Abstract

Purpose – Given the perceived weak corporate governance systems in Ghana, corporate governance education curriculum requires empirical investigations to ascertain factors that can enhance student knowledge in governance systems based on their career interests and programme of study. Therefore, we investigate whether students with a career interest in corporate governance exhibit a significantly different level of comprehension compared to those without such an interest. Furthermore, we explore whether the comprehension of course concepts differs across various business-related programmes, investigating potential variations in understanding among students from diverse programme backgrounds.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a descriptive design, we adopt a quantitative approach and survey method to collect cross-sectional data from 1,050 undergraduate students in selected Ghanaian public universities. We analyse the data using t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Findings – We establish no statistically significant difference in comprehension levels of corporate governance concepts between students with a career interest in corporate governance and those with no career interest. However, we find statistically significant differences in the comprehension of corporate governance concepts among students pursuing different business-related programmes.

Practical implications – Our findings imply that the corporate governance course should be taught practically, giving students insights into what the course entails from an industrial viewpoint. This may entail engaging experts from industry as visiting lecturers at intervals to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Students could also benefit from mentorship programmes from industry, internships and related placements to ensure an understanding of theoretical concepts from practical perspectives.

Originality/value – Our study is novel and contributes to extant literature because it is the first empirical study on corporation governance education that emphasizes on students career interests and programme of study from a developing country perspective.

Keywords Corporate governance, Career interest, Higher education, Ghana

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Corporate governance education refers to training and equipping students and trainees on corporate practices principles. While some literature exist on corporate governance training, the need for practical corporate governance training appears urgent to alleviate corrupt practices and corporate malfunctioning (Turnbull, 2019; Solomon and Solomon, 2020; Hilton and Arkorful, 2021). Aligning corporate governance training with industrial demands can help address the current dismal state of management practices, particularly in the public sector (Nakpodia et al., 2018). This requires empirical studies to ascertain factors that account for poor training in corporate governance, particularly in developing countries like Ghana that is perceived to be a gateway to Africa. In Ghana, corporate governance as a course is offered at different levels – diploma, bachelor, master and doctoral. The syllabus syncs with international benchmarks and the country’s corporate environment demand. At the undergraduate level, the
corporate governance curriculum exposes students to the understanding of basic concepts such as “understanding the distinction between governance and corporate governance”, “the purpose, elements, theories, and models of corporate governance”, “regulatory mechanisms”, “development of corporate governance”, “factors influencing corporate governance in Ghana”, “stakeholders, shareholders and the OECD principles of corporate governance”, “board of directors”, “the role of control systems in corporate governance” and “corporate scandals and corporate governance in Ghanaian banks-case studies”.

Earlier scholars (e.g. Awaah et al., 2021a, b) submit that students generally have difficulties comprehending concepts in major subjects in higher educations but failed to pay attention to corporate governance education which is critical in promoting good governance at micro and macro levels. For instance, academics (such as Awaah et al., 2021a, b; Gbeleyi et al., 2022; Onowugbeda et al., 2022) identified topics that students consider challenging to study and the factors accounting for such. Yet, literature concerning corporate governance and how students understand key concepts is dearth. While some may attribute students’ understanding of corporate governance concepts to the teaching and learning approach, Awaah et al. (2021a, b) argue that with the emergence of the Culturo-Techno-Contextual Approach (CTCA) as an innovative teaching approach that contextualizes teaching and learning, students should be able to comprehend difficult concepts in any subjects that they are familiar with. It follows that if students are taught well then their poor comprehension level could be attributed to factors other than the teaching method. Therefore, we focus on intrinsic factors such as career interest and desired programme of study as possible factors that might determine students’ understanding of corporate governance concepts in Ghana.

Accordingly, we probe the following objectives: (1) whether there is a statistically significant difference in comprehension levels of corporate governance concepts between students with a career interest in the field and those with no interest and (2) whether there are statistically significant differences in the comprehension of corporate governance concepts among students from different academic programmes. To achieve the objectives, we employed a quantitative approach, collecting cross-sectional data which are analysed using t-test and ANOVA. This paper is novel since it investigates challenges in the corporate governance curriculum and factors inhibiting students’ understanding which were overlooked by previous studies to proffer recommendations to improve student performance of the course which may impact corporate practices positively. Additionally, this paper reveals the programmes that best promote students’ understanding of corporate governance and make suggestions to improve understanding of the course across the various programmes in the Ghanaian universities.

