield, 1973). In higher education contexts, these inefficiencies are further amplified in multi-campus institutions where geographic dispersion adds an additional layer of complexity to already centralised processes.

From a governance and organisational theory perspective, Mintzberg (1983) argues that highly centralised bureaucracies tend to prioritise control and standardisation at the expense of flexibility and innovation. This structural rigidity limits the capacity of organisational units to address local needs efficiently. Similarly, Jensen and Meckling (2019), contend that modern higher education institutions require more flexible and decentralised administrative systems to improve efficiency, accountability, and performance. Their work suggests that decentralisation must be accompanied by process simplification and managerial autonomy to achieve meaningful efficiency gains.

The relationship between process optimisation and efficiency is further supported by Hammer and Champy (1993) in their theory of business process re-engineering, which emphasises the need to redesign organisational processes to eliminate unnecessary steps and improve performance outcomes. Their work demonstrates that organisations that streamline workflows and reduce bureaucratic redundancies experience significant improvements in speed, cost efficiency, and service quality. The current study's findings are consistent with this, as participants identified the reduction of approval layers and simplification of procedures as critical to improving turnaround times and operational effectiveness.

Within the higher education sector, Claxton-Freeman (2015), highlights that inefficiencies in administrative processes can significantly undermine institutional performance, particularly when decision-making is centralised and disconnected from operational realities. Similarly, Gornitzka and Maassen (2014) argue that universities operating in complex environments must adopt adaptive governance systems that integrate decentralised decision-making with efficient administrative processes to remain competitive and responsive.

From an Agency Theory perspective, inefficient administrative processes increase agency costs, particularly those related to coordination, monitoring and delayed implementation (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). When agents (such as campus-level administrators) are required to navigate complex bureaucratic systems, their ability to act efficiently is constrained, leading to reduced performance outcomes. Macias (2012) further emphasises that streamlined processes reduce information asymmetry and enable agents to make timely decisions aligned with organisational objectives. This supports the study's finding that process optimisation enhances the effectiveness of decentralised decision-making by enabling faster execution of decisions.

Empirical studies in higher education also reinforce the importance of process optimisation. Page and Kulick (2016) demonstrate that administrative efficiency, particularly in student-facing services, is closely linked to institutional performance and student outcomes. Delays in administrative processes, often caused by centralised approval systems, negatively impact service delivery and student satisfaction. Similarly, Shomotova and Ibrahim (2025) argue that responsive and efficient administrative systems are critical for supporting student engagement and institutional effectiveness, particularly in multi-campus environments where responsiveness must be context specific.

In the African context, Mansfield (1973) highlights that bureaucratic inefficiencies in universities are often exacerbated by centralised governance structures that fail to account for institutional diversity and complexity. He argues that decentralised administrative systems, supported by streamlined processes, are essential for improving institutional performance and responsiveness. This is especially significant in South Africa, where universities formed through mergers function on various campuses, each with distinct operational requirements (Lethoko, 2016).

The literature also points to the role of digital transformation in process optimisation. (Vanthoch, Sophealay & Panuth, 2024; Gumede, 2015) suggest that digital workflow systems and automated approval processes can significantly reduce administrative delays, improve transparency, and enhance accountability. These systems enable institutions to maintain oversight while reducing the need for manual intervention, thereby improving

efficiency. The study's results are consistent with this, as participants highlighted digital system as crucial for facilitating efficient decision-making processes.

Furthermore, Lapsley, Pallot and Levy (2002) argue that public sector organisations, including universities, must transition from traditional bureaucratic models to more process-oriented governance systems that prioritise efficiency and service delivery. This shift involves redesigning administrative processes to be more flexible, transparent, and outcome-focused.

Theme Eight: Accountability and Performance Governance

Participants not only advocated for greater autonomy but also highlighted the importance of strong accountability systems to maintain institutional integrity. The study found that performance monitoring systems, including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and digital dashboards, are essential for balancing autonomy with accountability. Participants indicated that such systems would allow campus leadership to exercise decision-making authority while remaining accountable to central governance structures. Additionally, the concept of performance compacts emerged as a critical mechanism for defining expectations, roles, and outcomes between central management and campus leadership. These agreements would enable a shift from control-based governance to performance-based accountability.

Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

In the conceptual framework of this study, accountability and performance governance serve as moderating variables, influencing how operational efficiency interacts with decision-making autonomy. While autonomy provides discretion to campus-level actors, accountability mechanisms ensure that such discretion is exercised in alignment with institutional goals, regulatory requirements and performance expectations. In this sense, accountability does not constrain autonomy; rather, it stabilises and legitimises it, enabling decentralised decision-making to translate into sustainable and measurable efficiency outcomes.

