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USEFULNESS OF PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, A CASE OF GULU UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University. The objectives included identifying factors influencing effective financial management, pinpointing challenges, and proposing strategies for improvement. A mixed-methods approach was used, involving 120 staff members, with 109 respondents participating, including finance staff, registrars, principals, heads of departments, and lecturers. Data collection included interviews with 15 key figures, such as members of the University Council and management, who oversee financial operations. The study found that the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) played a crucial role in enhancing transparency and compliance in financial management at the university. However, challenges such as delayed government fund disbursements, inadequate training, inefficiencies in financial systems, and outdated technology were identified as major obstacles. To address these issues, the study recommended improving procurement procedures, leveraging Non-Tax Revenue (NTR) sources, strengthening debt management policies, and increasing government funding. The need to upgrade financial management systems, particularly through the adoption and optimization of IFMS and Electronic Government Procurement (EGP), was also emphasized. Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of IFMS and EGP on financial transparency and efficiency in public universities.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Public universities are fundamental institutions in the educational infrastructure of nations, serving as catalysts for knowledge dissemination and research that shape the trajectory of societies (Othman & Othman, 2014). Countries worldwide are faced with concerns of funding their higher education sectors, and there have been different practices across developing countries to increase funding of higher education(Ngcobo, 2021). In addition, Government subsidies to universities keep declining, and every year there is student unrest caused by the cost of education(Mlambo et al., 2017). This, in turn, has strained the financial sustainability of the universities. Universities are now competing for funding to ensure their sustainability through alternative funding sources(Basri & Muhammad, 2019). Similarly, Sazonov, Kharlamova & Chekhovskaya,(2020) outlined that universities may not be possible to rely on government grants in the future. In developing countries, public higher education is mainly financed through income from research and private grants(Ngorima; Msweli, 2022).

African countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania among others, universities are mainly financed through government subsidies with minimal reliance on income from research and private grants(Ngcobo, 2021). Revenue generated from research and grants is the least income from universities' revenue sources(Barohn Kimminau & Brooks, 2018). Therefore, they resort to alternative sources such as tuition, and fees among others.

In Uganda, as in many other countries, these institutions rely on governmental funding to sustain their operations. However, alongside this foundational support, public universities are also tasked with generating a significant portion of their operational budget through various revenue streams, commonly known as Non-Tax Revenue (NTR). This dual financial model is designed to foster financial sustainability and autonomy within these academic entities.

Gulu University, situated in the northern region of Uganda, stands as a prominent institution in the country's higher education landscape. Established with a mission to provide quality education and contribute to socio-economic development, Gulu University faces the challenge of effectively managing its public finances to fulfill its mandate amidst various fiscal constraints.

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One of the primary challenges facing Gulu University is the effective management of its NTR. While the university receives funding from the government, it is also required to generate a significant portion of its budget through NTR sources. This includes revenue from student fees, research grants, and income from commercial activities. However, despite efforts to increase revenue generation, Gulu University has struggled to meet its annual revenue targets, leading to financial deficits and budgetary constraints.

The Auditor General's Report for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2020, highlighted several financial discrepancies at Gulu University, including the accumulation of receivables and outstanding advances. This accumulation of receivables, which includes uncollected student fees and advances from previous fiscal years, poses a significant risk to the financial stability of the university. Furthermore, the Auditor General's Report noted that management's failure to collect these debts was attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of the university and disrupted revenue collection efforts.

In response to these challenges, the Auditor General advised the university's Accounting Officer to follow up on outstanding student debts in accordance with the university's debt management policy. Additionally, the Auditor General recommended that the university take steps to ensure accountability for outstanding advances, including the possibility of recovering these funds from the salaries of affected staff. Against this backdrop, it is evident that there is a pressing need to assess the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University.

1.2 Problem statement

While public universities in Uganda receive funding from the Government, they are also required to generate a significant portion of their budget through Non-Tax Revenue (NTR) sources (Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022). However, Gulu University has consistently failed to meet its annual revenue collection targets. Despite the various advancements in technology and the availability of modern systems and practices in public finance like Electronic Cash (ECash), Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS), Academic Information Management system (AMIS), Human Capital Management (HCM), Program-Based Budgeting (PBS), and Electronic Government Procurement (EGP), public universities often face significant failures in their financial management. This failure is evident from the accumulation of receivables totaling UGX. 2,384,894,482, as reported in the financial statements for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2020. Additionally, uncollected student fees amounting to UGX. 896,874,429, and advances totaling UGX. 1,488,110,053 from the fiscal year 2018/2019 remain outstanding (Auditor General's Report, 2019). This accumulation of receivables poses a risk of reduced funding allocation to the University, as warrants are contingent on NTR performance. Management attributes the failure to collect these debts to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of the University. The Auditor General has advised the Accounting Officer to pursue the outstanding student debts in accordance with the University's debt management policy and to ensure accountability for the advances. Alternatively, if necessary, the advances should be reclaimed from the salaries of affected staff. Therefore, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of public finance management in public universities, using Gulu University as a case study.

