

The Influence of Church Sponsorship on Organisational Culture in Private Universities: A Case of Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examines how church sponsorship influences the organizational culture of private universities in Nairobi, Kenya. It explores the impact of governance involvement and material support on institutional values, leadership, and autonomy. Guided by Resource Dependence and Stakeholder Theories, a correlational research design was used. Data were collected from 215 respondents across six church-sponsored universities using structured questionnaires. Denison et al.'s (2014) Organizational Culture Survey measured organizational culture. Church sponsorship shapes university culture through governance participation and material contributions. Sponsors influence governance via board representation, policy formulation, and leadership appointments. Material support includes financial aid, infrastructure investments, and scholarships. The study evaluates how these factors contribute to institutional identity and operations. Findings reveal a moderate positive correlation between church sponsorship and organizational culture. Governance involvement ($r = 0.247$, $p < 0.01$) and material support ($r = 0.265$, $p < 0.01$) significantly enhance institutional culture. While governance input strengthens institutional identity, excessive administrative influence may threaten autonomy. Material support, particularly financial aid and infrastructure, plays a critical role in shaping university sustainability. These insights contribute to discussions on faith-based higher education governance. Strategic governance by church sponsors fosters a strong institutional culture, but direct administrative control should be minimized. Sponsors should prioritize long-term infrastructural investments aligned with institutional goals. Future research should explore mediating factors such as leadership styles to deepen understanding of faith-based university governance.

Key words: church sponsorship, organizational culture, governance involvement, material support, faith-based higher education

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1. 1. Introduction

Church sponsorship involves a dynamic partnership where the sponsoring church contributes both governance and material support, shaping the culture of the universities they sponsor (Karr, 2018). A church, in this context, refers to a Christian religious institution dedicated to worship and religious activities (Ndaita, 2023). Churches play a pivotal role in establishing and nurturing higher education institutions, becoming deeply involved in their governance and operations. Governance participation includes roles like board membership, influencing policies, approving leadership appointments, and ensuring alignment with church doctrines (Mande, 2018; James, 2020). On the material side, church sponsorship encompasses financial contributions, asset donations, scholarships, grants, and infrastructure projects. Additionally, sponsors engage in academic, administrative, and student life activities (Wafula, 2021; Ajayi et al., 2021).

Church sponsorship has significantly contributed to the growth of Christian private universities globally, including in regions such as the USA, UK, Asia, and Africa (Kaell, 2020; Gonzalez-Perez et al., 2021). In the USA, its development has been greatly influenced by historical and cultural contexts. For example, Catholic universities have drawn on the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Jesuits, while Protestant institutions have been shaped by evangelical and fundamentalist traditions. These differing values compel Catholic and Protestant churches to take on the financial responsibility for maintaining their universities (Karr, 2018). A similar phenomenon is noted in the UK, where Grendler (2017) highlights the role of the country's religious history and the relationship between the Church of England and other denominations in shaping church-

sponsored education (Yu, 2020).

In Asia, the expansion of church-sponsored private universities has been shaped by the historical context of colonialism and missionary efforts (Tachikawa, 2018). As a result, various Christian private universities, including Catholic, Protestant, and evangelical institutions, have been established, each adhering to distinct practices and values that reflect the influence of their founding churches. For example, private universities in Asia often emphasize serving underprivileged and marginalized communities, a reflection of their Catholic or Protestant backgrounds. In contrast, evangelical universities prioritize evangelism and mission work, in alignment with their distinctive theological traditions (Tachikawa, 2018). Similarly, a study conducted by Pinto (2019) explored the influence of British education on the Ghanaian education system and its interactions with cultural heritage preservation. Colonial education in Ghana was largely facilitated through the church's educational infrastructure. The study established that education significantly transformed the cultural landscape of the Ghanaian populace. It further revealed that the theological orientation of the denominations sponsoring these universities substantially influenced the values and principles guiding their governance practices. For instance, Pentecostal-sponsored universities emphasized charismatic leadership and spiritual formation, whereas Presbyterian-sponsored universities prioritized academic excellence and social responsibility. These different approaches contribute to the organizational culture, characterized by traits of involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission, forming a unified cultural framework within the university (Nyamosi, 2019; Denison et al., 2014).

