

THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE ON QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN IRAQI PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study investigates the essential topic of academic governance at Iraqi private institutions, which has received increased worldwide and local attention in recent years. As these institutions face a constantly changing educational environment, good governance is critical to satisfying society's increasing expectations. The research emphasizes the importance of governance in promoting openness, accountability, and justice in academic institutions. Universities may foster trust among important stakeholders, such as professors, students, and the general public, by putting in place strong governance mechanisms. Academic administration goes beyond resource management, allowing university officials to confront issues including technology breakthroughs, changing financing, and expanding demand for higher education. This is especially crucial when enrollments grow, and institutions must justify public funding by demonstrating efficiency, responsiveness to social demands, and alignment with labor market requirements. The study's findings, based on data collected from 410 respondents from Babylon's private universities, show that universities with strong governance frameworks have higher levels of transparency, effective decision-making, and accountability, allowing them to better navigate external challenges and adapt to social changes. The study used the SEM-PLS approach to examine the links between governance aspects and educational quality. However, many colleges confront challenges in implementing these governance structures due to bureaucratic roadblocks, reluctance to change, and insufficient funding. The report suggests that resolving these problems would need a balanced strategy that stresses both public accountability and institutional autonomy in order to ensure the long-term effectiveness of higher education governance.

Keywords: *University Governance; Transparency; Accountability; Private universities; Iraq.*

1. Introduction:

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in academic governance. Academic governance has arisen as a critical issue in the growth and strategic planning of higher education institutions. Governance systems at these institutions are critical because they establish the underlying aims and values that drive their educational missions. Governance processes primarily focus on several key areas, including the degree of adherence to institutional regulations and policies, the alignment of institutional objectives with the interests of faculty members and students, and the institution's ability to achieve its defined goals (Middlehurst and Kogan, 2018).

One of the most compelling reasons for the emphasis on academic governance is the growing significance that higher education institutions play in national and global economies. Universities are often regarded as critical to a country's economic, social, and cultural growth. As a result, academic governance processes have become a critical tool for these institutions to assure excellent performance, operational efficiency, and overall success (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Teixeira & Carvalho, 2021). This increased emphasis on governance focuses on increasing administrative performance, output quality, teaching staff competency, and educational program creation (Maringe & Sing, 2014).

In nations that prioritize higher education development, improving academic governance is regarded as a vital aspect in guaranteeing institutional expansion and sustainability. Higher education institutions

should improve governance procedures to enable more effective teaching, better resource allocation, and a better learning environment (World Bank, 2020). As a result, these enhancements can lead to higher student outcomes and increased institutional responsibility. Furthermore, building strong governance frameworks is viewed as a way to address issues such as inefficiency, lack of transparency, and corruption, which might jeopardize academic institutions' integrity (Jadah et al., 2020; Hazelkorn, 2015; Davies, 2017).

To fulfill their tasks in the twenty-first century, higher education institutions must build strong governance frameworks. Academic governance, which aims to achieve quality, efficiency, openness, and effectiveness, is an important component in ensuring that institutions stay responsive to societal requirements (Scott, 2014; Sauder and Ouellet, 2017). Furthermore, this method assists institutions in combating corruption and maintaining high academic integrity standards, thereby increasing the legitimacy and confidence of stakeholders both within and outside the institution (Jadah et al., 2021; Santiago et al., 2011).

1.2 Problem statement

The absence of academic governance in universities has been cited as a major contributor to poor university performance and results. Without a clear and organized governance framework, universities may face inefficiencies, poor resource allocation, a lack of accountability, and a failure to accomplish academic and administrative objectives. The absence of governance structures eventually inhibits educational quality and the creation of a strong academic environment. The implementation of academic governance is thus critical for the success of higher education institutions. Implementing an integrated governance system ensures that university administrations may fulfill their duties more efficiently, effectively, and transparently, hence enhancing overall performance (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Morys, 2020; Jadah & Al-Husainy, 2022).

