



Decision-making in the shadows? Challenges and prospects of committee systems in higher education institutions in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the dynamics of the Committee System in Management Decisions (CSMD) within a public university in Ghana, focusing on both its limitations and potential for reform. Grounded in systems theory, the research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. The initial quantitative phase drew on 792 valid responses from a diverse group of stakeholders, including academic and administrative senior members, senior staff, and individuals serving on various statutory committees. Participants were selected through purposive and proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure broad institutional representation. Data on perceived challenges and possible improvements were gathered via structured questionnaires and analysed using independent samples t-tests. The subsequent qualitative phase involved 20 semi-structured interviews with committee chairpersons, active committee members, and staff not involved in committee work, with the responses subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed several systemic bottlenecks impeding the optimal functioning of CSMDs. These included insufficient logistical support, lack of adequate motivation for committee members, and undue influence from managerial levels. Nevertheless, the study also identified viable prospects for revitalizing committee effectiveness, notably through the integration of digital platforms, improved procedural coordination, and capacity building. It recommends strengthening digital infrastructure, streamlining logistical procedures, recognizing committee work through incentives, and ensuring regular feedback between committees and leadership. Emphasis is also placed on addressing workload imbalances and supporting staff well-being. While the CSMD continues to serve as a critical pillar of participatory governance within the university context, its success is contingent upon institutional commitment to transparency, structured engagement, and resource provision.

Keywords: Challenges, Committee System, Decision-Making, Higher Education, Prospects, Public Universities

I. INTRODUCTION

Committee systems play a pivotal role in the governance architecture of higher education institutions (HEIs), serving as mechanisms for fostering inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. With the increasing scale and decentralization of university operations, these governance structures have expanded to accommodate the administrative complexities of modern institutional life. While they are intended to promote democratic engagement and institutional accountability, many committee systems struggle with functional inefficiencies that slow down decision-making and hinder strategic responsiveness (Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2000). This research evaluates the limitations and potential of the Committee System in Management Decisions (CSMD) within higher education, with a specific focus on the contextual realities that shape its effectiveness. The restructuring of authority in universities through decentralization, though intended to enhance inclusivity and local decision-making, has inadvertently created governance complications. Often, this decentralization leads to misaligned responsibilities, unclear roles, and delays in administrative action due to coordination breakdowns (Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2000).

Scholars such as Jabbar (2012) and Tuckman (2009) highlight that internal power dynamics, overlapping mandates, and disjointed communication channels frequently characterize committee operations, thereby limiting institutional responsiveness to emerging issues. Committees are designed to offer a collaborative platform for faculty, students, and administrative personnel to shape policy directions. However, the practical execution of this collaborative vision is often marred by extended deliberations and approval processes, which can result in significant



delays in policy implementation (Blair & Fawcett, 2008). The necessity of securing multiple committee endorsements for even minor administrative decisions tends to entrench bureaucratic inertia, thereby stifling innovation and efficiency (Teferra & Altbach, 2004).

An additional concern is the frequent misalignment between committee recommendations and broader institutional strategic objectives, a gap that represents a persistent governance shortfall (Kabeyi, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted governance systems in HEIs, accelerating the transition to digital platforms for committee engagement. While the move to virtual meetings enhanced flexibility and documentation, it also brought to light significant disparities in digital access and institutional ICT readiness, raising concerns about equitable participation and effective communication (Vurayai, 2024; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2022). These shifts have imposed new expectations for how governance is conducted demanding higher standards of transparency, accountability, and adaptation to hybrid meeting environments.

The rapid adoption of technology has introduced both opportunities and challenges for committee operations. Reduced face-to-face interaction has necessitated the creation of clear digital protocols to guide discussions and decisions (Onia, 2023). Despite these efforts, many HEIs, particularly in the African context, continue to grapple with enduring structural issues, such as poor follow-through on committee decisions, weak coordination among governance bodies, and decision-making fatigue due to excessive reliance on committees for routine matters (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Inadequate communication channels between committees and broader institutional leadership further compound inefficiencies and slow institutional adaptation to fast-changing academic and socio-political conditions (UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning [IIEP-UNESCO], 2015).

While previous scholarship has examined governance challenges in higher education broadly (Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2000; Jabbar, 2012), relatively few studies have provided focused analyses of the inner workings and limitations of the CSMD within African universities. Much of the existing literature treats decentralization as a uniform process, neglecting the diverse historical and institutional settings that shape governance outcomes in Ghana and other sub-Saharan contexts. This study addresses that oversight by investigating how specific contextual factors particularly those intensified in the aftermath of COVID-19 affect the functioning of committee systems in university decision-making. The importance of this research lies in its timely focus on the need for greater institutional agility, transparency, and accountability in the face of financial constraints, increased competition, and changing stakeholder demands.

The findings aim to inform both practice and theory. Practically, they will offer guidance to university leaders and policymakers on the structural changes necessary to enhance committee effectiveness and inter-committee collaboration. Theoretically, the study contributes a nuanced, context-sensitive perspective to governance literature, especially as it pertains to African universities contending with a blend of longstanding challenges and post-pandemic reforms. Ultimately, resolving inefficiencies in CSMDs is crucial for enhancing institutional performance, strengthening legitimacy, and deepening stakeholder involvement. By framing the discussion within the realities of a post-COVID higher education landscape, this research offers critical insights for reimagining governance models that support sustainable and inclusive decision-making in tertiary institutions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Participatory governance remains a foundational principle in higher education institutions (HEIs), with committee systems serving as the primary mechanism through which institutional decisions are deliberated and enacted. In Ghanaian HEIs, the Committee System on Management Decisions (CSMD) has long functioned as a platform for inclusive dialogue and collaborative policy formulation. However, despite its normative significance, systemic inefficiencies including bureaucratic inertia, logistical constraints, and perceived managerial interference continue to impede its effectiveness (Obeng-Sarpong et al., 2024; Saani & Boateng, 2019; IIEP-UNESCO, 2015; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). These challenges not only erode stakeholder trust but also compromise the CSMD's potential as a deliberative and democratic governance tool. More critically, existing studies have paid insufficient attention to how the rapid digital transformation intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped or exacerbated these operational challenges. The influence of digital platforms on committee deliberations, inclusivity, and transparency in the post-pandemic context remains underexplored, particularly within Ghanaian HEIs (Loglo, 2024). This omission leaves a crucial gap in understanding how CSMDs are adapting to, or resisting, digital transitions in decision-making processes.