Literature review and hypotheses

Culturo-techno-contextual approach

Several innovative learning theories have been used to examine students’ understanding of concepts in subjects. In this study, we consider the CTCA a suitable model. The CTCA is a method of teaching using the principles of culture, technology and context (Okebukola, 2020). The CTCA states that a society’s culture might have a philosophy that does not apply to all people and civilizations worldwide while sharing parallels with other cultures (Awaah et al., 2021a, b). Thus, teaching African students using their culture is imperative since non-African methods do not always apply to their specific living conditions. Using the CTCA, students can be encouraged to enquire from their parents, guardians and elders in the community on cultural knowledge relative to concepts to be taught in class as prior knowledge before the subject is taught (Okebukola, 2020).

The “techno” component of the CTCA advocates the use of modern technology available to students (Awaah et al., 2021a, b). Modern technology like the Internet, personal computers
and mobile phones enables students to find information better and makes lessons easily accessible. The CTCA encourages teachers, with the support of parents and educational institutions, to adopt technology to support students understanding of courses. This entails the willingness of parents and institutions of learning to provide technology aids such as computers, laptops, Internet and other technology support infrastructure to aid teaching and learning. The “context” of the CTCA asserts that human acts, utterances, expressions and learning can be only understood in the context they occur (Okebukola, 2020). Therefore, in teaching students, the materials should be relevant to their immediate environment to quickly understand the concepts being taught (Okebukola, 2020). The approach links learning and communities with the main goals of increasing student engagement, boosting academic outcomes, impacting communities and promoting appreciation of the surrounding world.

As an emerging teaching model in education to enhance students’ understanding of concepts in different disciplines, CTCA has been widely applied in similar studies (e.g. Awaah et al., 2021a, b, 2022, 2023; Onowugbeda et al., 2022, etc.), affirming its efficacy as underpinning theory for this study. Since we aim to assess whether students’ comprehension of concepts in corporate governance education will differ base on their career interest and programme of study, we adopt this model which generally promotes students’ understanding of concepts better in an African setting. This model allows us to deal with the possibility that the method of teaching and learning might be a major factor and that all the students would have the same learning environment and resources. Thus, this model provides a sound basis to assume that the students are being taught well so that their career interest and programme of study will be tested relative to their understanding of the concepts being taught in corporate governance.

**Students’ career interest and comprehension level of concepts**

Career interest refers to a profession or an occupation chosen as one’s life work (Reverso Dictionary, n.d.). It follows that career interest is an inclination concerning work. Thus, in this study, career interest relates to the inclinations of students toward work after completion of undergraduate university education. Literature suggests that career interest of students could stimulate their understanding of different subjects. For instance, Awaah et al. (2021a, b) submit that there is significant relationship between students’ future career interest and concept difficulty in public administration (PA). In a related study, Gbeleyi et al. (2022) found a significant negative relationship between students’ career interest and perceived difficulty in the Ghanaian and Nigerian computer studies curriculum. Investigating the entrepreneurship education curriculum in Ghana, Awaah et al. (2023) establish that there is no statistically significant relationship between students’ career interest and students’ comprehension levels in concepts taught in the entrepreneurship curriculum.

Furthermore, Milligan and Littlejohn (2017) examined what motivated students and professionals to study using massive open online courses (MOOC). The results indicate reasons that encouraged respondents to study. Important reasons put forward by professionals were the potential benefits to their current and future careers, a casual interest in the topic they learnt or the simple desire to learn. These results demonstrate that potential benefits to an individual’s future career can motivate the individual to study and understand the concepts taught in a particular field. Lastly, Matsum (2018) investigated the effects of students’ interest and creativity on students’ achievement in economics using a descriptive method with a correlational technique and reported that students’ interest has a statistically significant effect on students’ achievement in economics. It follows that where students have a career plan in a subject, they will likely concentrate to understand concepts in the subject better than those without career interest in the subject. Therefore, there could be
differences in their [students] understanding level of courses based on career interest. Given the forgoing literature, we hypothesize that:

\[ H1. \] There is statistically significant difference in comprehension levels of corporate governance concepts between students with a career interest in corporate governance and those with no career interest.