Interest in the nexus between church sponsorship and organizational culture has led to research output that provides a foundation for understanding this relationship. One such study was conducted by Monteiro et al. (2021), who examined the influence of sponsorship on the cultural dynamics of colleges and universities in the USA. Their research revealed that the organizational culture within these institutions is significantly shaped by sponsorship from their respective mother churches. A particularly noteworthy challenge arises when universities have multiple sponsors, requiring them to navigate and balance the diverse demands exerted by each sponsor. In such cases, universities may opt to rebrand themselves to downplay their association with Christianity, thereby masking their religious affiliations. However, despite shedding light on this phenomenon, the study identified a conceptual gap regarding the understanding of sponsorship as a driver of cultural formation within faith-based organizations. This highlights the need for further research on how church sponsorship influences culture in Christian-sponsored universities. Church-affiliated organizations must manage multiple stakeholders, each uniquely contributing to and impacting their operations (Freeman et al., 2021). Nyarugwe (2022) conducted a study in Zimbabwe to examine how churches exerted their influence on the culture of the universities they sponsored. The study found that while churches provided resources to help universities operate, church officials also influenced administrative decisions (McGahan, 2021).

Churches also play a significant role in mainstreaming church-affiliated universities, shaping their values and culture. Mande (2018) conducted a study in Uganda to examine the relationship between sponsorship, university culture, and performance climate. This quantitative research focused on the Anglican Church of Uganda's contribution to higher education. The study acknowledged the Church's substantial support in resource provision and the establishment of numerous universities post-independence. However, it revealed a gap between the sponsorship provided and the transmission of values and ethical principles. Operational difficulties, leading to university closures, exacerbated this issue. Additionally, legal constraints limited the influence of the Church, particularly regarding the involvement of bishops, who often serve as university chancellors but lack executive powers, in university administration (Scott & Davis, 2021).

A large number of private universities in Kenya are closely tied to and owned by religious institutions (Ndanu, 2020). These universities were founded with a mission to fulfill the "Great Commission," aiming to make a positive societal impact through Christian education grounded in strong values, fostering both intellectual and moral growth (Nyamosi, 2019). As a result, their visions and missions are deeply inspired by scripture, shaping aspects such as staff recruitment in line with the values and norms of their founding denominations (Nyamosi, 2019). This focus on Christian values largely attracts Christian students, which, while aligned with their mission, can potentially limit the universities' growth and financial stability (Ndanu, 2020; Nwinye & Gilbert, 2023).

Sponsors often step in to provide financial support to address the gap between tuition fees and the actual costs of running these institutions, a challenge compounded by the tough operating environment for private universities (Ndanu, 2020; Jungin & Jae, 2021). Mungathia (2018) explored the financial sustainability of private universities in Kenya and found that the transformation of theological colleges into institutions offering a broader range of secular programs led to changes in donor perceptions. Many donors reduced or withdrew their support, viewing this shift as moving away from the biblical values originally associated with these universities. This highlights

the influence donors have in shaping the values upheld by these institutions (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Additionally, the move from exclusively theological training to a more diversified curriculum has created financial challenges that private universities continue to face (Makwana et al., 2023).

2. Purpose of the study

This study aims to investigate the influence of church sponsorship on the organizational culture of selected private universities in Nairobi, Kenya. Specifically, the study examines how different aspects of sponsorship, including governance involvement and material support, shape the organizational culture within these institutions.

3. Research objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- i) To assess the influence of sponsor involvement in governance on the organizational culture of selected private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.
- ii) To assess the influence of sponsor material support on the organizational culture of selected private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

4. Research hypotheses

Based on the research objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

4.1. Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between sponsor involvement in governance and the organizational culture of selected private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between sponsor involvement in governance and the organizational culture of selected private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

4.2. Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between sponsor material support and the organizational culture of selected private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between sponsor material support and the organizational culture of selected private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

5. Methodology

This study employed a correlational research design, chosen for its ability to systematically and objectively assess the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Asenahabi, 2019). This approach is particularly suited for studies involving the collection of quantitative data using structured questionnaires, thereby minimizing subjectivity in the interpretation of findings.