1.3. Specific objectives

i. To determine the factors affecting the effectiveness of public finance management in public universities.
ii. To assess the challenges hindering the effectiveness of public finance management in public universities
iii. To suggest means of facilitating public finance management in public universities

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviewed two related theories in the context of this study, the resource dependency theory (RDT) and neoliberalism theory.

2.1 Resource Dependency Theory

Johnson et al, (1996) concurs that resource dependency theorists provide focus on the appointment of representatives of independent organizations as a means for gaining access in resources critical to firm success. Dependency of public universities to government subsidies (resources) is an example of RDT. RDT is also highlighted by the diversification of revenue sources. Hence, as government support for public universities keeps declining, the opportunity for privatization and intervention of the private sector to manipulate control over public universities is slowly increasing (Akomolafe & Aremu, 2016). This failure is evident from the accumulation of receivables totaling UGX. 2,384,894,482, as reported in the financial statements for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2020. Additionally, uncollected student fees amounting to UGX. 896,874,429, and advances totaling UGX. 1,488,110,053 from the fiscal year 2018/2019 remain outstanding (Auditor General's Report, 2019). Therefore, this theory was used to explain the significant dependency of public universities on external resources, such as government subsidies and private funding, which creates substantial challenges in financial management. This reliance often leads to financial instability, particularly when government support declines or becomes unpredictable, resulting in budget deficits, deferred projects, and strained academic programs. Furthermore, the dependency limits the universities' autonomy, as they must align with the priorities of external funders. These challenges complicate financial planning and resource allocation, making it difficult for public universities to achieve long-term financial sustainability and operational effectiveness.

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2.2 Neoliberalism Theory

The theory was devised by John Turner. Neoliberalism theory contends that for better efficiency of services, the servicing system must be inclusive of the provider, stakeholders, and beneficiaries in its decision-making(Pennington, A; Mokose, M.; Smith, M. N; Kawanu, 2017). This is believed to render efficient service delivery and unbiased decisions. The concept of neoliberalism persists in public universities characterized by diverse students' political mobility (Walt, 2017). The influence of inconsistent state subsidies and tuition fee collection is also justified by neoliberalism theory because of their context is associated with a social dilemma. Therefore, this theory was used to explain the impact of neoliberal principles on public financial management in universities, especially as government support decreases and the pressure for efficient resource allocation increases. Neoliberalism advocates for reduced government intervention, pushing universities to adopt more market-driven approaches to funding and resource management. This shift often leads to increased reliance on private sector partnerships, tuition fees, and alternative revenue streams. As a result, public universities must navigate complex financial challenges, balancing the need to maintain academic standards while ensuring financial sustainability in a more competitive and resource-constrained environment.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 The factors affecting the effectiveness of public finance management in public Universities

This section provides an empirical review of existing studies on factors affecting financial management effectiveness in public universities.

Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS)

Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMS) play a pivotal role in modernizing and improving public financial management within universities. IFMS integrates various financial processes such as budgeting, accounting, procurement, and reporting into a unified system. This integration enhances transparency by providing real-time financial data and facilitates better decision-making through accurate financial reporting and expenditure tracking. For instance, a study conducted by Bwogi (2017) at Makerere University in Uganda employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews with university staff, to analyze the impact of IFMS on financial management processes. The findings highlighted that the implementation of IFMS not only streamlines administrative processes but also strengthens financial oversight by enabling institutions to monitor budget execution and ensure compliance with fiscal regulations.

Budgeting Process

The budgeting process is a cornerstone of effective financial management in universities. It involves the strategic allocation of resources to support educational programs, research initiatives, infrastructure development, and operational expenses. A well-defined budgeting process ensures that financial resources are allocated efficiently, aligning with institutional priorities and goals. Research conducted Mukwaya, (2016) at Makerere University used qualitative methods, including interviews with financial managers and document analysis, to demonstrate that effective budgeting fosters financial discipline, accountability, and transparency by providing a structured framework for resource allocation and expenditure monitoring. This enables universities to optimize resource utilization, mitigate financial risks, and adapt to changing economic conditions or funding constraints.

Debt Management Policy

Debt management policies are crucial for maintaining financial sustainability and managing liquidity within higher education institutions. These policies outline strategies for borrowing, repayment schedules, and debt limits to minimize financial risks and ensure long-term fiscal health. A study by Kasirye (2018), focused on Ugandan higher education institutions utilized a case study methodology, examining specific instances of debt management practices across various universities. The research emphasized that effective debt management practices involve assessing borrowing needs, negotiating favorable loan terms, and implementing strategies to diversify funding sources. By adhering to prudent debt management policies, universities can minimize interest costs, maintain creditworthiness, and allocate resources effectively to support academic and operational priorities.