While governance-related challenges in Ghanaian universities have been broadly acknowledged (Saani & Boateng, 2019), few empirical inquiries have systematically interrogated the internal workings of CSMDs using disaggregated stakeholder data across academic, administrative, and committee-excluded groups. This gap is consequential, as stakeholder-specific insights significantly shape the perceived legitimacy and operational efficiency of decision-making structures. Moreover, prior research has often treated participatory governance as a monolithic construct, neglecting the complex institutional architectures and informal power dynamics embedded within



committee systems (Saani & Boateng, 2019; IIEP-UNESCO, 2015). The absence of fine-grained, context-sensitive analysis renders existing findings less actionable and perpetuates the need for further studies.

This study addresses these critical gaps by adopting an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase identifies key challenges confronting CSMDs through independent samples t-tests, while the qualitative phase explores stakeholder-informed responses through thematic analysis. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of both the structural deficits and reform prospects of CSMDs. The study's contribution lies in its methodological depth, empirical grounding, and contextual specificity. By capturing the perspectives of committee insiders and outsiders alike, it advances a locally anchored, evidence-based framework for reforming committee governance. Unlike imported models, the proposed framework responds to institutional realities, offering actionable insights for policy and practice. In so doing, the study transcends rhetorical commitments to participatory governance and contributes substantively to the evolving discourse on inclusive decision-making in African higher education.

1.1 Research Questions

The study sought answers for the following research questions

- i. What are the key challenges faced by the Committee System on Management Decisions (CSMD) in higher education institutions?
- ii. What measures can be implemented to mitigate the challenges confronting the CSMD within these institutions?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 System Theory

Applying Systems Theory to the Committee System on Management Decisions (CSMD) provides a robust analytical lens for examining how different components within university governance structures interact to influence institutional outcomes. Rooted in the work of scholars like Ackoff (1999) and Checkland (1981), Systems Theory emphasizes the interdependence and interaction among elements within a system. Within the context of higher education governance, the CSMD functions not as an isolated unit but as a key subsystem that integrates with others such as academic, financial, research, and administrative units. Each committee within the CSMD operates with specific mandates, yet their activities are interconnected, forming part of a larger organisational ecosystem. As such, inefficiencies in communication, decision delays, or role ambiguities in one committee can cascade and negatively impact the broader decision-making landscape. These interdependencies underscore a key tenet of Systems Theory: dysfunction in one part of a system can disrupt the operation of the entire system (Senge, 2006).

Understanding these relational dynamics is essential when diagnosing the persistent challenges confronting the CSMD. For instance, issues such as misaligned objectives, limited inter-committee coordination, and fragmented information flow cannot be addressed in isolation. Systems Theory, therefore, calls for an integrated approach that strengthens communication pathways, clarifies decision-making responsibilities, and fosters a culture of collaboration among governance units. This theoretical perspective reinforces the study's aim to uncover not only the specific challenges within individual committees but also the broader structural and procedural constraints that affect overall governance performance. By situating the CSMD within a systems framework, the research advocates for solutions that are systemic rather than piecemeal, thereby enhancing the efficiency, responsiveness, and cohesion of university decision-making structures.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Challenges Faced by Committee Systems in Universities

Committee systems play a vital role in the governance of higher education institutions (HEIs), acting as key mechanisms for decision-making, policy formulation, and academic administration. Despite their importance, numerous studies highlight persistent challenges that impede their effectiveness. One major issue is the delay in decision-making, often caused by the need for broad consensus. While inclusivity in decision-making is essential for ensuring diverse stakeholder representation, Tuckman (2009) argues that this inclusivity can result in drawn-out deliberations, slowing down the decision-making process and hindering timely responses. Decentralisation, designed to promote participatory governance, often results in unintended consequences. According to Agyenim-Boateng et al. (2000), decentralised governance structures can lead to fragmentation, where the central administration becomes disconnected from departmental units, creating confusion around roles and responsibilities. This fragmentation can also foster power struggles between departments and administrative bodies, further complicating the decision-making process. Jabbar (2012) also observes that unclear role definitions within committees often lead to disputes over authority and influence, which undermines institutional cohesion and efficiency. Communication challenges



exacerbate these governance issues. Inadequate communication of decisions, coupled with unclear guidelines for implementation, frequently results in misalignment between committees and administrative units (IIEP-UNESCO, 2015). Teferra and Altbach (2004) have highlighted that this lack of alignment can cause decisions made by committees to fail in their practical implementation, creating a disconnect between strategic decisions and their execution. Moreover, the absence of clear accountability structures in the decision-making process can further entrench institutional inertia, limiting the effectiveness of committee systems (Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2000).

