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ROLE OF BOARD DIVERSITY IN ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN RWANDA: EVIDENCE FROM UNIVERSITY OF KIGALI

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ABSTRACT

The governance of higher education institutions has increasingly emphasized board diversity as a strategic mechanism for improving institutional effectiveness. Private universities, particularly in developing countries, face growing pressure to enhance governance quality, accountability, innovation, and academic performance. This study examined the role of board diversity in enhancing institutional effectiveness in private universities in Rwanda, using the University of Kigali as a case study. The research adopted a mixed-methods case study design integrating survey data, governance document analysis, and key informant interviews with university management and board stakeholders. Board diversity was operationalized through gender diversity, professional expertise diversity, educational diversity, and nationality diversity, while institutional effectiveness was measured using strategic performance, academic quality, operational efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction indicators. Findings indicate that diverse board composition significantly enhances decision-making quality, strategic oversight, and institutional adaptability. The study further revealed that multidisciplinary expertise among board members strengthens policy formulation and institutional innovation. The research concludes that board diversity is a critical governance mechanism for improving private university effectiveness in Rwanda. The study recommends deliberate diversity policies, competency-based board appointments, and inclusive governance frameworks within higher education institutions.

Keywords: *Board diversity, institutional effectiveness, university governance, private universities, Rwanda, University of Kigali.*

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INTRODUCTION

The governance of higher education institutions has increasingly attracted global scholarly and policy attention as universities face mounting pressure to improve institutional effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability in an increasingly competitive knowledge economy. Across the world, governing boards play a strategic role in shaping institutional vision, overseeing management performance, and ensuring stakeholder representation, making board composition a critical determinant of organizational outcomes. Contemporary governance research emphasizes board diversity—encompassing gender, professional background, age, nationality, and expertise—as a mechanism for improving decision quality, innovation, and strategic responsiveness. Empirical studies indicate that diverse boards enhance institutional oversight and promote balanced decision-making through varied cognitive perspectives and experiential knowledge (Matekenya & Musvosvi, 2024; Gharios et al., 2024). Additionally, global governance scholarship highlights that board diversity strengthens transparency and sustainability reporting practices, reinforcing institutional legitimacy and long-term effectiveness within complex governance environments (Bhatia & Kumar, 2024; Shakil et al., 2025). Consequently, diversity has evolved from a normative governance principle into a strategic performance driver within modern institutions worldwide.

In the United States, board diversity debates have become central to discussions surrounding university governance, academic freedom, and institutional accountability. American higher education institutions traditionally emphasize shared governance structures combining trustees, faculty leadership, and administrative executives, but growing political, social, and technological pressures have intensified scrutiny of governance effectiveness. Research examining governance frameworks in U.S. universities shows that diverse governing boards improve adaptability, policy innovation, and institutional resilience, particularly in rapidly changing technological and regulatory contexts (Li et al., 2025; Du, 2025). However, recent policy shifts and legal debates surrounding diversity initiatives demonstrate ongoing tensions between governance autonomy and political influence, which scholars argue directly affect institutional effectiveness and decision-making processes (Scholars at Risk, 2025; AACSB, 2025). These developments underscore the importance of examining how diversity contributes not only to representation but also to governance stability and performance outcomes.

China presents a contrasting governance model characterized by centralized state influence combined with institutional modernization efforts aimed at enhancing university competitiveness and innovation capacity. Chinese universities operate under government-guided governance structures where boards and administrative councils align institutional strategies with national development goals. Studies on governance reforms in Chinese higher education reveal that institutional effectiveness improves when governance structures integrate diverse expertise, sustainability considerations, and technological innovation perspectives (Zhang et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). Furthermore, comparative analyses of university governance systems indicate that diversity in expertise and stakeholder participation supports policy implementation efficiency and institutional modernization within centralized governance environments (Li et al., 2025; Du, 2025). These findings demonstrate that even within state-led systems, diversity contributes to institutional adaptability and strategic effectiveness.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, higher education institutions are undergoing governance transformation driven by expansion in student enrollment, regional integration, and demands for quality assurance. Universities increasingly require inclusive governance systems capable of addressing developmental challenges such as limited resources, infrastructure constraints, and skills mismatches. Governance quality has been identified as a key determinant of sustainable development outcomes across African institutions, with inclusive leadership structures improving institutional coordination and performance (Adebayo et al., 2025; Aryee et al., 2025). Scholars further argue that diversity in governance bodies strengthens stakeholder engagement and promotes equitable policy formulation, particularly in contexts where universities serve diverse socio-economic populations (Makuve, 2024; Adebayo et al., 2025). Despite these benefits, many African universities continue to experience governance gaps linked to limited representation and weak institutional oversight mechanisms.