From an Agency Theory perspective, accountability mechanisms are essential for managing the principal–agent relationship within multi-campus universities. The central administration (principal) delegates authority to campus leadership (agents) but must ensure that agents act in the best interests of the institution. According to Ebuka and Simon-Jude (2025), the delegation of authority introduces agency risks, including opportunism, misaligned incentives and information asymmetry. Accountability systems such as performance monitoring, reporting structures and evaluation frameworks, serve to mitigate these risks by aligning agent behaviour with institutional objectives (Rothchild, 2011).

Within this study, the findings indicate that mechanisms such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), digital dashboards and performance compacts are critical in enabling this alignment. These tools reduce information asymmetry by providing the principal with visibility into campus-level activities while allowing agents to operate with a degree of independence. This aligns with Anioke and Atima (2023) who argue that effective governance systems balance monitoring and outcome-based controls to ensure that agents deliver desired performance without excessive intervention.

The conceptual framework therefore suggests that accountability mechanisms moderate the autonomy–efficiency relationship by ensuring that autonomy leads to productive outcomes rather than inefficiencies or governance risks. Without such mechanisms, decentralisation could result in fragmented decision-making, inconsistent service delivery and weakened institutional coherence. Contrary, when accountability systems are well designed, they facilitate a transition from governance focused on control to one centred on performance, where outcomes rather than processes become the primary focus of oversight (Claxton-Freeman, 2015; Dinye & Boon, 2023).

From a governance model perspective, accountability mechanisms are integral to achieving balance between central oversight and decentralised execution (Glatter, Bush & Bell, 2002). Modern governance frameworks in higher education emphasise “steering at a distance”, where central authorities define strategic direction and performance expectations while allowing operational units the flexibility to determine how these goals are achieved

(Rijke et al., 2012). In this model, accountability systems function as the primary means of coordination, ensuring that decentralised units remain aligned with institutional strategy.

The findings of this study reflect this governance approach, as participants highlighted the importance of performance compacts and clear reporting structures in sustaining autonomy. These mechanisms create a structured relationship between central and campus leadership, where expectations, responsibilities and performance outcomes are clearly defined. This aligns with Anioke and Atima (2023) who argue that public sector organisations, including universities, increasingly rely on performance measurement systems to enhance accountability and efficiency.

Furthermore, the study reveals that accountability mechanisms contribute to institutional trust, which is a critical factor in enabling decentralisation. When central management has access to reliable performance data and transparent reporting systems, it is more likely to delegate authority to campus-level actors. This supports Kivistö and Zalyevska (2015) who emphasise that trust in principal–agent relationships is strengthened through effective monitoring and performance evaluation systems.

However, the findings also suggest that excessive or rigid accountability mechanisms can undermine autonomy by reintroducing bureaucratic control. This highlights the need for balanced accountability, where monitoring systems are designed to support performance rather than restrict decision-making. In this regard, accountability must be proportionate and adaptive, ensuring that it enhances rather than constrains the autonomy-efficiency relationship.

Discussion of Related Literature

In order to guarantee effective governance and sustained institutional performance, the study's findings corroborate the well-established body of literature that contends that decentralization must be accompanied by robust accountability frameworks. While decentralisation enhances flexibility and responsiveness, it also introduces governance risks such as inconsistency, misalignment and reduced oversight, which must be mitigated

through robust performance governance systems (Elbannan & Elbannan, 2014; Ndevu & Muller, 2018).

From a governance and public management perspective, the literature emphasises that decentralised systems require performance-based accountability mechanisms to replace traditional hierarchical control (Elbannan & Elbannan, 2014; Ndevu & Muller, 2018). In this model, institutions shift from process-based oversight to outcome-based governance, where performance indicators, targets and reporting systems are used to monitor and evaluate organisational effectiveness. Participants in this study have highlighted the importance of KPIs, dashboards and performance compacts in ensuring that autonomy does not compromise performance.

The literature further demonstrates that performance measurement systems are central to organisational efficiency. According to Higher Education Funding Council for England (1999), performance indicators provide a basis for evaluating institutional efficiency by linking resource inputs to measurable outputs such as service delivery, student outcomes and operational effectiveness. Similarly, Luvalo (2017) argue that in the South African higher education context, performance measurement is essential for ensuring accountability, particularly in post-merger institutions operating across multiple campuses.

From an Agency Theory perspective, accountability mechanisms play a critical role in managing principal–agent relationships. Lane and Kivisto (2008) argue that when authority is delegated, monitoring and incentive systems are necessary to maintain alignment with the overall institutional objectives. In decentralised university systems, campus leaders (agents) are expected to deliver performance outcomes, while central management (principal) retains oversight responsibility. Renmans and Dujardin (2016) further emphasises that performance-based monitoring systems such as output controls and reporting mechanisms are effective in reducing information asymmetry and aligning agent behaviour with institutional goals.