Electronic Government Procurement (EGP)

Electronic Government Procurement (EGP) systems have revolutionized procurement processes in universities by replacing traditional paper-based methods with digital platforms. EGP systems streamline procurement workflows, from requisition to payment, by automating purchasing processes, enhancing transparency, and reducing administrative burdens. Research conducted at Nigerian universities employed a survey methodology, gathering data from procurement officers and administrative staff to assess the impact of EGP systems. The study by Oloyede (2019), found that these systems facilitate competitive bidding, contract management, and vendor performance evaluation, leading to cost savings and improved procurement efficiency. By adopting EGP systems, universities can ensure compliance with procurement regulations, minimize procurement cycle times, and achieve greater accountability in expenditure management.

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Human Capital Management (HCM) System

Human Capital Management (HCM) systems are essential for optimizing workforce productivity, talent management, and organizational development within universities. These systems encompass recruitment, training, performance management, and employee engagement strategies aimed at attracting, developing, and retaining skilled personnel. A report by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) on Ugandan universities utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches, including surveys and focus groups, to gather insights on HCM practices. The report indicates that effective HCM systems support succession planning, career development, and organizational effectiveness by aligning human resource strategies with institutional goals. Investing in training and development programs enhances employee skills, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance, contributing to a positive work environment and sustainable growth (ACCA, 2010).

Training and Development Programs

Continuous training and development programs are critical for building financial management expertise and ensuring staff competency in universities. These programs enhance staff skills in budgeting, financial analysis, compliance, and regulatory requirements. An ACCA report on Ugandan universities employed a longitudinal study design, tracking the impact of professional development programs over time. The study suggests that by investing in professional development, universities can equip staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt to evolving financial management practices, technological advancements, and regulatory changes. Training initiatives promote a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and excellence in financial management, contributing to institutional resilience and strategic agility (ACCA, 2010).

Program-Based Budgeting (PBS) Approach

Program-Based Budgeting (PBS) represents a strategic approach to budget allocation that links financial resources to programmatic outcomes and performance metrics. This approach emphasizes transparency, accountability, and results-oriented budgeting by aligning funding with institutional priorities and strategic objectives. Research at several universities in the United States employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of budgetary data with qualitative interviews with budget officers, to highlight that PBS enables universities to assess program effectiveness, allocate resources efficiently, and demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. By integrating PBS into budgeting processes, universities can enhance decision-making, optimize resource allocation, and achieve measurable outcomes in academic and operational performance (Covey, 2006).

Internal Controls

Robust internal controls are essential for safeguarding university assets, preventing financial mismanagement, and ensuring compliance with regulatory standards. Internal controls encompass policies, procedures, and monitoring mechanisms designed to detect and mitigate risks related to financial operations. Research from U.S. and Japanese universities utilized case study methodologies, examining specific instances of internal control implementations. These studies emphasized that effective internal controls include segregation of duties, authorization protocols, financial reporting frameworks, and periodic audits to uphold integrity, transparency, and accountability in financial management practices. By strengthening internal controls, universities can mitigate operational risks, improve financial oversight, and uphold institutional reputation and trust (Flynn & Tannenbaum, 1993).

Capacity Building

Continuous capacity building initiatives are vital for developing institutional capacity and enhancing financial management capabilities within universities. Capacity building encompasses staff training, professional development programs, and knowledge-sharing activities aimed at building technical expertise, leadership skills, and institutional resilience. ACCA's research on Ugandan universities utilized a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, to gather data on capacity building practices. The study indicates that by investing in capacity building, universities can strengthen financial management practices, adapt to emerging challenges, and sustain long-term organizational growth. Capacity building initiatives foster a culture of learning, collaboration, and innovation, positioning universities to effectively navigate complexities in higher education finance and achieve strategic objectives (ACCA, 2010).

Technological Adoption

Technological adoption in financial management enables universities to leverage advanced systems and tools for enhanced operational efficiency, data accuracy, and decision-making capabilities. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, data analytics platforms, and digital financial management solutions streamline administrative processes, automate routine tasks, and provide real-time insights into financial performance. Research by Davenport (1998) on U.S. universities utilized a quantitative approach, analyzing data on ERP system implementations, to suggest that technological integration supports financial transparency, regulatory compliance, and strategic planning by facilitating data-driven decision-making and optimizing resource allocation. By embracing technological advancements, universities can improve operational agility, reduce costs, and enhance competitiveness in a dynamic higher education landscape (Davenport, 1998; Provost & Fawcett, 2013).