In South Africa, higher education governance reforms have emphasized transformation, inclusivity, and research productivity as mechanisms for improving institutional performance in the post-apartheid era. Universities have adopted policies promoting demographic and professional diversity within governing councils to address historical inequalities and enhance institutional responsiveness. Empirical research demonstrates that governance quality significantly influences innovation outcomes and economic contributions through improved strategic decision-making and resource allocation (Chagwiza et al., 2024; Adebayo et al., 2025). Moreover, governance diversity has been associated with stronger accountability systems and improved institutional legitimacy among stakeholders, reinforcing universities' developmental roles within national socio-economic transformation agendas (Makuve, 2024; Chagwiza et al., 2024). Nevertheless, challenges remain regarding balancing representation with governance competence and effectiveness.

In Kenya, private universities have experienced rapid expansion, creating increased demand for effective governance structures capable of sustaining academic quality and financial stability. Kenyan higher education reforms emphasize board professionalism and diversity as critical tools for improving institutional management and competitiveness within East Africa's evolving education market. Studies on institutional governance in African universities indicate that demographic and professional diversity within governing bodies enhances strategic oversight and supports innovation adoption, particularly in resource-constrained environments (Matekenya & Musvosvi, 2024; Makuve, 2024). Additionally, regional governance initiatives promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration demonstrate that inclusive governance arrangements improve institutional coordination and cross-border academic cooperation (Kim & Lee, 2025; Aryee et al., 2025). These developments highlight the growing recognition of board diversity as a governance reform priority in Kenya's higher education sector.

In Rwanda, the higher education sector has undergone significant transformation aligned with national development strategies aimed at building a knowledge-based economy. Private universities play a critical role in expanding access to higher education and supporting workforce development, thereby requiring effective governance systems capable of ensuring academic quality and institutional sustainability. Despite regulatory improvements, questions remain regarding how governance structures—particularly board composition—affect institutional effectiveness in private universities. Emerging African governance literature emphasizes that diversity within institutional boards enhances accountability, strategic planning, and stakeholder representation, which are essential for institutional performance in rapidly developing education systems (Adebayo et al., 2025; Matekenya & Musvosvi, 2024). However, empirical evidence examining the relationship between board diversity and institutional effectiveness within Rwandan private universities remains limited, creating a significant research gap. This study therefore investigates the role of board diversity in enhancing institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali, contributing context-specific evidence to governance scholarship in Rwanda and the broader African higher education landscape.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid expansion of higher education globally has intensified concerns regarding institutional governance effectiveness, particularly in private universities where accountability structures depend heavily on governing boards. Evidence shows that governance diversity remains uneven despite growing recognition of its strategic importance. For instance, recent higher education governance reports indicate that women constituted only 43.4% of university governing body members, while ethnic minority representation stood at 15.2%, demonstrating persistent diversity gaps within institutional leadership structures (Advance HE, 2024). Limited diversity at the board level has been associated with weaker strategic oversight, reduced innovation, and insufficient responsiveness to stakeholder needs in complex academic environments. In Rwanda, the issue becomes more pronounced due to the dominance of private higher learning institutions, which account for the majority of tertiary enrollment and institutional presence. As of 2023, Rwanda had over 30 private higher learning institutions, enrolling approximately 57% of tertiary students, highlighting the critical governance role played by private university boards in shaping national human capital development (Ministry of Education Rwanda, 2023). Despite this growth, tertiary education participation remains low, with only 2.8% of the population attaining bachelor-level education, raising concerns about institutional effectiveness, quality assurance, and leadership capacity within universities (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR], 2024). These statistics suggest that governance structures—including board composition and diversity—may influence institutional performance outcomes, yet empirical evidence linking board diversity to effectiveness in Rwandan private universities remains limited.