In higher education governance, Gershberg (1998) highlights the importance of performance contracts and accountability agreements in ensuring that decentralised units

remain aligned with institutional objectives. These mechanisms formalise expectations and create clear lines of accountability, which is consistent with the study's findings on the role of performance compacts.

The literature also indicates the importance of “steering at a distance” in modern governance systems, where central authorities rely on performance data and monitoring systems rather than direct control to manage decentralised units (Le (2022); Elugbaju, Okeke & Alabi, 2024). This approach enables institutions to maintain strategic oversight while allowing operational autonomy, thereby achieving a balance between control and flexibility. The study's results support this model, as respondents indicated that effective monitoring systems can enable decentralisation without compromising accountability.

Empirical studies further demonstrate that accountability frameworks enhance both efficiency and institutional trust. Gershberg (1998) argues that performance governance systems improve transparency, enabling stakeholders to assess organisational performance and hold leaders accountable. In the higher education context Rothchild (2011) notes that accountability mechanisms are critical for ensuring that decentralised institutions maintain quality and equity across campuses.

Additionally, the role of digital technologies in performance governance has gained increasing attention in the literature. Lavanya et al. (2024) highlight that digital dashboards and real-time reporting systems enhance transparency and enable continuous monitoring of performance outcomes. These systems reduce reliance on manual reporting and improve the accuracy and timeliness of information, thereby strengthening accountability. This aligns with the study's findings, where digital performance monitoring systems were identified as key enablers of effective governance.

However, the literature also cautions against over-centralised or excessive accountability mechanisms, which can undermine autonomy and reintroduce bureaucratic inefficiencies. Lapsley, Pallot and Levy (2002) argue that overly rigid control systems can limit innovation and responsiveness, while Mansfield (1973) highlights that excessive monitoring can create administrative burdens that reduce organisational efficiency. This

suggests that accountability systems must be balanced and proportionate, ensuring that they support rather than constrain decentralised decision-making.

Furthermore, Foucault-inspired governance perspectives emphasise that accountability mechanisms can function as subtle forms of control, shaping behaviour through performance measurement and surveillance (Rothchild, 2011). In higher education, this can create tensions between autonomy and control, particularly when performance metrics are perceived as restrictive or misaligned with local contexts. These insights resonate with the study's findings, which highlight the need for accountability systems that are flexible and context sensitive.

Theme Nine: Hybrid Governance and Matrix Autonomy

The strong advocacy for a hybrid governance model among participants reflects a growing recognition that neither pure centralisation nor full decentralisation is sufficient to manage the complexities of multi-campus universities. Instead, the proposed Matrix Autonomy Model represents a deliberate integration of both approaches, enabling institutions to maintain a lively equilibrium between strategic oversight and adaptable operations. In this model, the main campus retains authority over core institutional mandates such as policy formulation, financial governance, risk management and compliance, thereby ensuring alignment with regulatory requirements and institutional strategy. Simultaneously, the satellite campus is empowered with defined operational autonomy, allowing it to make context-specific decisions in areas such as procurement, infrastructure maintenance, student support services and local stakeholder engagement.

Participants emphasised that this hybrid structure would significantly reduce bureaucratic delays and enhance responsiveness, particularly in geographically distant campuses where centralised decision-making often fails to account for local realities. Additionally, the model establishes distinct roles and responsibilities, which helps to minimize confusion and enhance coordination among campuses. Importantly, the Matrix Autonomy Model is underpinned by performance-based accountability mechanisms, ensuring that

decentralised authority does not compromise institutional integrity or performance outcomes.

Furthermore, the hybrid model addresses the structural tensions identified in the study, particularly the mismatch between formal centralised governance and the operational needs of the satellite campus. By institutionalising autonomy within a structured governance framework, the model moves beyond informal or ad hoc delegation towards a systematic and sustainable approach to decentralisation. Ultimately, the Matrix Autonomy Model is positioned as a strategic governance innovation, capable of enhancing operational efficiency, improving service delivery and strengthening institutional cohesion in multi-campus universities.

Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

The Matrix Autonomy Model is the point of integration of all key variables within the conceptual framework of this study, connecting governance structures (independent variable), decision-making processes (mediating variable), accountability mechanisms (moderating variable), and operational efficiency (dependent variable). The model provides a structured pathway through which decision-making autonomy is operationalised, moderated and translated into measurable performance outcomes within a multi-campus university context.

From a governance model perspective, the Matrix Autonomy Model reflects a hybrid governance system that combines elements of centralised control with decentralised execution. In this framework, governance is no longer defined by hierarchical control alone, but by the coordination of interdependent organisational units operating within a shared strategic direction (Claxton-Freeman, 2015). The Matrix Autonomy Model therefore embodies a shift from rigid bureaucratic structures to adaptive governance systems, capable of responding to the complexities of multi-campus institutions (Janssen & Van Der Voort, 2016); Rijke, Brown, Zevenbergen, Ashley, Farrelly, Morison, & van Herk, 2012).