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Governance and Leadership

Effective governance structures and strong leadership are essential for ensuring sound financial management practices and fostering institutional resilience in universities. Governance frameworks define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes related to financial oversight, risk management, and strategic planning. Studies by Jensen & Meckling (1976) and Northouse (2018) on global institutions utilized case study methodologies to highlight that strong leadership promotes ethical behavior, accountability, and transparency in financial management practices, inspiring confidence among stakeholders and enhancing institutional reputation. Leadership commitment to financial stewardship, compliance with regulatory standards, and fostering a culture of integrity and accountability are critical for sustaining organizational success and achieving long-term financial sustainability (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Northouse, 2018).

External Audits

Regular external audits play a crucial role in validating financial practices, ensuring regulatory compliance, and enhancing accountability in university operations. External audits provide independent assessments of financial statements, internal controls, and compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. Research by Romney & Steinbart (2018) on universities utilized a quantitative approach, analyzing audit reports, to indicate that auditors evaluate financial operations, identify areas for improvement, and recommend corrective actions to strengthen financial governance and mitigate risks. By undergoing external audits, universities demonstrate commitment to transparency, integrity, and responsible financial management, reinforcing stakeholder confidence and supporting informed decision-making (Romney & Steinbart, 2018; Kingdon, 1995).

2.3.2 Challenges Hindering the Effectiveness of Public Finance Management in Universities

This section explores the key challenges that impede the effectiveness of public financial management in universities, among these include;

Inadequate Funding

Universities across the globe face significant challenges due to inadequate funding. A study focusing on public universities in Nigeria highlighted that insufficient budget allocations severely impact the ability of institutions to maintain infrastructure, support academic programs, and conduct research (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008). Similarly, research conducted in Zimbabwe revealed that state universities struggle with financial constraints, leading to issues such as delayed salaries and underfunded projects (Musingafi & Mafini, 2014). These financial challenges limit the capacity of universities to achieve their educational objectives and maintain operational efficiency.

Bureaucratic Delays

Bureaucratic delays are another critical issue affecting the efficiency of public finance management in universities. Studies from universities in Sri Lanka and Malaysia show that lengthy administrative processes and red tape result in significant delays in the disbursement of funds and the implementation of financial decisions (Weerakkody, 2008; Rahman, 2011). These delays can hinder timely project execution, disrupt academic schedules, and demoralize staff and students. In Sri Lanka, for instance, the slow pace of administrative approvals has been identified as a major bottleneck in the efficient management of university finances (Weerakkody, 2008).

Weak Internal Controls

Weak internal controls pose a significant risk to the effective management of university finances. Research from Kenya indicates that weak internal control systems in public universities lead to inefficiencies and potential financial mismanagement (Wanyama, 2017). The absence of robust audit mechanisms and transparent financial reporting processes exacerbates the risk of fraud and misallocation of funds. Studies suggest that enhancing internal control systems through regular audits and transparent reporting can mitigate these risks and improve financial management efficiency (Wanyama, 2017).

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is a pervasive challenge in the realm of public finance management within universities. Studies from various countries, including Sierra Leone and Malaysia, reveal that university staff and administrators often resist changes to financial management practices due to fear of the unknown or loss of control (Kamara, 2020; Rahman, 2011). This resistance can manifest in the reluctance to adopt new financial systems, implement cost-saving measures, or restructure financial departments. Overcoming this resistance requires effective change management strategies, including stakeholder engagement, training, and clear communication of the benefits of proposed changes (Kamara, 2020; Rahman, 2011).

Inadequate Financial Reporting Systems

Inadequate financial reporting systems are a significant barrier to effective public finance management in universities. Research from universities in Nigeria and Sierra Leone highlights that outdated or inefficient financial reporting systems lead to inaccuracies in financial

data, delayed reporting, and difficulties in financial planning and analysis (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008; Kamara, 2020). These inadequacies hinder the ability of university management to make informed financial decisions and ensure accountability. Implementing modern financial reporting systems and training staff on their use can significantly improve the accuracy and timeliness of financial information (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008; Kamara, 2020).

Limited Capacity and Skills

Limited capacity and skills among university financial management staff are critical challenges identified in studies from various countries, including Kenya and Nigeria. Research indicates that many university finance departments lack adequately trained personnel capable of managing complex financial operations and adapting to new financial management practices (Wanyama, 2017; Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008). This skills gap can lead to inefficiencies, errors, and suboptimal financial decision-making. Investing in continuous professional development and capacity-building initiatives is essential to enhance the skills and competencies of university financial staff (Wanyama, 2017; Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008).