Although international scholarship increasingly connects board diversity with organizational effectiveness, significant contextual and methodological gaps persist. Studies such as Shakil et al. (2025) demonstrate that gender-diverse boards improve organizational outcomes through stronger governance mechanisms, while Wiyono et al. (2025) show governance practices significantly enhance institutional performance and employee outcomes in private higher education settings. Similarly, Baccini and Re (2023) reveal that homogeneous governance structures can limit innovation and reinforce decision-making biases within academic institutions. However, most existing studies focus on corporate sectors or universities in developed economies, leaving African private universities underexplored. Research in higher education governance has also concentrated largely on faculty diversity or equity initiatives rather than governing board composition and institutional effectiveness outcomes. Furthermore, prior studies rarely examine how multiple dimensions of diversity—such as gender, professional background, and stakeholder representation—interact within governance systems in emerging higher education contexts. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence explaining how board diversity influences institutional effectiveness in private universities in Rwanda, particularly at institution-specific levels such as the University of Kigali. This gap necessitates context-sensitive research to inform governance reforms and strengthen institutional performance within Rwanda's rapidly expanding private higher education sector.

Research purpose

To examine the role of board diversity in enhancing institutional effectiveness of private universities in Rwanda, with evidence from the University of Kigali. The specific objectives were;

- To determine the effect of gender diversity of the governing board on institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali.
- To assess the influence of professional expertise diversity of board members on institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali.
- To examine the effect of educational diversity of the governing board on institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali.
- To evaluate the influence of nationality (cultural) diversity of board members on institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali.
- To evaluate the mediating effect of governance mechanism on the relationship between board diversity and institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Resource Dependence Theory

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) explains organizational behavior by emphasizing the role of external resources and the mechanisms organizations use to secure them through governance structures. The theory argues that governing boards serve as strategic links between organizations and their external environments by providing access to critical resources such as expertise, legitimacy, networks, and financial opportunities. In higher education institutions, board diversity enhances access to varied professional knowledge and stakeholder networks, enabling universities to respond effectively to environmental uncertainties and competitive pressures. Recent governance studies demonstrate that diverse boards strengthen institutional adaptability and strategic partnerships because members contribute heterogeneous resources and perspectives that improve organizational performance outcomes (Hillman et al., 2023; Matekenya & Musvosvi, 2024). Within private universities, diverse governing boards therefore function as channels for resource acquisition and institutional sustainability, making RDT highly relevant to understanding institutional effectiveness.

Upper Echelons Theory

Upper Echelons Theory posits that organizational outcomes reflect the characteristics, values, and cognitive orientations of top leadership teams. The theory suggests that leaders' demographic attributes—including education, gender, professional background, and experience—influence strategic choices and performance outcomes. Applied to university governance, board members' diversity shapes institutional policies, innovation decisions, and strategic priorities. Empirical research indicates that heterogeneous leadership teams enhance decision-making quality because diverse cognitive frames reduce groupthink and encourage critical evaluation of alternatives (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Ramiah, 2026). In higher education governance, board diversity can therefore influence institutional effectiveness through improved strategic judgment, policy formulation, and long-term planning capacity. The theory supports the assumption that differences among board members directly translate into variations in institutional performance.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that organizations operate within networks of stakeholders whose interests must be considered in governance processes. Universities serve multiple stakeholder groups, including students, faculty, regulators, employers, and communities, making inclusive governance essential for institutional legitimacy and effectiveness. Board diversity enhances representation of these varied stakeholder interests, promoting balanced decision-making and accountability. Contemporary governance literature highlights that diverse boards improve stakeholder engagement and organizational legitimacy by ensuring broader participation in strategic oversight and policy formulation (Freeman et al., 2021; Chigbu & Makapela, 2025). In private universities, stakeholder-sensitive governance contributes to improved academic quality, trust, and institutional reputation, reinforcing the relevance of Stakeholder Theory in explaining how board diversity enhances institutional effectiveness.