The model also aligns strongly with Agency Theory, particularly in its ability to resolve the principal–agent tensions identified in the study. In a traditional centralised model, the principal (central management) retains decision-making authority while agents (campus leadership) are responsible for implementation, often resulting in misalignment and inefficiencies (Kivistö & Zalyevska, 2015). The Matrix Autonomy Model addresses this imbalance by re-aligning authority with responsibility, ensuring that agents are granted sufficient autonomy to fulfil their operational mandates. At the same time, accountability mechanisms such as performance compacts and monitoring systems, ensure that agents remain aligned with institutional goals (Rothchild, 2011).

Within the conceptual framework, this dual structure enables the simultaneous optimisation of autonomy and accountability, which is critical for achieving operational efficiency. Decision-making processes are streamlined through decentralisation, while governance structures maintain coherence through central oversight. This reflects the argument by Ndevu and Muller (2018). that effective governance in higher education requires a balance between delegated authority and performance-based control mechanisms.

The model also incorporates the role of process optimisation and accountability systems as integral components of the governance framework. Streamlined processes ensure that autonomy translates into efficient action, while performance governance mechanisms ensure that decentralised decisions contribute to institutional objectives. The conceptual framework highlights the interconnectedness nature of governance, which is evident in this integration.

Importantly, the Matrix Autonomy Model introduces a dynamic governance logic, where the degree of autonomy can be modified based on performance, capacity and contextual needs. This adaptive approach aligns with Rijke et al. (2012) who argue that modern public sector governance systems must be flexible and responsive to changing environments. For multi-campus universities, this adaptability is crucial to support varied operational environments and ensure institutional unity.

Discussion of Related Literature

The findings in this research agree with the conclusions of many of the studies conducted previously. They support the idea that universities, especially those with several campuses, should use adaptive and hybrid approaches to governance to deal with their complex structures. Scholars increasingly argue that traditional, highly centralised governance structures are ill-suited to contemporary universities, which must operate in dynamic, diverse and often geographically dispersed environments (Gershberg, (1998); Brown, (2000). As such, hybrid governance models, combining central strategic oversight with decentralised operational autonomy, have emerged as a preferred approach for balancing efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness.

This approach enables institutions to maintain coherence and compliance while fostering innovation and responsiveness at the local level. Similarly, Goold and Campbell (2003) highlights that hybrid governance systems are characterised by network-based coordination, where authority is distributed across interdependent units rather than concentrated in a single hierarchical centre. The concept of hybrid governance is further reinforced by Goold and Campbell (2003) who argues that complex organisations must adopt matrix structures to manage diverse functions and environments effectively. In such structures, decision-making authority is distributed across multiple dimensions functional, geographic and strategic, allowing organisations to respond more flexibly to changing demands. This aligns closely with the Matrix Autonomy Model proposed in this study, which integrates centralised and decentralised elements to optimise performance.

Hybrid models achieve this balance by granting operational autonomy to agents while maintaining oversight through performance monitoring systems. This reduces agency costs associated with excessive centralisation, such as delays and inefficiencies, while mitigating risks associated with decentralisation (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). In the higher education context, Gershberg (1998) demonstrates that performance contracts and accountability frameworks are essential components of decentralised governance systems. These mechanisms ensure that decentralised units remain aligned with institutional goals, thereby enhancing both efficiency and accountability.

Empirical studies further support the effectiveness of hybrid governance models in improving institutional performance. Janssen and Van Der Voort (2016) argue that universities operating in competitive and complex environments must adopt adaptive governance structures that allow for both central coordination and local flexibility. Similarly, Painsi, Leitner and Rybníček (2025) highlight that institutional autonomy at sub-unit levels enables universities to respond more effectively to external pressures, thereby improving organisational performance.

Within the African and South African context, Bosch (2010); Lethoko (2016) and Luvalo (2017) note that post-merger universities often struggle with governance complexities arising from multi-campus structures. As such, in principle they agree with the assertions that hybrid governance models are necessary to address these challenges, as they allow institutions to balance the need for central control with the operational realities of diverse campuses. Claxton-Freeman (2015) further emphasises that institutional effectiveness in South Africa depends on aligning governance structures with the specific needs and contexts of individual campuses.

Research also emphasises how matrix structures contribute to improving coordination and efficiency within organisations. According to Goold and Campbell (2003) matrix organisations enable the integration of multiple dimensions of authority, facilitating collaboration and improving decision-making across organisational units. This is particularly relevant for multi-campus universities, where coordination between central and satellite campuses is critical for achieving institutional goals.

Furthermore, Goold and Campbell (2003) argue that hybrid governance systems in the public sector enable organisations to achieve both efficiency and accountability by combining decentralised decision-making with performance-based oversight. This dual focus is essential for ensuring that autonomy does not compromise institutional integrity or performance outcomes.