Governance Issues

Governance issues significantly affect the effectiveness of public finance management in universities. Studies from public universities in Nigeria and Zimbabwe reveal that poor governance practices, including lack of transparency, accountability, and weak oversight mechanisms, contribute to financial mismanagement and corruption (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008; Musingafi & Mafini, 2014). Effective governance structures that ensure transparency, accountability, and robust oversight are crucial for the efficient management of university finances. Strengthening governance frameworks through policy reforms and institutional capacity building can mitigate these challenges (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008; Musingafi & Mafini, 2014).

External Factors

External factors such as economic instability, political interference, and regulatory changes also impact the effectiveness of public finance management in universities. Research from various countries, including Sierra Leone and Malaysia, shows that economic downturns, political instability, and frequent changes in government policies can disrupt university funding and financial planning (Kamara, 2020; Rahman, 2011). These external pressures necessitate adaptive financial management strategies that can respond to changing economic and political environments. Developing contingency plans and engaging in proactive financial planning can help universities navigate these external challenges (Kamara, 2020; Rahman, 2011).

2.3.3 Facilitating public finance management in public University.

This section provides empirical review on suggesting strategies to enhance public financial management in these institutions.

Enhancing Funding Strategies

According to Odhiambo and Kamau (2003), engaging policymakers through evidence-based lobbying can result in increased financial support for educational institutions. Salmi and Hauptman (2006) recommend securing grants from international organizations, forming partnerships with private sector entities, and leveraging alumni contributions to diversify funding and reduce dependency on government allocations.

Streamlining Bureaucratic Processes

According to Flynn and Tannenbaum (1993), reducing bureaucratic complexities in fund disbursement can enhance efficiency. Implementing digital approval systems can streamline processes and expedite decision-making. Effective communication channels between the finance department and other university units are crucial. As suggested by Drucker (1999), clear and timely communication ensures the smooth dissemination of financial information, reducing delays and misunderstandings.

Strengthening Internal Controls

Strong internal controls are vital for preventing financial mismanagement. According to COSO (1992), robust internal controls involve continuous monitoring and regular updates to address emerging risks. Regular internal and external audits are essential for compliance and accountability. The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) (2012) highlights that frequent audits can identify areas for improvement and ensure adherence to financial regulations.

Promoting Change Management

Continuous professional development is necessary for equipping finance staff with modern financial management skills. Kotter (1996) emphasizes the importance of training programs in fostering adaptability and improving efficiency. Creating a culture that values innovation and change is crucial. According to Schein (1992), involving staff in change management initiatives can reduce resistance and enhance support for new practices.

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Upgrading Financial Reporting Systems

Investing in modern financial management software can significantly improve financial reporting. According to Romney and Steinbart (2018), advanced systems allow for real-time tracking, reporting, and analysis, enhancing transparency and decision-making. Transparent financial reporting builds trust and accountability. Literature by Ball (2009) indicates that implementing policies mandating transparent reporting practices leads to better financial oversight.

Building Capacity and Skills

Regular training and development opportunities are essential for building expertise. The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) (2010) recommends continuous professional development to improve skills in budgeting, auditing, and financial analysis. Attracting and retaining qualified finance professionals is crucial. Studies by Armstrong (2014) suggest that offering competitive salaries and benefits can help retain skilled personnel, enhancing overall financial management.

Improving Governance Structures

Clear policies and guidelines outlining roles and responsibilities are essential. Governance research by Jensen and Meckling (1976) emphasizes the need for well-defined governance structures to ensure effective financial oversight. Leadership committed to ethical standards and good governance practices is vital. According to Northouse (2018), leadership training for senior management improves their capability to oversee financial operations effectively.

Mitigating External Risks

Comprehensive contingency plans are necessary to manage external risks such as economic instability. Research by Taleb (2007) on risk management highlights the importance of preparedness for maintaining financial stability during adverse conditions. According to Kingdon (1995), engaging policymakers can also advocate for the university's financial needs, mitigating the impact of external factors.

Leveraging Technology

Integrating Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems can streamline financial processes. Literature by Davenport (1998) indicates that ERP systems reduce manual errors and improve efficiency. Data analytics tools provide insights into financial performance. According to Provost and Fawcett (2013), data analytics helps in identifying trends, forecasting financial needs, and optimizing resource allocation.

Fostering Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging stakeholders in the budgeting process ensures their needs are considered. Research by Covey (2006) suggests that participatory budgeting leads to more realistic and accepted budgets. Regular communication with stakeholders about financial matters builds trust and involvement. As noted by Freeman (1984), using meetings, reports, and digital platforms keeps stakeholders informed and engaged.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional design targeting 120 staff, including university executives, departmental heads, and finance administrators. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, the sample size was determined to be 109 respondents for quantitative research. Qualitative sampling reached saturation with 15 respondents, including 2 University Council members, 5 management members, 3 principals, 3 finance managers, and 2 audit department managers. Simple random sampling ensured equal representation, while purposive sampling selected cases aligned with research objectives. Data collection spanned three weeks, utilizing interviews and self-administered questionnaires. Interviews provided reliable, relevant insights, while questionnaires allowed efficient quantitative analysis (Saunders et al., 2009).