The shift to virtual and hybrid models of governance during the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced a new set of challenges for committee systems. IIEP-UNESCO (2015) pointed out that inadequate internet access, digital fatigue, and the lack of informal communication channels significantly disrupted committee operations. These technological barriers were particularly problematic in contexts where digital infrastructure was already weak. Vurayai (2024) and UNESCO (2022) further emphasize that unequal access to digital tools exacerbates existing power imbalances within institutional hierarchies, affecting whose voices are heard and whose decisions are prioritized in committee settings. Moreover, the shift to virtual environments has increased staff burnout, with the heightened demands of virtual meetings contributing to emotional fatigue (Fynn et al., 2022). The transition to more digitalized committee work during the pandemic, while offering flexibility, has thus also burdened staff with additional pressures that affect their capacity to engage effectively. This issue is compounded by the perception of excessive executive interference in committee affairs, which erodes trust in the governance system (Tetty, 2017). Furthermore, inadequate documentation practices, such as incomplete or inaccurate meeting minutes, undermine transparency and accountability, diminishing the overall credibility of committee decision-making processes (De Boer et al., 2007).

While much of the literature has explored broader governance issues within HEIs (Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2000; Jabbar, 2012), specific studies focusing on the challenges facing Committee Systems on Management Decisions (CSMD) are relatively scarce. Existing studies on committee systems have often concentrated on general governance or administrative challenges without delving into the specific dynamics of CSMDs within universities. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the operational, technological, and institutional factors that hinder the effectiveness of the CSMD, particularly in the post-pandemic context of Ghanaian universities.

2.2.2 Measures to Address Challenges in Committee Systems

Effective committee systems are fundamental to the governance of higher education institutions (HEIs), but various challenges persist that hinder their efficiency. A critical approach to enhancing committee functionality involves establishing clear role definitions and accountability frameworks. Jabbar (2012) underscores that explicitly defining roles within committees is essential for reducing operational ambiguity and improving decision-making clarity. Similarly, Tuckman (2009) argues that aligning individual committee members' roles with institutional goals ensures a focused and timely approach to tasks, thereby fostering more effective decision-making. Improving communication, both within committees and across administrative units, is another key strategy for addressing challenges. Agyenim-Boateng et al. (2000) emphasize the need for structured communication channels and feedback mechanisms, which facilitate the efficient dissemination and execution of decisions. These systems enable universities to respond swiftly to challenges and ensure that decisions are iterative and continually refined. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools holds significant promise for improving the efficiency of committee systems. IIEP-UNESCO (2015) advocates for the use of digital platforms to streamline processes such as scheduling, documentation, and information sharing. Such tools can enhance transparency, reduce administrative overhead, and foster greater accountability. However, Vurayai (2024) cautions that unequal access to digital infrastructure and varying levels of digital literacy could exacerbate existing inequalities, making it essential for universities to address these disparities. Glover and Latif (2022) emphasize that continuous investment in digital ecosystems spanning infrastructure, training, and software tools is vital to prevent breakdowns in communication and uphold procedural efficiency in digital committee governance.

Another vital consideration is the transparency of committee documentation. As De Boer et al. (2007) highlight, thorough and transparent documentation of decisions serves not only to safeguard institutional memory but also to bolster accountability and legitimacy in decision-making. In the absence of systematic record-keeping, governance continuity and the effective implementation of decisions are at risk. Additionally, managing the workload of committee members is a crucial factor in maintaining engagement and efficiency. Teferra and Altbach (2004) suggest that fostering a collaborative environment within committees can help mitigate burnout, while Tight (2014) and Luescher-Mamashela (2013) warn that imbalanced governance responsibilities can lead to disengagement and increased staff turnover. Institutions should, therefore, adopt strategies to redistribute workloads and recognize the efforts of committee members, ensuring that the responsibilities are shared fairly across all participants. Systemic challenges, such as elite capture, also impede the effectiveness of committees. Tetty (2006) describes how powerful individuals may monopolize governance processes, limiting diversity of thought and stifling innovation within committees. Similarly, Mohamedbhai (2014) and Ashcroft and Rayner (2011) argue that genuine influence in



committee operations, as opposed to symbolic participation, is crucial for the realization of effective governance. The increasing digitalization of committee work also necessitates the establishment of new norms and practices. Onia (2023) highlight the importance of defining professional online engagement protocols to ensure effective communication and professionalism in virtual committee settings.

While these measures are grounded in existing literature, few studies have specifically focused on the CSMD within HEIs. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring context-specific strategies to improve the CSMD in the governance structures of higher education institutions, particularly in the wake of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift towards more digitalized operations.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, which commenced with a quantitative phase and was followed by a qualitative phase to provide a deeper interpretation of the data. Specifically, two sets of structured questionnaires were administered: one targeting members of statutory committees and the other aimed at non-committee members, including senior academic and administrative staff. This approach facilitated the collection of diverse perspectives, capturing the varying roles and experiences within the CSMD. The initial quantitative phase offered a broad overview of stakeholders' perceptions, challenges, and operational dynamics within the committee system. To further clarify and expand upon these findings, a subsequent qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with ten committee chairpersons, selected purposively. This qualitative phase provided an opportunity to delve into more complex issues, such as power dynamics, institutional culture, and the effectiveness of decision-making, which are not easily captured through survey instruments. The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was particularly suited to the objectives of this study, as it allowed for the exploration of both the general trends in committee operations and the deeper, underlying factors influencing committee decision-making in higher education governance. As noted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), this design enhances the depth of analysis by combining the breadth of quantitative data with the nuanced understanding provided by qualitative insights. This approach ensured methodological rigor, triangulation, and alignment with the study's broader goal of contributing to institutional reform.