**Students’ programme of study and comprehension level of concepts**

According to the Collins dictionary (n.d.), a programme of study is the prescribed syllabus that students must be taught at each key stage in education. At the higher educational level, a programme of study may entail a curriculum of courses intended to lead to the award of doctorate, masters, first degree, diploma or related certificates. In this study, a programme of study means a collection of courses studied to meet set requirements for the award of a bachelor’s degree. Overwhelming problems for educational programmes are real threats, particularly if students do not understand concepts being taught (Wu and He, 2009). Thus, there is a need to create a synthesized theoretical framework to capitalize on an unparallelled opportunity afforded by the fast global expansion of professional education in a subject field. Souitaris et al. (2007) examined how entrepreneurship programmes affected science and engineering students’ entrepreneurial attitudes and intents. The results show that the programmes improve attitudes and overall entrepreneurial intention and that inspiration is the most impactful advantage of the programmes. These studies were conducted outside of the African region nevertheless the findings suggests that programmes that allow students to understand a course better would be most beneficial to efforts to improve students’ participation in the course activities.

Studies have established the relationships between programme of study and concept difficulties within the African region. For instance, Awaah (2023) reports that there is a statistically significant difference amongst students studying various programmes in their comprehension level of the concepts taught in the entrepreneurship curriculum. His study implies that the programmes that students study influence their comprehension levels of the concepts taught in the entrepreneurship curriculum in Ghanaian universities. The study further reported that the business-related programmes seem to have a higher level of comprehension than the other programmes. Specifically, BSc Business Economics students have the highest level of comprehension while BSc information technology management students have the least level of comprehension. In another related study, Awaah (2021) established a relationship between programme of study and concept difficulty in the study of PA. The study found statistical significance between programme of study and concept difficulty in the study of PA in Ghanaian universities. His finding implies that difficulties in the study of PA by Ghanaian university students have a relationship with students’ programme of study at a correlation coefficient of \(-0.022\).

The studies above highlight the relationship between programme of study and comprehension or difficulty in understanding certain concepts. Specifically, the studies in the African region found that students studying business-related programmes tend to have a higher level of comprehension of entrepreneurship concepts, whereas students studying information technology management tend to have a lower level of comprehension. Additionally, the study on public administration found that students’ programme of study correlates with their difficulties in understanding PA concepts. These findings suggest that the nature of a particular programme of study can significantly influence students’ ability to comprehend and apply concepts.

The study by Souitaris et al. (2007) extends this understanding beyond the African context, indicating that the relationship between programme of study and concept comprehension is not limited to a specific region. Souitaris et al.’s (2007) finding suggests
that entrepreneurship programmes can have a positive impact on students’ attitudes and intentions towards entrepreneurship, particularly in the fields of science and engineering. The study highlights inspiration as the most impactful advantage of these programmes, indicating that such programmes can help students develop a passion for entrepreneurship and thereby improve their comprehension of related concepts. Thus, studies above serve as empirical basis for this paper. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H2. There are statistically significant differences in the comprehension of corporate governance concepts among students studying different business-related programmes.

Methods
Design
We adopted a quantitative approach given the research objectives. This approach allowed us to obtain numeric data for the statistical analysis (Dawson, 2009; Hilton et al., 2023). It also enabled us to delineate the distinct understanding of course concepts between students with a career interest in corporate governance and those without, shedding light on significant differences in their comprehension. We used survey method to collect cross-section data. This method facilitated the data collection process (Altinay et al., 2015; Hilton et al., 2021).

Setting, population and sampling
We conducted the study in three public universities within Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The three universities were selected based on teaching the course for a minimum of 10 years and also running similar business-related programmes that prepare students for a career or further studies in corporate governance. The study’s population comprised all students studying corporate governance as a course at the undergraduate level from the three selected universities. The target population was level 400 students who might have studied the course for at least two semesters. We randomly selected 1,050 students from the three selected universities. This sampling method enabled us to address selection bias in data collection.