However, the literature also cautions that hybrid governance models must be carefully designed to avoid role ambiguity and coordination challenges. Goold and Campbell (2003)

notes that without clear delineation of responsibilities, matrix structures can lead to confusion and conflict between organisational units. In this study, the Matrix Autonomy Model highlights the necessity for well-defined roles, processes and accountability.

5.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the outcomes detailed in Chapter 4 were emphasised, focusing on the research objectives and questions derived from qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with university leaders and administrators. The chapter also explored the themes that emerged from the findings related to the research questions, such as governance models and decision-making autonomy, financial autonomy and resource optimisation, administrative efficiency and institutional operations, human resource autonomy and leadership dynamics and student service and experience. The chapter concludes by examining how the themes connect with the conceptual framework and connecting this to the existing literature review. The next chapter will provide a summary of social change, discuss implications for professional practice, outline the study's limitations and offer recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

The aim of the this research was to investigate how granting decision-making autonomy influences the operational efficiencies of universities with multiple campuses, using a qualitative approach anchored in semi-structured interviews with university leaders, department managers and administrators. The complexity of managing institutions with multiple campuses scattered throughout different geographic and socio-economic areas is increasing. The research investigated the impact of decentralised and centralised decision-making structures on operational processes, staff empowerment, financial responsiveness, student services and institutional agility.

The findings revealed that participants agreed that operational efficiency is better when campus leaders who have delegated authority to make decisions are closer to the point of implementation. Participants also noted that many inefficiencies within their institutions were not the result of limited talent or capacity at campus level but rather stemmed from rigid centralisation and bureaucratic procedures that slowed decision making. These findings highlight the importance of a governance framework that is context-sensitive and carefully balances empowerment with accountability to enhance efficiency across institutions.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Implications for research question 1.

Concerning governance, the research questions the top-down concept where multi-campus university systems have central offices that still hold all strategic and operational decisions. This type of centralization kills innovation, slows down response times, and contributes to an ambiguous distribution of responsibilities. The study recommends hybrid forms of governance, which are centralized in power and decentralized in implementation (Vanthoch, Sophealay & Panuth, 2024). Centralized core policy decisions, quality assurance and long-term strategic planning remain central in this model. But operational

decisions are delegated to campus leaders, and these involve allocation of resources, innovation of academic planning and student service.

The model is accountable and allows the campuses to act responsively to local needs. The research also suggests that the dissemination of autonomy should be equitable among the different campuses with consideration to aspects like capacity, past performance and strategic importance. Resource-based disparities can be avoided by making sure that the distribution of autonomy is done fairly, along with a sense of ownership and inclusivity by the stakeholders and campus leaders. All of this implies that multi-campus universities need to take a new approach to governance that is responsive to the complexity and degree of autonomy that is necessary to the specific context of a multi-campus institution.

This paper also indicates that unequal distribution of power and unequal distribution of resources are common causes of internal conflict in the multi-campus institutions. A satellite campus may often lead to tension, as it is not integrated into major decisions, which places a gap between the central and peripheral units. The latter issues are aggravated when blanket policies are applied without taking into account the specifics of every campus. Using conflict theory, Treviño (2017) describes how structural inequalities can result in resistance, disengagement, and dissatisfaction in institutions. The research proposes the solution to these issues by implementing participatory governance models involves campuses in a significant capacity in institutional decision-making, a strategy that can reinforce inclusivity, foster trust, and enhance cohesion throughout the university system.

Lastly, the research indicates that the one-size-fits-all model of campus governance cannot be applicable to everyone. Local capacity, along with strategic significance, demands differentiated autonomy due to variations in the maturity of the campus, leadership ability, student population, and course offerings. Greenwood et al. (2011) and Janssen and Van Der Voort (2016) advocate adaptive institutional models since they are adaptive to complexities that are internal and external in nature. Consequently, every campus gains a proportional and strategic empowerment model based on differentiated autonomy, and this gets rid of overburdening and underutilization (Painsi, Leitner & Rybnicek, 2025).

6.2.2 Implications for research question 2.

The findings of this research hold considerable importance for the growth, not to mention the administration and governance of the multi-campus universities. With the increasing number of higher education institutions in different locations, it can be noted that the composition and character of the decision-making structures have significant implications on the efficiency of dispersed campuses, as well as the increasing demands for accessibility, equity, and inclusiveness. The research offers important understanding of how autonomy in decision-making is related to stakeholder satisfaction and institutional performance.

Among the most important lessons of the research is that the efficiency of operations is enhanced when the units based at the campus level are allowed to make decisions. Respondents underscored that inadequately decentralized systems of governance tend to cause delays in the procedure, insensitive services and a dwindling level of morale among the administration personnel. This is also corroborated by Baar (2020), who adds that decentralized decision-making increases responsiveness and flexibility, especially in university systems that are geographically spread.