3.2 Population

This study focused on a defined population comprising senior academic and administrative members, as well as senior staff, within a public university in Ghana. The primary participants were individuals serving on 47 statutory committees that are instrumental to the institution's governance architecture. These committees oversee essential functions such as academic policy formulation, financial planning, human resource development, and institutional strategy. Their inclusion was pivotal, as their direct engagement with the Committee System on Management Decisions (CSMD) positioned them to offer grounded perspectives on its operational efficacy and structural configuration. Complementing this group were senior members and staff who, although not directly involved in committee service, had been impacted by committee decisions within the past five years. This cohort, encompassing both teaching and non-teaching personnel, contributed critical observations on the extent to which the committee system upholds principles of transparency, participation, and institutional responsiveness. By incorporating viewpoints from both those embedded within and those external to the formal committee structure, the study achieved a holistic appraisal of the CSMD. This inclusive approach resonates with methodological recommendations in educational research literature, which underscore the importance of capturing the experiences of both policy actors and policy recipients when evaluating institutional governance systems (Coe et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through this dual-lens perspective, the study was able to assess the broader institutional impact and perceived legitimacy of the committee system in the post-pandemic context.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

To ensure representativeness and methodological robustness, the study adopted a multi-stage stratified sampling approach, combining purposive selection with proportionate stratified random sampling. The accessible population consisted of 2,665 individuals, comprising 213 committee members and 2,452 non-committee members. These were further classified into senior members (both teaching and non-teaching) and senior staff, allowing for targeted sampling within distinct professional categories. Given the explanatory sequential mixed-methods framework, the study treated committee members and non-committee members as separate strata due to their divergent functions and perspectives within the Committee System on Management Decisions (CSMD). At the initial stage, all 213 committee members were purposively included in the quantitative phase. This census approach was



strategically chosen to capture the full spectrum of insights from individuals directly involved in committee deliberations and institutional decision-making.

For the non-committee member stratum, proportionate stratified random sampling was employed to ensure balanced representation across the identified subgroups. The sample size determination was guided by Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, which recommended a minimum of 334 respondents for a population of 2,452. However, to enhance the reliability of subgroup analyses and reduce sampling error, the target sample size was increased to 687 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ultimately, 628 valid responses were received from the non-committee group and 164 from committee members, resulting in a final sample of 792 participants representing approximately 29.72% of the entire accessible population. Despite the shortfall from the initial target, the achieved sample size was sufficiently robust for the intended statistical and qualitative analyses, supporting the study's goals of depth, representativeness, and analytical precision (Bryman, 2016).

Table 1

Summary Statistics of Composition of Population and Sample

Category of respondent		Population	Sample
Non-committee members	Senior members (Teaching)	751	254
	Senior members (Non-Teaching)	197	127
	Senior staff	1504	306
Total (non-committee mem.)		2452	687
Committee members		213	213
Overall total		2665	900

*Note: Final valid responses used for analysis = 792

3.4 Instrument

To collect robust quantitative data, the study employed two custom-designed structured questionnaires, each tailored to suit the distinct roles of committee and non-committee members. The instruments were systematically organised into three sections. Section A gathered basic demographic data such as participants' professional rank and length of service. Sections B and C featured closed-ended items structured along a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). These sections explored perceived challenges encountered in committee functions as well as potential strategies for enhancing their efficiency. Grounded in systems theory, the design of the instruments conceptualised university committees as interactive elements within a larger institutional governance framework. This theoretical underpinning contributed to the construct validity of the questionnaires. To strengthen both content and face validity, two specialists in educational leadership and governance rigorously reviewed the instruments. Their expert critiques informed revisions aimed at ensuring alignment with the study's central aims and conceptual focus.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted involving 30 participants from a similar public university. The goal was to evaluate the instruments' clarity, internal coherence, and reliability. The pilot yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.802 for the committee member version and 0.715 for the non-committee version both surpassing the widely accepted reliability threshold of 0.60 (Kline, 1999; Bryman, 2016), thus confirming acceptable internal consistency. Based on the pilot feedback, minor revisions were introduced to enhance clarity and contextual relevance. For the qualitative component of the study, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore deeper thematic concerns not easily captured through surveys. Interview participants included five purposively selected committee chairpersons, five committee members, and ten non-committee members. The interview protocol delved into issues such as internal committee interactions, the extent of influence on management decisions, levels of procedural transparency, and barriers to effective functioning. This phase served to enrich and contextualise the quantitative findings, in line with the explanatory sequential research strategy advocated by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). Data collection was conducted over a five-month period. Questionnaires were distributed in person to ensure a higher response rate. Ultimately, the return rates were 77.12% for committee members and 91.4% for non-committee members. A total of 792 valid responses were obtained, representing 29.72% of the overall target population. Table 2 summarises the reliability statistics and response rates across the different respondent groups.

Table 2

Summary Statistics of Reliability Coefficient and Return Rate of Questionnaire

Respondent	Cronbach Alpha	Distributed Questionnaire	Return Rate
Committee members	.698	213	164(77.12%)
Non-committee members	.715	687	628 (91.4%)
Total		900	792



3.5 Analysis of Data

The analytical focus of this study centred on three key respondent categories within a public university: senior academic members, senior administrative staff, and committee participants. Before conducting any analysis, the collected data underwent rigorous editing to confirm completeness and internal consistency. To address the two principal research questions, independent samples t-tests were applied to assess differences in how committee-related challenges and proposed interventions were perceived across different staff categories. This statistical method was selected for its appropriateness in comparing the means of two unrelated groups on continuous scale variables and was well-aligned with the study's goal of uncovering significant perceptual variations. Prior to conducting the t-tests, standard assumptions including normality and homogeneity of variances were examined and met, justifying the reliability of the chosen test procedure (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2020). Employing inferential statistical methods enabled the researcher to move beyond descriptive interpretations, thereby enhancing the robustness and explanatory potential of the findings.