4.0 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 4.1. Gender of respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	66	66	66.0	66.0
	Male	34	34	34.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Data. Survey 2024

The findings from gender of respondents indicates that the proportion of female is 66 % compared to that their male counterparts of 44%. These figures imply that there are more females who participated in the study than the males. This may be because there are more

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women are employed in administration compared to men. Moreover, these figures are consistent with Assfaw and Sebhat (2019) findings who observed that gender is an important factor when doing any study.

Table 4.2. Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bachelor's Degree & Professional Certification	55	55.0	55.0	55.0
	Masters	30	30.0	30.0	85.0
	PHD	15	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Data. Survey 2022

In the table 4.2 above, the findings from the educational level of respondents revealed that 55.0 % of the respondents had Bachelors' and Bachelor's with professional certificates (CPA, ACCA, and CIPS) level of education, 30,0 % of respondents mentioned that they attained a master's degree at the postgraduate level at time of the study. Furthermore, the 15% of the respondents had attained a Phd. This implies that respondents were conversant and technically educated to understand the tuition revenue collection addressed in the questionnaire. This also explains the high response rate (96%) because respondents were aware, comprehended and answered issues relating to tuition collection with ease.

Table 4.3. Working Experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1- 2years	16	16.0	16.0	16.0
	3 years and above	84	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary Data. Survey 2022

With regards to the working experience of respondents, the findings in table 4.3 above indicated that 16.0 % of the respondents has spent less than 2years working with their institution, and the next 84% of respondents had spent more than three and above years working with their institution. This implies that respondents had enough experience on public finance management at Gulu University.

4.2 Descriptive Statics

4.2.1 The factors affecting the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University.

Under this section, respondents were requested to present their opinions regarding the statements we placed to them to analyze the **factors for the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University.**, using a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Not Sure (NS)=3, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5.

Table 4.4: The factors for the effectiveness of public finance management in public universities.

Descriptive Statistics					
Statement	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
The Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) enhances the accuracy and reliability of financial reports at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.929	.4415
The current budgeting process at Gulu University effectively aligns with the institution's strategic goals and objectives.	100	1.0	5.0	4.000	.8536
Gulu University's debt management policy is sufficient in addressing outstanding receivables and ensuring timely debt collection.	100	1.0	5.0	3.702	.9238
The use of Electronic Government Procurement (EGP) has improved transparency and efficiency in the procurement processes at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.454	1.0315
Regular financial audits are conducted, and their recommendations are effectively implemented to improve financial management at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.482	.9827

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The Human Capital Management (HCM) system at Gulu University ensures efficient and transparent management of staff-related financial matters.	100	1.0	5.0	3.418	.9940
Gulu University's finance department has adequate staffing and resources to manage the financial operations effectively.	100	1.0	5.0	3.617	.9758
Training and development programs for finance department staff are regularly conducted to keep them updated on best practices in public finance management.	100	1.0	5.0	3.184	1.3607
The Program-Based Budgeting (PBS) approach at Gulu University has improved the allocation and utilization of financial resources.	100	1.0	5.0	3.652	1.0756
The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have been effectively managed to minimize their impact on the financial performance of Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.837	.9973
Valid N (Listwise)	100				

Source: Primary Data. Survey 2024

NB: *These matters were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Standard Deviation indicate the degree to which individual scores by respondents are far from the mean value.*

The findings from Table 4.4 indicated the factors for the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University. The most significant factor is the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS), which enhances the accuracy and reliability of financial reports with a high mean of 4.929 and a low standard deviation of 0.4415, indicating strong agreement and consistency among respondents. This is followed by the current budgeting process aligning with the institution's strategic goals and objectives, with a mean of 4.000 and a standard deviation of 0.8536, signifying agreement but with slightly more variation in responses. The management of disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is also rated highly, with a mean of 3.837 and a standard deviation of 0.9973, suggesting effective handling. Other factors, such as the debt management policy, finance department staffing, and the Program-Based Budgeting (PBS) approach, show moderate effectiveness with means ranging from 3.617 to 3.652 and standard deviations between 0.9238 and 1.0756, indicating some variability in perceptions. The use of Electronic Government Procurement (EGP), regular financial audits, and the Human Capital Management (HCM) system are perceived less favorably, with means around 3.418 to 3.482 and higher standard deviations up to 1.0315, reflecting more diverse opinions. Lastly, training and development programs for finance department staff received the lowest mean score of 3.184 with a standard deviation of 1.3607, highlighting a significant area for improvement. These findings imply that while certain financial management systems and processes at Gulu University are effective and well-regarded, others require attention and enhancement to ensure overall improvement in public finance management.