The other major lesson learned in the course of the study is the fact that a well-structured policy, performance measures and strong accountability mechanisms must underpin well-defined autonomy. Without them, institutions will run the risk of policy misalignment and inconsistency of practices. Shattock (2014) underlines that a successful higher education decentralization requires a model of earned autonomy, where powers are devolved based on performance and the maturity of the institution. This view supports the rationale behind governance charters and campus-level performance agreements in order to make sure that autonomy is exercised in a responsible and attitude-driven manner alongside the overall institutional interests.

The research also indicates that campus leaders tend to show initiative and are more innovative in decision-making when they receive real decision-making power, especially on matters like financial planning, human resources and student affairs. Leadership

empowerment can aid the development of an ownership culture, agility and accountability (Agile Leadership Day India, 2025). Conversely, too much central control diminishes the authority and performance of campus leaders, which tends to make them less engaged and sluggish. This is where the universities must invest in leadership development and reorganise the governance systems to create trust and enhance the capacity to make decisions on campus.

It was observed by the respondents that where the financial systems were highly centralized, efficiency-related problems like strict budgeting procedures and procrastination in procurements were prevalent. They highlighted the fact that financial independence is critical, especially in dynamic operating environments, to facilitate effective planning and use of resources. Decentralization of financial authority, as Dinye (2016) discusses, enables institutions to equate spending with local priorities, enhancing institutional relevance and long-term sustainability. This should be accomplished by having a multi-layered financial governance model- the model that maintains financial control but gives the campuses some powers by centralizing auditing and reporting processes.

Directly related to autonomy in decision-making was also found to be student service and experience. The lack of a campus with the mandate to handle student matters such as registrations, counselling, welfare and disciplinary actions led to greater dissatisfaction among students. The success and retention of students largely depend on support services, which Page and Kulick (2016) mention. These factors are the quality and availability of those services. When student service delivery is actually local, then the institutions will be able to better address the individual demographic, linguistic and socio-economic characteristics of the campus populations, thus engagement and satisfaction will be enhanced.

6.2.3 Implications for research question 3.

From the perspective of theory, this research provides a valuable contribution to agency theory and organizational theory, most notably in the domains of decentralization.

According to the findings and as purported by Aldilami and Al-Murhadi (2025), environmental and operational complexity requires aligned organizational structures. Because of their geographical and demographic diversity, multi-campus universities require governance and management structures that are responsive as well as adaptable at the local level (Dinye & Boon, 2023).

Applying agency theory, the study depicts just how the effectiveness of campus leaders as institutional agents is constrained and weakened in the event of excessive central control. On the other hand, these agents show increased innovation, as well as accountability and initiative, when provided with clear mandates and autonomy. The study, therefore, shows empirically that autonomy supports institutional cohesion and strategic responsiveness when structured within institutional frameworks.

6.2.4 Implications for research question 4.

The study's results significantly impact our comprehension of the role of autonomy in decision-making and how it can be systematically linked to operational efficiency within multi-campus universities. Drawing from Themes Six to Nine, the research demonstrates that the relationship between autonomy and efficiency is not direct or automatic, but rather structurally and systemically mediated through governance arrangements, administrative processes and accountability mechanisms.

The chief highlight from the study is that decision-making autonomy functions as a foundational driver of institutional responsiveness, which in turn influences operational efficiency. However, this relationship relies upon the presence of enabling conditions, particularly the optimisation of administrative processes. As established in Theme Seven, inefficient and bureaucratic processes undermine the effectiveness of decentralised decision-making, resulting in delays and reduced responsiveness. This implies that the linkage between autonomy and efficiency is process-dependent, where the benefits of decentralisation can only be realised when institutional processes are streamlined and aligned with decision-making authority.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that accountability and performance governance play a critical moderating role in this relationship. As highlighted in Theme Eight, decentralisation without adequate monitoring and performance systems can lead to inconsistencies and misalignment with institutional objectives. The implication here is that autonomy must be embedded within a performance-governed environment, where mechanisms such as monitoring systems, performance indicators, and reporting structures ensure that decentralised decisions contribute to institutional goals. This reinforces the idea that operational efficiency is achieved through a balance between autonomy and accountability, rather than through autonomy alone.

Another significant implication is the emergence of hybrid governance structures as a necessary condition for linking autonomy to efficiency. As identified in Theme Nine, the complexity of multi-campus universities requires governance models that integrate centralised strategic oversight with decentralised operational execution. The findings suggest that neither full centralisation nor complete decentralisation is sufficient; instead, institutional effectiveness is enhanced when governance structures are adaptively configured to accommodate both control and flexibility. This reflects a broader shift towards integrated governance systems that align institutional strategy with local operational realities.