To complement the quantitative strand, qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews were subjected to thematic analysis guided by the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved a systematic process of open and axial coding to extract recurring patterns and themes related to committee influence, procedural bottlenecks, and decision-making dynamics within the governance structure. Systems theory provided a conceptual lens for interpreting the qualitative insights, helping to situate individual experiences within the broader institutional ecosystem. The integration of survey results and interview findings through triangulation further enhanced the study's internal validity. Additionally, the overall trustworthiness of the analysis was reinforced by expert validation of instruments and rigorous piloting, ensuring alignment with both theoretical and methodological expectations.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 What are the Challenges that face CSMD in HEIs

This section addressed the first research question by examining how committee members and their non-committee counterparts perceive the challenges affecting the functionality of the Committee System on Management Decisions (CSMD), particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The investigation was timely, given how the pandemic accelerated digital transformation and reconfigured institutional governance structures. Specifically, it aimed to uncover how shifts in technological reliance, participation protocols, and resource distribution have influenced the efficiency and inclusiveness of committee processes. To discern whether there were meaningful differences in perceptions between these two staff groups, independent samples t-tests were conducted across various challenge indicators. These included both long-standing governance issues and emerging difficulties stemming from recent institutional changes. The statistical comparison provided a nuanced understanding of stakeholder concerns, revealing how professional roles and committee involvement shape one's experience of the CSMD. Through this empirical approach, the study not only highlighted critical areas requiring attention but also laid the groundwork for informed, context-sensitive reforms that can enhance the equity, transparency, and responsiveness of decision-making processes in higher education governance.

Table 3

Independent Samples T-test Results on CSMD Challenges by Staff Category

Challenge	t	df	p-value	Mean difference	Significant difference
Delay in circulating of agenda for meetings	2.08	76	0.041	0.13	Yes
Sitting allowances not paid promptly	1.52	76	0.132	0.13	No
Delay in communicating decisions to management	-1.01	76	0.316	-0.11	No
Inadequate facilities for committee work	-1.84	76	0.070	-0.29	No (marginal)
Committees pose financial strain on university resources	-2.54	76	0.013	-0.48	Yes
Interference from management or influential staff	-3.51	76	0.001	-0.72	Yes
Poor quality of minutes (language, structure, content)	.57	76	0.570	0.09	No
Inconsistent internet during virtual/hybrid meetings	2.66	76	0.009	0.34	Yes
Difficulty engaging members across hybrid formats (virtual/in-person participation)	2.32	76	0.023	0.28	Yes
Digital fatigue and reduced motivation among staff	1.89	76	0.063	0.25	No (marginal)
Lack of training for digital meeting tools (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams)	2.41	76	0.019	0.30	Yes
Inequitable access to digital resources for committee work	2.78	76	0.007	0.39	Yes
Delays due to asynchronous communication styles (emails, group chats)	1.47	76	0.145	0.15	No
Staff burnout affecting committee participation	2.58	76	0.012	0.31	Yes



The results of the independent samples t-test, as presented in Table 3, indicate notable perceptual differences between committee and non-committee members regarding several challenges confronting the CSMD. Committee members were significantly more likely to report obstacles such as delays in the timely distribution of meeting agendas ($p = .041$), unstable internet connectivity ($p = .009$), and complications associated with hybrid meeting formats ($p = .023$). They also expressed greater concern over inadequate training in digital technologies ($p = .019$), unequal access to digital infrastructure ($p = .007$), and heightened experiences of staff fatigue and burnout ($p = .012$). In contrast, non-committee members more strongly perceived financial constraints ($p = .013$) and undue managerial interference in committee affairs ($p = .001$) as key issues. A few variables, including the adequacy of physical facilities ($p = .070$) and symptoms of digital fatigue ($p = .063$), approached statistical significance but did not meet conventional thresholds. Other items exhibited no significant differences between groups. These findings underscore the differentiated realities of staff engagement with the CSMD, shaped by their specific institutional roles and levels of involvement.

4.2 Perceived Strategies for Making the CSMD More Functional

This research question focused on identifying the strategies perceived as most effective for improving the functionality of the Committee System in Decision-Making (CSMD) at the University of Cape Coast, particularly in response to the complex demands posed by the post-COVID-19 academic landscape. The aim was to uncover practical and forward-looking interventions that balance the enduring principles of participatory governance with contemporary digital realities. Given the significance of this inquiry in shaping future policy reforms, the study sought to capture a range of views from both committee and non-committee stakeholders. An independent samples t-test was employed to examine whether statistically significant differences existed between these two groups regarding their preferred strategies. The results provide insights that can guide institutional efforts to foster more inclusive, responsive, and effective decision-making structures.

Table 4

Independent Samples T-test Results on Strategies to Improve CSMD Functionality

Strategy	t	df	p-value	Mean difference	Significant difference
Regular in-service training for committee members	0.31	76	0.756	0.04	No
Provide adequate and reliable resources for committee work	-1.05	76	.296	-0.13	No
Provide training in meeting procedures and committee protocols	0.38	76	0.703	0.05	No
Provide training in time management	0.64	76	0.524	0.08	No
Ensure committees operate independently without interference	-1.07	76	0.288	-0.16	No
Improve transparency and timely dissemination of agenda and decisions	2.31	76	0.024	0.26	Yes
Timely and structured documentation of committee deliberations	2.42	76	.018	0.27	Yes
Prompt payment of sitting allowances	-1.88	76	.064	-0.22	No (marginal)
Expand access to ICT resources for committee-related activities	2.75	76	.007	0.33	Yes
Provide stable internet infrastructure for hybrid/virtual meetings	2.61	76	.011	0.29	Yes
Train members on digital tools (Zoom, Teams, virtual etiquette)	2.58	76	.012	0.30	Yes
Minimize digital overload by limiting meeting frequency	1.94	76	.056	0.22	No (marginal)
Encourage synchronous communication and clarify digital etiquette guidelines	1.68	76	.098	0.18	No (marginal)
Assign secretaries with technical training to ensure quality minutes	2.69	76	.009	0.28	Yes
Offer well-being support and fair distribution of committee workloads to reduce burnout	2.71	76	.008	0.32	Yes
Review committee membership policy to reduce multitasking overload	-6.88	76	<.001	-0.78	Yes
Grant committees authority to implement decisions within approved mandates	-0.94	76	.349	-0.11	No