Effective academic governance is more than just enhancing administrative processes within universities. It also promotes accountability by requiring institutions to account for their activities, choices, and resource use. This responsibility is critical in ensuring that universities' aims fit with the expectations of stakeholders such as professors, students, and the general public. Furthermore, academic governance encourages openness by requiring that choices be made openly, with clear reasoning, and subject to review (Santiago et al., 2011; Hazelkorn, 2015; Jadah & Mohammed, 2016). Active engagement in decision-making processes by many stakeholders, including faculty members, students, and even citizens, is a critical component of academic governance. This participative approach is crucial for ensuring that the governance system represents the interests of the whole academic community while also upholding democratic ideals inside the institution (Maringe & Sing, 2014).

The question arises as to whether Iraqi universities and private colleges are capable of executing academic governance standards within their educational frameworks. Iraqi higher education has encountered several governance issues over the years, owing mostly to centralized decision-making and a lack of autonomy in academic and administrative concerns (Al-Kayed & Al-Hakmaniyah, 2003). The research challenge may be understood using two key questions:

- a) How does the level of transparency in academic governance influence the quality of education among university administrators and faculty at Iraqi private universities?
- b) What is the impact of transparency in governance processes on the quality of education at Iraqi private universities, as perceived by students, faculty, and the wider community?
- c) How does accountability in academic governance affect the quality of education and institutional performance in Iraqi private universities from the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and students?
- d) To what extent does stakeholder participation in academic governance contribute to the quality of education in Iraqi private universities, particularly in terms of curriculum development, teaching methods, and student engagement?

1.3 Importance of the study

The importance of this study is in assessing the ability of private colleges and universities to effectively execute academic governance in a way that fulfills the requirements required for high-quality education. Academic governance shapes the strategic direction, decision-making procedures, and accountability structures of educational institutions. This study will determine if private schools are prepared to

establish governance frameworks that improve educational results and line with global standards of excellence. The study's primary goal is to assess administrators, professors, and other stakeholders' knowledge and grasp of the academic governance culture. Furthermore, the study looks at the problems and hurdles that impede the effective implementation of governance systems, such as bureaucratic restraints, insufficient resources, reluctance to change, or a shortage of training. By identifying these constraints, the study hopes to shed light on how academic governance might be reinforced to improve educational results and institutional performance.

1.4 Objective of the study

The research aims to study the extent to which Iraqi private colleges or universities benefit from the principles of academic governance and the extent to which they are able to apply these principles. This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- A.** To examine the influence of transparency in academic governance on the quality of education as perceived by university administrators and faculty in Iraqi private universities.
- B.** To assess the impact of transparency in governance processes on the quality of education at Iraqi private universities, focusing on the perceptions of students, faculty, and the broader community.
- C.** To evaluate the role of accountability in academic governance and its effect on the quality of education and institutional performance in Iraqi private universities from the viewpoints of administrators, faculty, and students.
- D.** To explore the extent to which stakeholder participation in academic governance contributes to the enhancement of education quality in Iraqi private universities, particularly in areas such as curriculum development, teaching practices, and student engagement.

1.5 Research hypothesis:

The research is based on the hypothesis that academic governance has a tangible impact on the reality of higher education in higher education institutions in Iraqi private colleges or universities in developing their academic level.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between the level of transparency in academic governance and the perceived quality of education among university administrators and faculty at Iraqi private universities.

Hypothesis 2: Transparency in governance processes positively impacts the quality of education at Iraqi private universities, as perceived by students, faculty, and the wider community.

Hypothesis 3: Accountability in academic governance positively affects the quality of education and institutional performance in Iraqi private universities from the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and students.