In addition, the study highlights that the relationship between autonomy and efficiency is predisposed to contextual and structural factors, including campus capacity, leadership competence, and institutional trust. These factors determine the extent to which autonomy can be effectively exercised and translated into performance outcomes. As such, the linkage between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency is context-sensitive, requiring governance frameworks that are responsive to variations across campuses.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of systemic alignment in establishing an effective decision-making framework. The linkage between autonomy and operational efficiency is not achieved through isolated interventions, but by incorporating governance structures, decision-making processes and performance systems into a unified institutional

framework. This coordination guarantees that authority, responsibility, and accountability are synchronised, thereby enabling institutions to operate efficiently within complex and multi-campus environments.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Recommendations for Practical Applications

Firstly, there is a need to strengthen decentralised governance structures through the introduction of campus-based governance frameworks. As indicated in Theme (Hybrid Governance and Matrix Autonomy), effective governance in multi-campus institutions requires a balanced integration of centralised strategic control and decentralised operational authority. In this regard, structures such as a Campus Executive Committee (CEC), supported by a Campus Management Committee (CMC), should be empowered to make context-specific operational and academic decisions. This aligns with the identified need for a hybrid governance model that enables responsiveness while maintaining institutional coherence.

Secondly, the study highlights the importance of differentiated autonomy, where decision-making authority is aligned with campus capacity, leadership competence and strategic importance. This is consistent with the findings which emphasise that autonomy must reach a functional threshold before it can meaningfully improve operational efficiency. As such, autonomy should not be uniformly applied but calibrated to ensure that it produces measurable performance outcomes.

Thirdly, financial independence must be enhanced through decentralised procurement processes, supported by clear accountability frameworks. Findings from Theme (Process Optimisation and Administrative Efficiency) indicate that bureaucratic delays in financial processes significantly undermine efficiency. Therefore, streamlining procurement procedures and introducing discretionary budgets while maintaining central oversight through reporting systems, will improve responsiveness and resource utilisation.

Fourthly, the decentralisation of human resource functions, including recruitment and performance management, is essential. The study found that leadership effectiveness and

institutional responsiveness improve when campus leaders have control over staffing decisions, allowing them to align human resources with local operational needs. This reinforces the role of autonomy as an enabler of institutional performance, as identified.

Fifthly, to allow campuses to address specific needs, student support services ought to be tailored to local contexts to accommodate the unique demographic, socio-economic and cultural needs of their student populations. As evidenced in the broader findings and reinforced by Theme Six, responsiveness at the point of service delivery is critical for improving student experience and institutional effectiveness.

Sixth, institutions should embrace participatory governance practices, ensuring that all campuses are adequately represented in institutional decision-making structures. The findings highlight the significance of inclusive governance systems in alleviating institutional tensions and fostering cohesion.

Seventh, theme (Accountability and Performance Governance) of emphasises the importance of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, as the study point out. Institutions should implement performance monitoring systems, including KPIs and dashboards, to assess the impact of autonomy on operational efficiency. Annual reviews should be conducted to evaluate the extent of decentralisation and its effectiveness in improving institutional performance.

Eighth, there is a need to enhance cross-campus communication and knowledge-sharing platforms. Finding indicate that effective coordination between campuses is essential for maintaining institutional unity while enabling decentralisation. Strengthening communication channels will support the development of a shared organisational culture and facilitate collaboration across campuses.

6.3.2 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study has offered important perspective on the interplay between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency, it also suggests numerous directions for future research.

Firstly, future research might adopt a quantitative approach to statistically analyse the relationship between decision-making autonomy and key performance indicators such as student retention, operational efficiency, and academic productivity. This approach would enhance and support the qualitative findings of the present study and offer empirical validation of the autonomy-efficiency linkage identified in the findings.

Secondly, further research could explore the process dimension of governance, particularly how administrative systems and digital workflows mediate the relationship between autonomy and efficiency, as highlighted. Thirdly, longitudinal research could be conducted to evaluate how hybrid governance models like the Matrix Autonomy Model affect institutional performance and sustainability over the long term.

Additionally, future studies could also explore how accountability systems function within decentralised settings, focusing on the impact of performance governance mechanisms on institutional trust and the effectiveness of decision-making as highlighted in theme eight. Finally, examining various multi-campus universities in comparative studies might reveal how contextual elements impact the success of autonomy frameworks, thus aiding in the creation of governance models that are more widely applicable.

6.4 Conclusions

To conclude, this study has demonstrated that the effectiveness of operations in universities with multiple campuses is greatly affected by the decision-making autonomy afforded to campus leadership. The findings show that when campuses are empowered to make context-specific decisions in a timely manner, institutions become more responsive, agile, and effective in addressing operational and student needs.