Findings from Table 4 underscore notable divergences between committee and non-committee members regarding the perceived effectiveness of specific strategies to enhance the functionality of the Committee System in Decision-Making (CSMD). Committee members consistently placed higher value on measures aimed at addressing technological limitations, including the enhancement of internet infrastructure ($t = 3.21$, $p = .002$), capacity-building in digital tool usage ($t = 2.73$, $p = .008$), and increased access to ICT equipment ($t = 2.91$, $p = .005$). They also expressed stronger support for interventions targeting administrative efficiency, such as reducing digital overload ($t = 2.51$, $p = .014$), improving timeliness in the circulation of meeting documents ($t = 2.29$, $p = .025$), and appointing adequately trained secretaries to support committee work ($t = 2.63$, $p = .010$). In contrast, non-committee members gave



significantly greater emphasis to alleviating excessive committee workload through a reduction in multiple committee assignments ($t = -2.88$, $p = .005$). Interestingly, both groups demonstrated broad consensus on several strategic interventions, including the need for in-service training, committee autonomy, and empowerment, as these did not produce statistically significant differences. These findings suggest a shared recognition of core institutional needs, albeit shaped by differing experiences and roles within the university's governance framework.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Challenges Undermining the Functionality of the Committee System in Decision-Making (CSMD) (RQ1)

The statistical data presented in Table 3 offers critical insight into the multifaceted challenges confronting the Committee System in Decision-Making (CSMD) within Ghanaian higher education institutions (HEIs), especially amid on-going post-COVID-19 governance transitions. The findings highlight not only procedural inefficiencies but also deeper governance-related concerns that collectively compromise the responsiveness, inclusivity, and legitimacy of institutional decision-making.

A pronounced divergence in perceptions between committee members and their non-committee counterparts suggests that institutional role and proximity to committee work significantly shape stakeholders' experiences. Committee members consistently identified operational and technological obstacles as key impediments. One of the more pressing issues, as evidenced by a significant p -value ($p = .041$), was the untimely distribution of meeting agendas. This delay restricts participants' ability to prepare adequately, thereby diminishing the quality and depth of discussions. A committee chair captured the impact succinctly, noting: "It's hard to hold meaningful discussions when members receive materials just hours before a meeting. It leads to superficial contributions, or worse, silence." Such procedural shortcomings, while seemingly minor, foster a culture of passive engagement that ultimately weakens deliberative governance.

Another significant challenge involved unreliable internet connectivity during hybrid or virtual sessions ($p = .009$), a problem that points to broader infrastructural constraints confronting many Ghanaian universities in the wake of COVID-19. As one respondent lamented, "Our internet is so unreliable that half of our virtual meetings are spent troubleshooting. Decisions get delayed or rushed, and the sense of cohesion among members is lost." This illustrates how technological gaps can silence certain voices, leading to digitally-mediated exclusion and reinforcing asymmetries in participation and influence.

Additional concerns included difficulties with hybrid participation ($p = .023$) and a lack of training in virtual communication platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams ($p = .019$). The transition to digital operations, while necessary, appears to have outpaced the preparedness of institutions and staff. The issue of unequal access to digital tools ($p = .007$) further underscores persistent inequalities as a digital divide that reflects and reproduces broader disparities in institutional power and voice (Vurayai, 2024; UNESCO, 2022).

Committee members also reported higher levels of burnout ($p = .012$), underscoring the emotional and psychological burdens associated with committee participation in under-resourced settings. One participant explained: "The workload keeps piling, and sometimes it feels like we're doing everything without much support or recognition. You get tired, mentally and emotionally." This exhaustion is compounded by signs of digital fatigue ($p = .063$), aligning with Fynn et al.'s (2022) observation that while committee involvement is vital for collegial governance, it is often experienced as an overextension rather than an honour.

Conversely, non-committee members expressed stronger reservations about the independence and cost-efficiency of the CSMD. Significant concerns included managerial interference ($p = .001$) and the financial burden that committee work places on already strained university budgets ($p = .013$). These sentiments point to a general mistrust of the integrity of committee processes, particularly among those not involved directly. Tetey (2017) highlights how political encroachment on university governance can erode faith in internal decision-making structures. This was echoed by one interviewee who remarked: "It sometimes feels like decisions are made elsewhere, and the committees only exist to rubber-stamp them." Such perceptions, if left unaddressed, risk undermining participation and the credibility of committee outputs.

Interestingly, the quality of minutes, a factor often flagged in governance discourse did not emerge as a statistically significant concern ($p = .570$). Contrary to expectations, qualitative data suggested a high standard of professionalism among administrative staff tasked with minute-taking. A secretary reflected: "It's not easy. Sometimes you're up till midnight just to get the minutes typed, cross-checked, and ready for circulation. But we know it matters it's the institutional memory." This dedication highlights the often-overlooked contributions of support staff in maintaining institutional continuity and governance integrity.

Other issues such as limited physical infrastructure for committee meetings ($p = .070$) and communication delays via asynchronous channels ($p = .145$) were not statistically significant but recurred in interview narratives. Participants cited challenges in securing meeting venues and difficulties coordinating through emails or messaging platforms. These findings are consistent with the observations of De Boer et al. (2007), who argue that even minor



procedural hurdles, when frequent, can erode the effectiveness of university governance and hinder collaborative engagement.

The contrasting perspectives of committee and non-committee members reveal a fundamental disconnect in how the CSMD is experienced and evaluated. While committee members focus on tangible operational barriers, non-members tend to highlight broader structural and governance-related issues. This divergence points to a lack of shared understanding about the role, processes, and value of committee work within HEIs. The study's explanatory sequential mixed-method approach enabled a richer understanding of these complexities. Interview data, particularly from committee chairs and active members, provided context to the statistical patterns. For example, while the delay in management's response to committee decisions ($p = .316$) was not significant quantitatively, multiple respondents noted a lack of feedback and communication from upper administration. One committee chair remarked: "We send recommendations up, but it's like shouting into a void. There's rarely feedback, and we don't know if our inputs make any difference." Such institutional silence can dampen motivation and hinder adaptive decision-making.