5.1. Selection and description of participants

The study was conducted in church-sponsored universities in Nairobi, specifically Kenya Methodist University (KeMU), the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, the University of East Africa Baraton (UAEB), Kabarak University, Daystar University, and Africa International University. Participants included senior administrators, deans, department heads, faculty members, academic staff, and support staff, yielding a total accessible population of 474 individuals. To determine the appropriate sample size, the study applied the Yamane formula, which has been previously used in studies examining the organizational culture of higher education institutions (Agu, 2020; Nwinye & Gilbert, 2023). The formula generated a sample size of 217 participants, representing 45.8% of the total target population. A disproportionate stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across all categories of respondents. The sample was stratified by university and department to achieve this balance (Makwana et al., 2023).

5.2. Data collection and measurement

Data on organizational culture was collected using a validated survey instrument, Denison et al.'s (2014) Organizational Culture Survey. The short-form version consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =

Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicated a stronger organizational culture, measured across four key traits: involvement (empowerment, team orientation, capability development), consistency (coordination and integration, agreement, core values), adaptability (creating change, customer focus, organizational learning), and mission (strategic direction and intent, goals and objectives, vision). The scores from all traits were aggregated to provide an overall measure of organizational culture. Data on church sponsorship was collected using a researcher-developed Likert scale. Respondents indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The scores from all dimensions were aggregated to provide an overall measure of church sponsorship.

5.3. Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and variability (range, variance, standard deviation), were used to summarize the data. Additionally, regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the study variables. The following simple linear regression model was applied:

$$OC = b_0 + b_1 * CS + e$$

Where:

OC = Organizational Culture

b₀ = Constant

b₁ = Regression coefficient

CS = Church Sponsorship

e = Standard error

6. Results

A total of 215 participants responded to the survey. Demographic analysis revealed that male participants accounted for 68.8%, while female participants constituted 31.2%. The majority were administrative staff (67.9%) and held an undergraduate degree (63.3%).

6.1. Sponsor's involvement in governance

The first research question examined how sponsor involvement in governance influences organizational culture. The findings indicate a significant presence of sponsors within governance structures, as reflected in mean scores: representation on the board (M = 17.32), influence on policies (M = 16.61), and approval of leadership appointments (M = 15.27). Sponsors also played an active role in academic affairs (M = 15.82) and administrative roles (M = 15.15), with the highest engagement in student life programs (M = 16.70). The overall mean score for sponsor involvement in governance was 113.49, suggesting substantial participation across these dimensions. The results are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Sponsor's Involvement in Governance

Dimension	Sponsor Involvement in Governance							
	Representation in the Board	Influence on Policies	Approval of Leadership Appointments	Church Doctrine	Academic Affairs	Administrative Roles	Student Life Programs	Overall
Mean	17.32	16.61	15.27	16.62	15.82	15.15	16.7	113.49
Std. Dev.	2.077	2.276	3.617	2.595	3.644	3.095	1.854	14.59

Sponsors played an active role across various governance areas, with their most notable contributions being in board representation and student life programs. Their involvement was consistently high, as shown by the overall average score, which underscores their strong presence in shaping decisions and providing support within the institution.

6.1.1. Hypothesis testing: Sponsor's involvement in governance

The null hypothesis (H₀) stated that there is no significant relationship between organizational culture and sponsor involvement in governance. Correlation analysis revealed a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.247 (p <

0.01), indicating a moderate positive relationship. This suggests that increased sponsor involvement in governance is associated with a stronger organizational culture, though causality cannot be inferred. The results are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Involvement in Governance and Organizational Culture

		Organizational culture overall score	Sponsor involvement in governance - Overall score
Organizational culture overall score	Pearson Correlation	1	.247**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	215	215
Sponsor involvement in governance - Overall score	Pearson Correlation	.247**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	215	215

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis showed a clear link between sponsor involvement in governance and the strength of organizational culture in the universities studied. Specifically, as sponsors became more engaged in governance, the organizational culture grew stronger, as reflected by a moderate positive relationship.

6.2. Sponsor's material support

The second research question explored the impact of sponsors' material support on organizational culture. Analysis revealed varying levels of support, with the highest contributions in asset donations (M = 17.36) and financial contributions (M = 17.21), followed by scholarship grants (M = 16.46) and infrastructure development (M = 16.25). The overall mean score for material support was 67.28, indicating consistent contributions across financial and resource-based dimensions. The results are summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Material Support Dimensions

Sponsor's Material Support by Dimensions					
Dimension	Sponsors' material support - financial contribution	Sponsors' material support - Donation of assets	Sponsors' material support - Scholarship grants	Sponsors' material support - Infrastructure development	Sponsors' material support - Overall
Mean	17.21	17.36	16.46	16.25	67.28
Std. Dev.	1.984	1.877	1.792	2.768	6.69

Sponsors consistently supported the universities by providing resources, with the largest contributions coming in the form of donated assets and financial aid. Their overall strong average score highlights the sustained impact of their financial and infrastructural support.