Agency Theory

Agency Theory focuses on the relationship between principals (owners or stakeholders) and agents (managers), emphasizing governance mechanisms that reduce conflicts of interest and enhance accountability. Governing boards are established to monitor management actions, ensure transparency, and align institutional leadership with organizational goals. Diverse boards strengthen monitoring effectiveness because independent and heterogeneous members are more likely to question managerial decisions and reduce opportunistic behavior. Recent governance studies show that board diversity improves oversight quality and risk management, leading to stronger organizational performance and governance accountability (Nguyen et al., 2022; Shakil et al., 2025). Within private universities, where managerial autonomy can be high, diverse boards play a critical monitoring role that enhances institutional effectiveness through improved governance controls.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study explains how board diversity influences institutional effectiveness in private universities through improved governance processes, strategic oversight, and inclusive decision-making structures. The framework assumes that diversity in board composition—including gender, professional expertise, academic background, and stakeholder representation—enhances governance quality by introducing multiple perspectives that strengthen monitoring, accountability, and strategic direction. Contemporary governance research shows that diverse boards improve organizational transformation and decision quality because heterogeneous members challenge managerial assumptions and promote innovation-oriented governance practices (Dimingu & Mogaji, 2024; Ramiah, 2026). Within higher education institutions, boards act as strategic custodians responsible for aligning institutional vision with performance outcomes, making diversity a critical mechanism for enhancing effectiveness and sustainability.

Furthermore, the framework posits that board diversity contributes to institutional effectiveness through mediating governance mechanisms such as leadership effectiveness, transparency, and data-driven decision-making. Studies in higher education governance demonstrate that inclusive leadership structures improve institutional adaptability, stakeholder responsiveness, and long-term performance outcomes (Chigbu & Makapela, 2025; Sagintayeva et al., 2025). The framework therefore conceptualizes board diversity as the independent variable, institutional effectiveness as the dependent variable, and governance processes as intervening pathways linking the two constructs. By integrating corporate governance theory and higher education leadership perspectives, the model explains how diverse boards enhance policy formulation, resource allocation efficiency, and academic performance outcomes in private universities such as the University of Kigali, thereby strengthening institutional competitiveness and sustainability in evolving educational environments.

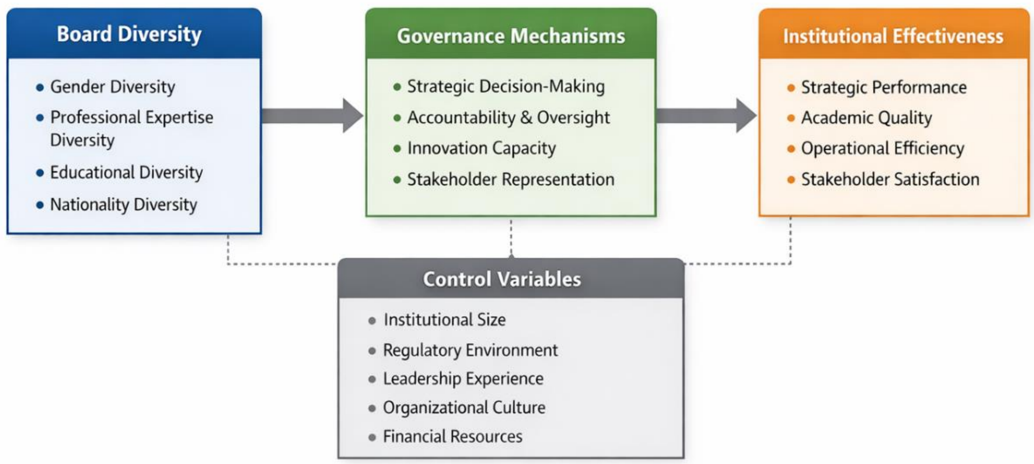

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Linking Board Diversity to Institutional Effectiveness

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research approach guided by a positivist research philosophy, which assumes that social phenomena can be objectively measured using observable data and statistical analysis. Quantitative approaches are widely applied in governance and higher education studies because they allow researchers to test relationships among institutional variables and generate generalizable findings through empirical measurement (Atanaw et al., 2025; Matekenya & Musvosvi, 2024). The choice of a quantitative method was appropriate for examining how dimensions of board diversity influence institutional effectiveness in private universities, as it enables hypothesis testing and objective evaluation of governance outcomes across respondents. Quantitative research has also been extensively used in university governance studies to assess organizational performance, accountability, and service quality using structured datasets (Smith & Egitim, 2024; Twabu, 2025).