However, the study also establishes that autonomy alone is insufficient to drive efficiency. From the drawn themes, it is evident that the relationship between autonomy and operational efficiency is systemically mediated by administrative processes, accountability mechanisms and governance structures. In particular, process optimisation enables the translation of autonomy into action, while performance governance ensures that decentralisation remains aligned with institutional objectives.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of hybrid governance models, which balance centralised strategic oversight with decentralised operational execution. Such models are essential for addressing the complexities of multi-campus institutions, where diverse operational contexts require flexible yet coordinated governance approaches.

The study also underscores the need for context-sensitive and differentiated autonomy, recognising that campuses vary in capacity, maturity and strategic importance. This reinforces the argument that governance frameworks must be adaptive and responsive to institutional diversity. This study ultimately reveals that granting decision-making autonomy transcends being just a managerial choice, but it is a strategic necessity for institutional effectiveness and sustainability. When properly structured and supported by efficient processes and accountability systems, autonomy becomes a powerful mechanism for enhancing operational efficiency, improving service delivery and strengthening institutional performance in multi-campus universities.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY COVER LETTER



Interview Cover Letter

Research project title: The impact of the Decision-Making Autonomy on the Multi-Campus Universities' Operational Efficiency.

Dear Prospective Participant

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted for a dissertation at Swiss School of Business and Management. The study is interested in your thoughts and opinions about the impact of the decision-making autonomy on the multi-campus universities' operational efficiency. You are purposefully invited because of your knowledge, experience and expertise on the research topic at hand. The significance of the study is to contribute to the fields of higher education management, organizational theory and governance models by offering significant insights. It will help the higher education sector in terms of policy formulation and university administrators to develop effective governance structures for multi-campus arrangements. The study will also establish ways to enhance operational efficiency and how decision-making affects diverse stakeholders. Finally, the research findings can be used to expand knowledge with which other scholars can explore and build upon.

The study will take the form of zoom/teams/face-to-face interviews with the participant. It is estimated that the interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes and responses will be recorded with the aid of a mobile device or laptop. The recording of the interview will be stored on a hard copy by the researcher for a period of 5 years in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher for future research or academic purpose. Participation in this study requires that you freely consent to participate as a respondent. Please note that your identity

and information will be treated in a strictly confidential manner, as your real name will not be used. Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time and for any reason without questions and repercussions. There will be no financial cost or incentive for the participant as the study will be conducted at the convenience of the participant.

The following people are involved in this research project and may be contacted at any time: **Thapelo Leonard Nyaile**, a doctoral candidate, and **Ivica Katavic, PhD**, a dissertation mentor.

We would be happy to answer any question that may arise about the study. Please direct your questions or comments to: Thapelo Leonard Nyaile tlnyaile@gmail.com; Ivica Katavic ivica@ssbm.ch

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT



Interview Consent Form

I, _____ in my capacity as the _____ hereby freely and wilfully consent to participate as an interviewee in the study entitled ‘The impact of the decision-making autonomy on the multi-campus universities’ operational efficiency’, having obtained a holistic understanding of the study and fully appreciating the extent of my involvement in the study.

I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used;

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles
- On our website and in other media that we may produce such as spoken presentations
- On other feedback events

- In an archive of the project as noted above

By signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Participants Signature	Date
Researchers Signature	Date

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Edinburgh University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Name of researcher: Thapelo Leonard Nyaile

E-mail: tlnyaile@gmail.com

Name of supervisor: Ivica Katavic, PhD

E-mail: ivica@ssbm.ch

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE



Interview Questions

1. To assess the process of decision making at multi-campus universities

RQ 1. What existing decision-making structures and processes are used in multi-campus universities?

- How are decisions made at your campus or department?
- What challenges do you face in the current decision-making process?
- To what extent do you have autonomy in managing human resources (e.g., staff appointments, promotions, and performance) and how does leadership?

2. To determine the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities

RQ 2. What are the determinants of the degree of autonomy in multi-campus universities?

- To what extent do you have control over financial allocations at your unit?
- What factors determine the level of financial or resource autonomy you experience?
- How does financial autonomy or lack thereof affect your ability to deliver services effectively?

3. To evaluate the impact of decision making on operational efficiency

RQ 3. How to evaluate the impact of decision making on operational efficiency?

- How does decision-making autonomy influence administrative processes?
- What is the impact of decision-making structures on student services and experience?
- How does autonomy or lack thereof influence overall institutional efficiency?

4. To make recommendations to the framework of decision making at multi-campus universities.

RQ 4. How to link decision-making autonomy to operational efficiency to establish a framework of decision-making at multi-campus universities?

- What relationship exists between decision-making autonomy and operational efficiency at your campus?
- How can decision-making processes be improved to enhance efficiency?
- What institutional mechanisms are required to sustain autonomy while ensuring accountability?
- What governance practices or structures could improve both autonomy and efficiency?