Similarly, opinions from interviews with University Management, Mangers of Department of Audit, Principals, Managers of Finance department were aware of the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University.

During follow-up interviews, **Respondent number 2 stated**

"……..The factors influencing the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University include the quality of our financial planning and budgeting processes. When we adopt a robust budgeting system that aligns with our strategic goals, it ensures that our resources are allocated efficiently and transparently. This, in turn, enhances the effectiveness of our public finance management……..."

Respondent number 5 stated

"……Another critical factor is the capacity and competency of our financial management team. Having a team of well-trained and experienced financial managers ensures that our financial processes are carried out accurately and efficiently. Continuous professional development and training programs are essential to maintain high standards of financial management at Gulu University……."

Respondent number 8 stated

"……..Technology and information systems play a significant role in influencing the effectiveness of our public finance management. Implementing advanced financial management software can streamline processes, reduce errors, and enhance real-time financial reporting and analysis. This technological integration helps us make informed decisions and improve financial accountability at Gulu University……"

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4.2.2 The challenges hindering the effectiveness of public finance management in public universities.

Under this section, we requested respondents to present their opinions regarding the statements we placed to them to analyze The challenges hindering revenue collection., using a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Not Sure = 3, Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5.

Table 4.5. The challenges hindering the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University. (N = 100)

Descriptive Statistics					
Statement	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Limited funding from the government is a major challenge to effective financial management at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.043	1.3141
The absence of robust financial management systems hinders effective budget implementation at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.135	1.2260
Inadequate training and development opportunities for finance staff contribute to inefficiencies in financial management at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.156	.9949
Delays in the disbursement of government funds negatively impact the financial operations of Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.858	1.0253
The accumulation of receivables due to uncollected student fees poses a significant risk to the financial stability of Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.142	1.0796
The lack of effective debt collection strategies affects the financial health of Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.085	1.1243
The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have severely impacted the revenue generation at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.177	1.0575
Inefficiencies in the procurement process lead to financial wastage and budget overruns at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	3.142	.9455
The existing financial policies and procedures are inadequate to address the financial management challenges at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	2.716	1.3434
Valid N (Listwise)	100				

Source: *Primary Data. Survey 2022*

NB: *These matters were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Standard Deviation indicate the degree to which individual scores by respondents are far from the mean value.*

The findings from Table 4.5 indicated the challenges hindering the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University. The most significant challenge is the delays in the disbursement of government funds, with a high mean of 3.858 and a standard deviation of 1.0253, indicating strong agreement and moderate consistency among respondents. This is followed by inadequate training and development opportunities for finance staff, with a mean of 3.156 and a lower standard deviation of 0.9949, reflecting agreement with slightly higher consistency. The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also significantly impact revenue generation, with a mean of 3.177 and a standard deviation of 1.0575. Other notable challenges include the absence of robust financial management systems (mean = 3.135, SD = 1.2260) and the accumulation of receivables due to uncollected student fees (mean = 3.142, SD = 1.0796), which pose risks to financial stability. Additionally, limited funding from the government (mean = 3.043, SD = 1.3141) and inefficiencies in the procurement process (mean = 3.142, SD = 0.9455) contribute to financial management challenges. The lack of effective debt collection strategies (mean = 3.085, SD = 1.1243) further hinders financial health, while existing financial policies and procedures are perceived as inadequate to address these challenges, evidenced by the lowest mean score of 2.716 and a high standard deviation of 1.3434.

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Similarly, opinions from interviews with University Management, Mangers of Department of Audit, Principals, Managers of Finance department were aware of the challenges hindering the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University.
During follow-up interviews,

Respondent number 1 stated

"……..One of the major challenges we face is inadequate funding. Gulu University often encounters budget constraints due to limited government allocations and other funding sources. This affects our ability to implement planned activities and maintain financial stability, thereby hindering effective public finance management……."

Respondent number 15 stated

"……..Another significant challenge is the lack of skilled personnel in our finance department. We often experience a high turnover rate among our financial staff, which leads to disruptions in financial operations and a loss of institutional knowledge. The lack of experienced personnel makes it difficult for us to manage finances effectively."

Respondent number 11 stated

"……..Inefficient financial systems and outdated technology also pose a challenge. Without modern financial management systems, we struggle with data inaccuracies, delays in financial reporting, and a lack of transparency. Upgrading these systems is essential for improving our financial management efficiency……."

4.2.3 The public finance management strategies at Gulu University.

Under this section, we requested respondents to present their opinions regarding the statements we placed to them to find out The revenue generation strategies at Makerere university, using a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Not sure = 3, Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5.