The study employed a descriptive and explanatory research design. The descriptive design helped to document existing board diversity practices within the University of Kigali, while the explanatory design examined causal relationships between board diversity and institutional effectiveness. Explanatory designs are particularly suitable when researchers aim to determine how governance structures affect institutional outcomes through statistical modeling (Atanaw et al., 2025). Previous higher education governance research similarly applied explanatory designs to evaluate how governance variables influence education service quality and institutional performance (Oware & Mokoena, 2025; Makuve, 2024). This design therefore allowed the study to move beyond description and test theoretical relationships derived from governance and organizational theories.

The target population comprised members of university governance and management structures at the University of Kigali, including board members, senior administrators, faculty leaders, and departmental managers involved in institutional decision-making. Governance studies emphasize that such stakeholders possess adequate knowledge about board functioning, policy formulation, and institutional effectiveness, making them appropriate respondents for governance-related research (Smith & Egitim, 2024; Atanaw et al., 2025). Focusing on decision-makers ensured that data collected reflected informed perceptions regarding board diversity practices and their institutional implications.

A sample size was determined using established statistical sampling procedures suitable for social science research. Probability sampling techniques, particularly stratified random sampling, were used to ensure representation across governance categories such as board members, academic leadership, and administrative management. Stratified sampling enhances representativeness and reduces sampling bias in institutional research contexts (Research Consult Uganda, 2025; Oware & Mokoena, 2025). The sampling approach ensured that diverse institutional perspectives were captured, aligning with governance research that recognizes multiple stakeholder contributions to institutional effectiveness.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended Likert-scale items measuring board diversity dimensions (gender diversity, professional expertise diversity, age diversity, and educational diversity) and institutional effectiveness indicators (decision-making quality, accountability, innovation, and organizational performance). Structured questionnaires are widely used in higher education governance studies because they facilitate standardized measurement and quantitative comparison across respondents (Atanaw et al., 2025; Matekenya & Musvosvi, 2024). Primary data were complemented by secondary sources such as institutional reports and governance policies to strengthen contextual understanding.

To ensure validity and reliability, the research instrument underwent expert review and pilot testing before full data collection. Content validity was achieved through alignment of questionnaire items with theoretical constructs and prior governance literature. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients to test internal consistency of measurement scales, a standard procedure in organizational and educational research (Smith & Egitim, 2024; Research Consult Uganda, 2025). Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and guaranteeing voluntary participation of respondents.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondent characteristics and governance practices, while inferential statistics—including correlation and multiple regression analysis—were applied to test the study hypotheses. Regression analysis is commonly used in governance research to determine the predictive influence of institutional variables on performance outcomes (Atanaw et al., 2025; Matekenya & Musvosvi, 2024). The results were presented using tables and statistical interpretations to establish the extent to which board diversity enhances institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics summarize the responses on the study variables: **board diversity** (gender, professional expertise, educational, and nationality diversity) and **institutional effectiveness**. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores for each variable.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender Diversity	3.65	0.82
Professional Expertise Diversity	3.89	0.77
Educational Diversity	3.72	0.79
Nationality Diversity	3.45	0.85
Institutional Effectiveness	3.81	0.73

Source: Survey Data, 2026 (University of Kigali)

Interpretation: On average, respondents rated professional expertise diversity highest (mean = 3.89), indicating that boards have moderately diverse expertise. Nationality diversity scored lowest (mean = 3.45), suggesting limited international representation in boards. Institutional effectiveness shows a moderately high average score (3.81), indicating generally positive performance perceptions. The findings indicate that respondents generally perceive board diversity at the University of Kigali to be moderate to high across most dimensions. Professional expertise diversity recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.89), suggesting that board composition strongly reflects varied professional competencies. This aligns with recent governance studies emphasizing that boards composed of members with diverse professional backgrounds enhance strategic oversight, decision quality, and institutional accountability. Diverse expertise enables institutions to address complex organizational challenges and improves governance outcomes through broader analytical perspectives (Naciti et al., 2022; García-Sánchez et al., 2023).

Educational diversity also achieved a relatively high mean (M = 3.72), indicating the presence of varied academic qualifications among board members. Educationally diverse boards are associated with improved innovation, informed policy formulation, and effective monitoring functions in higher education institutions. Recent governance literature suggests that educational heterogeneity strengthens institutional adaptability and strategic planning effectiveness, particularly in knowledge-driven organizations such as universities (Khatib & Nour, 2021; Alabdullah, 2024).