Instrumentation and data collection
We used a questionnaire to collect the data. The questionnaire contained items adapted from the difficult concepts in public administration questionnaire developed and validated by Awaah et al. (2021a, b). Section I of our questionnaire collected data on demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, age, programme of study, career interest and parental background). Section II contained eight topics from the course. Likert scale responses were provided where 1 = very difficult, 2 = moderately difficult and 3 = not difficult. The survey was conducted online through a generated Google form link which was shared on WhatsApp platforms created for the participants. The survey lasted for about a month.

We carried out validity and reliability to ensure that the instrument measures what we intended to measure and the items were internally consistency (Thomas, 2006; Hilton et al., 2023). We referred the questionnaire to corporate governance practitioners and lecturers to confirm the face validity. Their feedback was used to refine the instrument. We further carried out a pilot test with 50 students who did not form part of the final respondents. We ran a reliability test on the pilot data by calculating the Cronbach’s alpha. The Cronbach’s alpha test results show that the instrument is reliability. The actual survey data were also subjected to the Cronbach’s alpha test and the results ranged from 0.87, indicating that the measuring items are internally consistent and acceptable for this study (Cooper and Schindler, 2008; Field, 2015).
To meet all ethical requirements, institutional permission was granted before the participants were engaged. Next, the participants were informed of the research’s goals and their consent was sought. They were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

**Data analysis**

We used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyse the data. Precisely, we tested the hypotheses using *t*-tests and ANOVA. These tests are appropriate to establish difference between variables. Before proceeding with the analysis, we applied Tabachnick *et al.*'s (2001) rule of thumb on normality test which suggests that the skewness should be between −1 and +1. Since the skewness values in Table 2 are consistent with the rule, the data are normally distributed for the *t*-tests and ANOVA.

**Results and discussion**

Table 1 presents the *t*-test results for H1. It can be observed that there is no statistically significant difference between students with a career interest in corporate governance and those without in their comprehension level of the course \([t(1,048) = 0.95; p > 0.05]\) (Table 1). Hence, H1 is not supported. It implies there is no difference in the mean scores (Table 2), indicating that students with interest and those with no interest in corporate governance have similar levels of understanding of the course concepts. Thus, regardless of students’ career interest, their understanding level of concepts in corporate governance will likely be the same.

Our findings indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in the comprehension level of various corporate governance concepts between students with a career interest in corporate governance and those without. Our finding contradicts the findings of Awaah *et al.* (2021a, b), who found a statistically significant relationship between students’ career interests and concept difficulties. This contradiction may stem from students’ attitudes toward the courses in both studies. Table 2 shows that out of 1,050 respondents, 560 were interested in corporate governance, indicating the seriousness those

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th><em>t</em></th>
<th><em>p</em> (sig level)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Career interest</td>
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<td>29.46</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.34 (ns)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No career interest</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>29.26</td>
<td>3.07</td>
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</table>

**Source(s):** Authors’ computation (2023)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skew</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career interest in corporate governance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interested</td>
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<td>29.46</td>
<td>3.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>689</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBA</td>
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<td>29.90</td>
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<tr>
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<td>25.08</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<td>4.93</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSc Public Relations</td>
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<td>28.58</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0.56</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSc Information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
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</table>

**Source(s):** Authors’ computation (2023)
students attach to the course. Lastly, our finding refutes Matsum (2018) also found that students’ interest and creativity had a statistically significant effect on students’ achievement in economics. The inconsistency in findings may be due to the jurisdictional differences and course contents. While Matsum (2018) investigated economics as a course using correlational technique, we examined corporate governance as a course using t-test. Hence, the differences in the data analysis technique may contribute to the mixed findings. Again, the same teaching approach was not used to teach the students so it is possible that the method of teaching and learning played some intervening role in students’ understanding of the course concepts.

On the other hand, our finding is consistent with the work of Awaah et al. (2022) that revealed no statistically significant difference between students with career interests and those with no career interests in entrepreneurship regarding their comprehension level of the various concepts in the entrepreneurship curriculum. The consistencies in the findings may result from the study being conducted within the same country, same universities and similar demographic characteristics of respondents. Additionally, the same teaching approach was adopted in both studies so this could explain the similarity in the findings.

Table 3 shows the results of the ANOVA analysis for H2. It can be noticed that there is a statistically significant difference among students studying business-related programmes in their understanding of corporate governance \([F(5, 1,044) = 20.01; p < 0.05]\). Hence, H2 is supported. It implies that there is difference in the mean scores (Table 2), indicating that BSc information technology students have the highest comprehension level while Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students have the lowest comprehension level.