6.2.1. Hypothesis testing: Sponsor's material support

The null hypothesis (H0) stated that there is no significant correlation between sponsors' material support and organizational culture. The analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.265 ($p < 0.01$), demonstrating a moderate positive relationship. This suggests that increased material support from sponsors positively influences the overall organizational culture of the universities. The results are summarized in table 4.

Table 4: Correlation between Sponsor's Material Support and Organizational Culture

		Organizational culture overall score	Sponsors' material support - Overall score
Organizational culture overall score	Pearson Correlation	1	.265**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	215	215
Sponsors' material support - Overall score	Pearson Correlation	.265**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	215	215
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The analysis revealed that when sponsors provided more material support, such as financial contributions and resources, the organizational culture within the universities strengthened. This moderate positive relationship highlights how material support from sponsors positively influences the institution's values and identity.

7. Discussion

This study highlights the significant impact of church sponsorship on shaping the culture of sponsored universities. It confirms earlier research that emphasized the importance of both governance involvement and material support by sponsors in defining institutional culture (Mande, 2018; James, 2020; Ajayi et al., 2021). For instance, church sponsors actively participate in key governance areas, including representation on boards, influencing policies, appointing leadership, and contributing to academic programs. These findings align with Monteiro et al. (2021), who described how sponsorship structures shape cultural dynamics in faith-based institutions. Similarly, the study supports Nyarugwe's (2022) observations from Zimbabwe, where church officials influenced university administrative decisions, showing that sponsorship goes beyond finances to include governance and operations oversight. Interestingly, the study found a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.247$, $p < 0.01$) between governance involvement by sponsors and the organizational culture of universities. This reinforces the idea that governance structures embed institutional values, consistent with the Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which explains how organizations adjust their strategies based on external resource reliance. These findings echo Mande's (2018) conclusions about church-sponsored universities in Uganda, where governance challenges affected operational efficiency. By quantifying governance involvement, this study provides evidence of how sponsors influence university decision-making and culture.

In addition to governance, material support from church sponsors plays a pivotal role in fostering a strong organizational culture. The study revealed that contributions such as infrastructure development, financial aid, and scholarships significantly enhance the institution's identity and mission alignment, aligning with findings by Wafu (2021) and Gonzalez-Perez et al. (2021). A positive correlation ($r = 0.265$, $p < 0.01$) between material support and organizational culture suggests that financial contributions strengthen the university's foundation. This supports the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman et al., 2021), which argues that institutions must balance the needs of various stakeholders, particularly in faith-based contexts where sponsorship influences resource allocation. However, sponsorship also brings challenges. For example, tensions can arise between the autonomy of the university and the involvement of church sponsors, as noted by Mungathia (2018) in Kenyan private universities. A specific issue is the decline in donor support following theological colleges' expansion into broader educational institutions (Makwana et al., 2023). While sponsorship has clear benefits, universities must carefully address financial sustainability as they evolve beyond theological training.

This study sheds light on how church sponsorship shapes organizational culture through its influence on governance and material support, contributing valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge. However, the findings indicate that other factors also shape institutional culture, warranting further exploration. Future studies could examine how universities manage the delicate balance between sponsor influence, autonomy, and financial independence. Long-term research may also provide insights into the changing dynamics of church sponsorship in higher education.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that church sponsors' involvement in governance significantly shapes the culture of

sponsored universities. Active roles in board representation and academic activities positively influence the institution, though excessive involvement in administrative tasks might have downsides. Meanwhile, material support, such as financial contributions and infrastructure development, plays a vital role in building a cohesive organizational culture.

9. Recommendations

To ensure mutual success, church sponsors are encouraged to focus on strategic governance rather than over-involving themselves in daily administration. Universities should create clear frameworks for collaboration between sponsors and institutional leaders to strengthen their relationship. For long-term sustainability, sponsors should prioritize projects that align with the university's strategic goals. Future research could investigate other factors, like leadership styles, that mediate the connection between sponsorship and university culture.

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