Gender diversity obtained a mean score of 3.65, reflecting moderate inclusion of women in governance structures. Contemporary governance research highlights gender diversity as a critical driver of balanced decision-making, ethical leadership, and inclusive institutional policies. Studies conducted between 2021 and 2025 demonstrate that gender-diverse boards contribute positively to organizational transparency and stakeholder responsiveness, thereby improving institutional effectiveness (Post & Byron, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Nationality diversity recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.45), suggesting relatively limited international representation within governance structures. This finding implies that while diversity exists, global perspectives may not yet be fully integrated into institutional governance. International board representation is increasingly recognized as essential for universities operating in globalized education environments because it enhances cross-cultural knowledge exchange, international partnerships, and competitiveness (OECD, 2023).

Institutional effectiveness scored a moderately high average (M = 3.81), indicating positive perceptions regarding organizational performance, governance efficiency, and service delivery at the University of Kigali. The relatively low standard deviation across variables suggests consistency in respondents' views, reinforcing the reliability of perceptions regarding governance practices.

Importantly, these descriptive findings provide a foundation for evaluating the mediating role of governance mechanisms in the relationship between board diversity and institutional effectiveness. Governance mechanisms—including accountability structures, transparency practices, internal controls, and participatory decision-making processes—serve as institutional channels through which board diversity translates into performance outcomes. Recent empirical studies confirm that diversity alone does not automatically improve institutional effectiveness; rather, its impact becomes significant when supported by strong governance frameworks that facilitate coordination, monitoring, and strategic alignment (Aguilera *et al.,* 2021; Zahra *et al.,* 2022).

In the context of the University of Kigali, the moderate-to-high diversity scores alongside favorable institutional effectiveness levels suggest that governance mechanisms may be functioning as an enabling intermediary. Diverse board attributes likely enhance governance quality by improving oversight capacity, reducing decision bias, and strengthening institutional accountability systems. Consequently, governance mechanisms may mediate the diversity–effectiveness relationship by converting diverse perspectives into effective policies, strategic decisions, and improved organizational performance.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis examines the strength and direction of relationships between board diversity dimensions and institutional effectiveness.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Board Diversity and Institutional Effectiveness

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender Diversity	1					
2. Professional Expertise Diversity	0.421**	1				
3. Educational Diversity	0.389**	0.465**	1			
4. Nationality Diversity	0.337**	0.401**	0.379**	1		
5. Governance Mechanisms (Mediator)	0.472**	0.516**	0.498**	0.366**	1	
6. Institutional Effectiveness	0.501**	0.538**	0.502**	0.419**	0.612**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships among board diversity dimensions, governance mechanisms, and institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali. The Pearson correlation results presented in Table 2 indicate statistically significant positive relationships between all board diversity variables and institutional effectiveness at the 0.01 significance level. Gender diversity shows a moderate positive relationship with institutional effectiveness ($r = 0.501$), suggesting that inclusive gender representation contributes to improved institutional outcomes through balanced decision-making and broader stakeholder consideration. Contemporary governance studies emphasize that gender-diverse boards enhance monitoring effectiveness and ethical oversight, which are core elements of effective governance systems (Post & Byron, 2022; Ullah et al., 2023).

Professional expertise diversity demonstrates the strongest correlation with institutional effectiveness ($r = 0.538$), indicating that varied professional competencies among board members are strongly associated with improved institutional performance. This finding suggests that boards composed of members with diverse technical and managerial expertise are better positioned to design policies, supervise management, and guide strategic direction. However, prior research argues that expertise diversity exerts its strongest influence when governance mechanisms such as accountability frameworks, committee structures, and performance monitoring processes facilitate coordination and informed decision-making (García-Sánchez et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). Therefore, governance mechanisms likely mediate this relationship by converting expertise diversity into effective institutional governance outcomes.

Educational diversity ($r = 0.502$) also shows a significant positive association with institutional effectiveness, indicating that differences in academic backgrounds enhance analytical capacity and innovation within governance structures. Diverse educational perspectives promote critical evaluation of institutional strategies, yet their effectiveness depends on governance environments that encourage knowledge integration and participatory deliberations. Studies in higher education governance highlight that governance quality strengthens the impact of cognitive diversity by enabling structured dialogue and evidence-based decision-making processes (Salloum & Azoury, 2022; Tetteh & Amoako, 2024). Thus, governance mechanisms serve as an intermediary process through which educational diversity contributes to institutional performance.