Our results revealed a statistically significant difference among students studying various business-related programmes in their comprehension of corporate governance concepts. BSc Information Technology students had the highest levels of comprehension while BBA students had the lowest levels. Howbeit, it is interesting to see that BBA students rather have lowest level of comprehension of concepts in corporate governance. Unlike the BSc Information Technology students, BBA students read business-related courses right from level 100. Thus, BBA students have prior knowledge that should enhance their understanding of the course concepts. This finding contradicts the propositions of Piaget’s cognitive constructivist theory. Learners construct their knowledge. They build their knowledge through experience. They construct schemas – mental maps of the world – due to their experiences. Learners with existing knowledge (already studying business-related courses) go through assimilation to learn new information which is easier than the assimilation that learners without existing knowledge (not studying business-related courses) go through. The COVID-19 pandemic also limited student’s ability to get hands-on with the concepts taught. This might have also contributed to the challenges that BBA students faced. The effectiveness of their programme is hinged on practicality; hence, the lack of it may derail efforts to understand the course concepts.

Empirically, our findings are consistent with Awaah’s (2023) reports that there is a statistically significant difference among students studying various programmes in their comprehension level of entrepreneurship concepts. The consistency may be due to the fact that after studying entrepreneurship, students may have knowledge in business management concepts which will enhance their understanding of the corporate governance concepts. Thus, it is essential to emphasis that the programmes that students

<table>
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<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>(F)</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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<td>190.126</td>
<td>20.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>9822.325</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>9.504</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10872.953</td>
<td>1,049</td>
<td>9.504</td>
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</table>

**Table 3.** ANOVA results

Students’ career interest
study influence their comprehension levels of the subjects in Ghanaian universities, particularly in business-related subjects or courses. Howbeit, Awaah (2023) submitted that the business-related programmes such as BSc Business Economics students have the highest level of comprehension than the other programmes like BSc Information Technology Management, while in our study we discover that the BSc Information Technology Management rather has the highest level of comprehension and the BBA has the least level of comprehension. Our findings also underscore Awaah’s (2021) finding that statistical significance between programme of study and concept difficulty in the study of PA in Ghanaian universities. This consistency may also be as a result of the reasons aforementioned in the case of entrepreneurship curriculum.

Conclusion and implications
We have established that there is no statistically significant difference in the comprehension level of various corporate governance concepts between students with a career interest in corporate governance and those without. This suggests that students’ understanding of corporate governance concepts is not dependent on their desire to be corporate managers or governance experts. Once the right teaching methods are in place and the learning environment is conducive, students will comprehend the concepts in the course and perform well, and also become successful in their various careers. On the other hand, there are statistically significant differences in the comprehension of corporate governance concepts among students’ programme of study. This means that students’ programme of study may determine their level of seriousness and attention required to better comprehend corporate governance concepts.

Our findings imply that the corporate governance course should be taught practically, giving students insights into what the course entails from an industrial viewpoint. This may entail engaging experts from industry as visiting lecturers at intervals to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Students could also benefit from mentorship programmes from industry, internships and related placements to ensure an understanding of theoretical concepts from practical perspectives. Additionally, a virtual enterprise modelled can be created to help students understand the concepts. Lastly, students who study different programmes should be taught using different methods.

Theoretically, our paper bridged the gap between practice and theory by indicating that the nature of the corporate governance course – whether theoretically or practically oriented creates a distinct motivational frame for the subject. When students are taught in a practical way, they do not only get to understand the concepts but also the needs of industry. This endears to the industry in diverse ways. Firstly, the students can find practical solutions to industry problems during mentorship, attachment or other related programmes. Further, when teaching is done practically with students understanding concepts from theory and practice, it may lead to innovations and experiences that benefit both private and public sectors.

Limitations and suggestions for future research
We focused on only public universities in Ghana. Future research is necessary to increase the sample to include both public and private universities or it may be conducted outside the jurisdiction of Ghana to see if same or different results will be achieved. This will help in curriculum reforms across the African countries. Additionally, we did not consider the possible interference of demographic factors such as gender, academic year and age; hence, future research may include them as controls to see if there will be significant difference in the results.
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Further reading


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