Likewise, while the prompt payment of sitting allowances ($p = .132$) was not identified as a significant issue in the survey, interviews revealed that delayed payments are perceived as a symbolic slight. Several respondents emphasized that the issue is not merely financial but speaks to a broader lack of recognition and appreciation for committee contributions. One member put it succinctly: "It's not about the money, it's about respect for our time and input." Taken as a whole, these findings point to a dual challenge confronting the CSMD: one of operational capacity and the other of stakeholder confidence. The former is grounded in infrastructural and digital limitations that impede efficient functioning, while the latter reflects underlying perceptions of manipulation, exclusion, or inefficiency. Unless both dimensions are addressed, efforts to strengthen committee governance may yield only superficial improvements.

These insights reinforce broader scholarly critiques of governance in African universities. Scholars such as Mohamedbhai (2014) and Luescher-Mamashela (2013) emphasize the interplay between institutional constraints and governance outcomes. However, this study adds nuance by situating these tensions within the evolving context of digital transformation post-COVID-19. The findings suggest that achieving a robust and participatory committee culture in Ghanaian HEIs will require more than technical fixes; it will demand an integrated approach that combines digital capacity-building, institutional transparency, and a culture of mutual recognition.

4.3.2 Strategies to Improve the Functionality of the Committee System in Decision-Making (RQ2)

The findings from the independent samples t-test, as detailed in Table 4, offer a comprehensive understanding of how various stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of strategies intended to enhance the CSMD across Ghana's HEIs. When integrated with qualitative responses from interview participants, these results unveil multiple reform pathways particularly in relation to digital integration, transparency, work distribution, procedural clarity, and institutional support structures. While certain strategies garnered similar levels of endorsement from both committee members and non-members, statistically significant divergences highlight notable differences in lived experiences and viewpoints—an essential consideration in constructing more inclusive and resilient governance frameworks.

One of the most pronounced themes emerging from the data involves the role of digital technologies in academic governance. Committee members strongly endorsed four digitally focused interventions: improving access to ICT tools ($p = .007$), enhancing internet reliability to support hybrid and virtual meetings ($p = .011$), offering training in the use of digital platforms and etiquette ($p = .012$), and assigning skilled technical secretaries to ensure quality documentation ($p = .009$). These preferences underscore how integral digital platforms have become to governance operations, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic's catalysis of virtual meeting culture. A committee respondent aptly noted: "Virtual meetings are now the norm, but many senior colleagues face difficulties with basic tasks like sharing screens or navigating breakout rooms. Training is no longer optional." This perspective mirrors the argument that digital inclusion in governance is only meaningful when infrastructural access and member competence are addressed (Vurayai, 2024; UNESCO, 2022). Similarly, Gover and Latif (2022) caution that inadequate investment in digital ecosystems may lead to delays, inefficiencies, and the marginalisation of members lacking technical proficiency.

The broader contextual understanding gained from the second part of this study reinforces the importance of addressing digital inequalities and psychosocial dimensions to improve committee effectiveness. The research highlights that infrastructural deficits and digital fatigue—exacerbated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic—pose significant barriers to meaningful participation. Faculty and staff often experience stress, demotivation, and a sense of exclusion when digital tools and support are inadequate, reflecting concerns raised by Fynn et al. (2022) and Tettey (2017). Addressing these issues requires not only technological upgrades but also comprehensive capacity-building initiatives and recognition of the human element in governance processes.

Beyond digital concerns, transparency in agenda setting and structured documentation also emerged as statistically significant priorities among committee members ($p = .024$ and $p = .018$, respectively). Qualitative



evidence revealed shared frustration over inconsistent or delayed communication of decisions, which often undermines implementation and fosters confusion. One secretary explained, “When records are delayed or vague, decisions get misinterpreted or ignored entirely, which leads to conflict and, at times, inaction.” This aligns with De Boer et al.’s (2007) assertion that procedural clarity and timely documentation are central to the legitimacy of participatory governance structures. Moreover, ineffective documentation hampers institutional memory and diminishes accountability and continuity.

The integration of qualitative insights emphasizes that procedural inefficiencies are not solely technical but also psychosocial. The study underscores that stress, demotivation, and perceived lack of institutional recognition - especially amid increased digital workloads—diminishes the willingness and capacity of members to participate actively. Faculty members, often overburdened with governance duties alongside teaching and research, express concerns about workload imbalance and the absence of structured support mechanisms (Tight, 2014; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013). One committee chair noted, “I serve on over a dozen committees, and no one considers how this affects our stress, research productivity, or personal time—it’s just assumed we’ll manage.” These human-centered insights extend the discussion beyond procedural reforms, highlighting the need for institutional policies that promote workload equity and mental well-being to foster sustainable participation.

Another area of marked difference was the emphasis on welfare-related interventions, particularly equitable workload distribution and mental health support, which were more strongly endorsed by committee members ($p = .008$). This echoes the findings of the second part of the study, where faculty burnout and disengagement due to excessive responsibilities and insufficient recognition emerged as persistent challenges. Addressing these psychosocial dimensions is crucial for enhancing motivation, commitment, and overall governance efficacy.

Most notably, the most statistically significant result pointed to the need to revisit policies surrounding committee appointments, especially to reduce multitasking and excessive demands on a few individuals ($p < .001$; mean difference = -0.78). Committee members, more directly burdened, strongly backed this strategy, while non-members seemed less aware of its urgency. This perceptual gap underscores the importance of transparent, rotational, and inclusive appointment processes. The qualitative data revealed perceptions of “elite capture,” where a small subset of individuals dominate decision-making, limiting broader participation and legitimacy (Tetty, 2006). Reforming these structures to allow for more equitable access would not only relieve overburdened members but also enrich decision-making with diverse perspectives.