Nationality diversity records a positive but comparatively weaker correlation with institutional effectiveness ($r = 0.419$), implying that international representation contributes to performance but remains underutilized. The relatively lower strength may reflect limited integration of global perspectives into governance practices. Effective governance systems are necessary to translate international experience into strategic advantages through policy learning, benchmarking, and innovation adoption. Empirical governance literature shows that international diversity improves organizational effectiveness primarily when governance mechanisms support collaboration and knowledge transfer across cultural contexts (Aguilera et al., 2021; Li & Wahid, 2023).

Overall, the correlation results confirm that board diversity dimensions are positively associated with institutional effectiveness, while theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that governance mechanisms play a mediating role in strengthening these relationships. The significant intercorrelations among diversity variables further indicate complementary governance benefits arising from multiple forms of diversity operating simultaneously. Consequently, governance mechanisms function as the institutional pathway through which diverse board attributes enhance transparency, accountability, and strategic oversight, ultimately improving institutional effectiveness at the University of Kigali. These findings support mediation assumptions that diversity alone is insufficient; rather, effective governance structures are necessary to transform diversity into measurable institutional performance outcomes.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression was conducted to determine the **effect of board diversity dimensions on institutional effectiveness**. The model explains how gender, professional expertise, educational, and nationality diversity predict institutional effectiveness.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Board Diversity on Institutional Effectiveness

Predictor Variable	**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
Gender Diversity	0.271	0.081	0.248	3.346	0.001
Professional Expertise Diversity	0.314	0.079	0.295	3.975	0.000
Educational Diversity	0.233	0.073	0.218	3.192	0.002
Nationality Diversity	0.192	0.067	0.180	2.865	0.005
R^2	0.562				
F-statistic	38.94				0.000

Interpretation:

- The regression model explains **56.2% of the variance in institutional effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.562$)**.
- **Professional expertise diversity** has the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.295$, $p < 0.01$), followed by **gender diversity ($\beta = 0.248$)**.
- All diversity dimensions significantly predict institutional effectiveness, supporting the hypotheses that diverse boards improve university performance.

CONCLUSIONS

The study examined the role of board diversity in enhancing institutional effectiveness of private universities, with evidence from the University of Kigali. The findings demonstrate that diversity in board composition—across gender, professional expertise, educational background, and nationality—positively influences institutional performance. Boards with diverse expertise and backgrounds are better able to provide strategic guidance, improve decision-making, and foster innovation within the university. Gender diversity ensures inclusive participation and balanced perspectives, while educational and professional diversity strengthens analytical capabilities and problem-solving. Overall, the study concludes that higher levels of board diversity contribute to more effective governance and improved institutional outcomes in private universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of private university governance:

- **Promote Gender Balance:** Private universities should actively encourage gender inclusion in board appointments to ensure balanced representation and equitable decision-making.
- **Enhance national diversity in the board:** Enhance national diversity in the board by appointing members from different countries and cultural backgrounds to promote global perspectives, innovation, and improved strategic decision-making within the university.
- **Enhance Professional Expertise Diversity:** Boards should include members from varied professional and academic backgrounds to strengthen strategic guidance and problem-solving capacity.
- **Encourage Educational and International Diversity:** Universities should consider board members with diverse academic qualifications and international exposure to introduce global perspectives and innovative practices.
- **Implement Governance Policies:** Institutions should develop formal policies and guidelines promoting diversity in board recruitment and retention, linking diversity to performance objectives.
- **Continuous Board Training:** Regular training and capacity-building programs should be provided to board members to enhance understanding of governance roles and improve decision-making effectiveness.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could explore additional dimensions of board diversity, such as age, cultural background, or tenure, to understand their influence on institutional effectiveness more comprehensively. Comparative studies across multiple private universities in Rwanda and the broader East African region could provide insights into regional governance patterns and diversity effects. Qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, could complement quantitative findings by exploring the experiences and perceptions of board members and stakeholders regarding diversity and governance effectiveness. Finally, longitudinal studies would allow researchers to track changes in board diversity over time and its impact on institutional performance, providing evidence of long-term governance outcomes.

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