Table 4.6. The public finance management strategies in public universities. (N = 100)

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Implementing a comprehensive debt management policy will enhance the effectiveness of financial management at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.241	.8611
Increasing government funding allocations will significantly improve financial stability and operations at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.241	.7919
Regular training and capacity-building programs for finance staff are essential for effective financial management at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.028	.6964
Enhancing the use of technology, such as Electronic Cash (ECash) and Integrated Financial Management Systems (IFMS), will improve financial reporting and accountability at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.099	.7397
Developing and implementing effective procurement procedures will reduce financial wastage and improve budget adherence at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.390	.7632
Establishing clear and transparent financial policies and procedures will strengthen financial management practices at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.199	.7093
Promoting a culture of accountability and transparency among all staff involved in financial management will enhance the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.177	.8475
Leveraging Non-Tax Revenue (NTR) sources more effectively will contribute to the financial sustainability of Gulu University.	100	1.0	5.0	4.364	.5831
Valid N (Listwise)	100				

Source: *Primary Data. Survey 2022*

NB: *These matters were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Standard Deviation indicate the degree to which individual scores by respondents are far from the mean value.*

The findings from Table 4.6 indicated the public finance management strategies at Gulu University. The most significant strategy is developing and implementing effective procurement procedures, with a high mean of 4.390 and a standard deviation of 0.7632, indicating strong agreement and moderate consistency among respondents. This is followed by leveraging Non-Tax Revenue (NTR) sources more effectively, which has a mean of 4.364 and a lower standard deviation of 0.5831, reflecting strong agreement and high

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consistency. Implementing a comprehensive debt management policy and increasing government funding allocations both have a mean of 4.241, with standard deviations of 0.8611 and 0.7919, respectively, indicating strong agreement with slightly more variation in responses. Enhancing the use of technology, such as Electronic Cash (ECash) and Integrated Financial Management Systems (IFMS), has a mean of 4.099 and a standard deviation of 0.7397, followed by establishing clear and transparent financial policies and procedures with a mean of 4.199 and a standard deviation of 0.7093. Promoting a culture of accountability and transparency among all staff involved in financial management has a mean of 4.177 and a standard deviation of 0.8475. Regular training and capacity-building programs for finance staff are also considered essential, with a mean of 4.028 and a standard deviation of 0.6964. These findings imply that enhancing procurement procedures, leveraging NTR sources, and improving debt management policies are crucial strategies for improving the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University.

Comparably, 12 out of 15 respondents from follow-up interviews opined that below:
"…….To improve the effectiveness of public finance management, Gulu University should invest in capacity building for our financial management team. This includes regular training programs, workshops, and certifications to ensure that our staff are equipped with the latest skills and knowledge in financial management practices……..."

"…….Another way to enhance effectiveness is by adopting integrated financial management information systems (IFMIS). These systems can automate financial processes, improve accuracy, and provide real-time financial data, which is crucial for effective decision-making and financial oversight at Gulu University……..."

"……Improving stakeholder engagement and transparency is also vital. By involving various stakeholders in our budgeting and financial decision-making processes, we can ensure that our financial management practices are more inclusive and transparent. Regular financial audits and public disclosure of financial reports can also build trust and accountability within our university community……..."

5.0 DISCUSSION

The discussion of key findings revealed significant insights into the effectiveness of public finance management at Gulu University. The demographic analysis showed higher female participation, likely due to a larger presence in administrative roles, consistent with studies emphasizing gender representation. Respondents were well-educated, with most holding Bachelor's degrees or higher and having over three years of experience, suggesting familiarity with financial management practices. The Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) was identified as a critical factor in enhancing transparency and compliance, aligning with Bwogi (2017). Challenges included delays in government fund disbursements, inadequate training, and outdated financial systems, reflecting broader inefficiencies in public sector finance (Weerakkody, 2008; Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008). Strategies to address these issues included improved procurement procedures, leveraging Non-Tax Revenue (NTR), and adopting advanced technologies like IFMIS, consistent with Flynn and Tannenbaum (1993). Enhancing stakeholder engagement and capacity-building initiatives also emerged as essential for sustainable financial management.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the effectiveness of Public Finance Management at Gulu University is shaped by factors such as the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS), strategic budgeting, and resilience in handling disruptions like COVID-19. Challenges included delays in government fund disbursement, inadequate staff training, outdated technology, and inefficiencies in financial systems. To address these issues, the study recommended enhancing procurement processes, leveraging Non-Tax Revenue (NTR), increasing government funding, and strengthening debt management. Additionally, embracing advanced technologies, conducting capacity-building programs, and fostering transparency through participatory budgeting and public financial disclosure were emphasized to improve efficiency, accountability, and trust within the institution.

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