Interestingly, strategies typically assumed to be vital—such as offering routine training ($p = .756$), promoting time management ($p = .524$), and safeguarding committees from managerial overreach ($p = .288$)—did not yield statistically significant differences. This suggests a shared valuation across both groups but also indicates a recognition that these measures alone may not sufficiently tackle deeper structural and psychosocial challenges. As one interviewee commented: “*Workshops are helpful, but they don’t solve the real issue. If members feel their voices don’t count, training won’t change anything.*” These insights, coupled with findings on digital fatigue and mental stress, point towards the necessity of holistic reforms that integrate infrastructural, procedural, and human-centered approaches.

Some strategies approached significance, indicating potential emerging consensus. These include prompt disbursement of sitting allowances ($p = .064$) and curbing virtual meeting overload ($p = .056$). While financial incentives may be viewed skeptically, their symbolic value in recognizing service contributions is noteworthy. Likewise, addressing digital fatigue through clearer norms for synchronous and asynchronous communication ($p = .098$) remains essential. Several interviewees called for establishing standards for response timelines, meeting decorum, and digital professionalism—elements that are vital for fostering respectful and effective virtual governance, as argued by Onia (2023).

In sum, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings underscores that improving CSMD functionality requires multifaceted reforms. Technological upgrades and procedural transparency are necessary but insufficient on their own. Addressing psychosocial factors such as workload equity, mental health support, and perceptions of inclusion is equally vital. The findings reinforce the importance of transforming digital infrastructure, fostering participatory culture, and ensuring institutional responsiveness—elements that collectively contribute to more inclusive, effective, and sustainable governance systems. For such transformation to take root, HEI leadership must move beyond symbolic gestures and implement reforms that directly confront structural and human-centered barriers illuminated by this study. When properly supported, governance can transcend bureaucratic formalities and evolve into a platform for collaboration, innovation, and shared academic vision.



V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study highlights the crucial role of the Committee System in the governance structure of Ghanaian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). However, the findings reveal that its effectiveness is severely hindered by a series of systemic barriers. These challenges are not just operational inefficiencies; they reflect deeper institutional issues, particularly regarding structural neglect and a lack of prioritization of committee work within the broader academic and administrative framework.

A key conclusion is that the logistical delays, particularly in the distribution of agendas and preparatory documents, limit members' ability to contribute meaningfully to discussions. The failure to implement timely procedures compromises the depth and quality of decisions made, affecting overall institutional governance. Furthermore, technological barriers such as inconsistent internet access and limited digital literacy severely impair the functionality of hybrid or virtual meetings. This creates an environment where some members feel disengaged or entirely excluded, thus diminishing the potential of committee work to drive effective decision-making.

Additionally, the human resource pressures within committees, where staff are overburdened with multiple responsibilities, contribute to emotional fatigue and burnout. These factors, combined with the perceived interference of institutional leadership in committee affairs, erode trust in the system. Many staff members perceive committee work as merely symbolic, especially when decisions are seen to be overridden or manipulated to align with the preferences of senior management. The absence of feedback mechanisms further exacerbates this sense of disconnect, fostering a belief that committee efforts do not lead to meaningful institutional outcomes.

Despite these significant challenges, the study indicates that there is a desire for change within the institution. Participants expressed a strong willingness to embrace reforms, particularly in digital empowerment and enhanced procedural transparency, suggesting that meaningful improvements are possible with the right institutional investment and support.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions drawn, several actionable recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness of the Committee System in Ghanaian HEIs:

To address the technological challenges, it is critical that HEIs prioritize the expansion of digital infrastructure, particularly ensuring consistent and reliable internet access. Regular training in the use of digital platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) and digital etiquette for committee members is essential. This will empower members to participate more effectively in virtual meetings and reduce instances of exclusion due to technical difficulties. Moreover, assigning technical support staff during meetings would ensure smoother operations and improved recordkeeping.

Streamlining logistical processes, such as the timely distribution of meeting agendas and preparatory documents, is crucial for enabling well-prepared and informed discussions. Establishing clear timelines for document submission and review, coupled with an emphasis on structured recordkeeping, will help enhance procedural transparency. These practices will foster a culture of accountability and contribute to building trust among committee members.

The burden of committee responsibilities on already overworked academic and administrative staff needs to be acknowledged. Institutions should consider strategies for redistributing workloads to ensure that committee duties do not contribute to burnout. Additionally, institutions should provide access to psychosocial support services to help mitigate the emotional fatigue experienced by committee members. Recognizing the emotional and mental toll of committee service can help sustain staff morale and engagement in governance processes.

Symbolic recognition, such as timely payment of sitting allowances and formal acknowledgment of committee work, can have a positive impact on staff motivation. Institutions should ensure that committee work is seen not as an additional burden, but as an integral part of the institutional governance process. Recognizing the value of committee participation can also foster a more collaborative and participatory institutional culture.

To restore trust in the committee system, institutions must establish consistent feedback mechanisms between committees and institutional leadership. This will help close the feedback loop, ensuring that committee decisions are acted upon and that members receive feedback on the outcomes of their deliberations. This will also help alleviate the perception of managerial interference, as it will demonstrate that committee decisions are taken seriously and lead to tangible outcomes.

Finally, fostering a culture of procedural transparency within committees will enhance the legitimacy of the decision-making process. Institutions should focus on improving communication channels and ensuring that committee members are well-informed and prepared for meetings. Transparent procedures not only improve decision-making but also contribute to the overall accountability and effectiveness of institutional governance.



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