Hypothesis 4: Stakeholder participation in academic governance positively contributes to the quality of education in Iraqi private universities, particularly in curriculum development, teaching methods, and student engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Academic Governance

The concept of academic governance is one of the important concepts at the present time, which refers to the means through which higher education institutions are managed and organized. It means the way in which work is carried out in universities (World Bank, 2008). The World Bank has defined academic governance as behaviours that express how to exercise authority and achieve self-control. It focuses on the structure and function of the university as a whole and the regulatory and legislative framework for university administration (Adel, 2011). A concept of academic governance can be given as a set of rules and foundations according to which the university is managed according to a specific structure that includes the distribution of rights and duties among the university administration and university governance councils in a way that ensures the quality of the university's outputs. (Adnan, 2017).

2.2 Principles of academic governance

It is known that the foundations of academic governance are the rules and systems that achieve the best principles of senior management and individuals working in the institution. The most important principles of academic governance are:

- a) **Academic freedom:** Academic freedom gives researchers the right to conduct teaching, research, and publishing without restriction or censorship by the institutions in which they work. Reports issued by the American University Professors Association (AAUP) confirm that the relationship between academic freedom and governance depends on supporting the rights and freedom of faculty members and their role in achieving academic governance, and this requires university decision-making with participation by all parties concerned with the educational process (Iman,2015)
- b) **Counseling:** The university president and the rest of the administration staff consult on all academic matters with the college and concerned parties by discussing university questions and issues, and this discussion must be characterized by prior announcement in accordance with agreed-upon legal procedure (Ibrahim,2011).
- c) **Representation:** Effective academic governance in its reality requires professional and student representative bodies at the college level, the university council, and also at the external level of the university. These bodies represent its elements at the level of university policies (administrative decisions, financial level, and executive procedures (Boukashour,2007)
- d) **Financial Stability:** Educational institutions require sufficient financial resources to bring about development, to enable their institutions to develop and support their material resources so that the lack of resources does not cause a weakness in the independence of universities or affect them, and great importance must be given to the governance budget system for universities in order to carry out their tasks in the best way. And activate their roles, and universities have the right to dispose of these financial resources in a way that serves their interests, without adhering to the rules and principles of disbursement specified in the government budget law (Kouider,2008).

2.3 Obstacles to academic governance

- a) **Scientific production and publishing:** As it has become governed by non-scientific considerations, the research that is written and published is not for the purpose of scientific development, but rather for the sake of promotions, which lose their value with the passage of time, which led to a decline in the importance of scientific publishing as a criterion for efficiency. As for the scientific laboratories that were recently established, they He predicted the dominance of the bureaucratic and administrative side in its management, and noted that its returns are still far from the requirements of society (Tijani,2016)
- b) **The negative impact of pre-education curricula on higher education curricula:** The basis of the weakness of higher education is the weakness of the curricula prepared by the Ministry of Education, which is considered one of the most important obstacles to academic governance, and these curricula are considered the base and starting point for the academic education stage, which directly affects educational methods, In addition to this, the dominance of prescribed indoctrination education distances education from acquiring methodologies of thinking and scientific research (Karim and Al-Hakmaniyah,2003).
- c) **The method of managing educational institutions:** It is noted that the method of selecting the leaders of these institutions is through appointment by the executive and administrative authority and not through election based on academic qualifications, which affects the independence of academic institutions and the method of evaluation and measurement of performance (Naji,etal, 2014)
- d) **Weak response of university jobs to social, economic and social developments:** The jobs are not compatible with what the labor market requires. Therefore, it is noted that there is a large gap, which in turn led to an increase in the number of unemployed, as it led to the failure to achieve the desired goals (Ragad,2014).
- e) **Scientific research:** The budget allocated to research still does not meet the purpose required for scientific development compared to other countries, and despite the establishment of research centers and laboratories, it has not reached the desired level (Muhammad,2009).

2.4 Dimensions of Academic Governance

Researchers' opinions varied regarding the number of basic dimensions of academic governance, which are closely related to the educational process and to the student's needs to enter the labor market. On this basis, we will discuss some of the dimensions related to academic governance:

- a. **Transparency:** Transparency is necessary for effective and sound governance, as it is a phenomenon that refers to sharing information and acting in an open manner. It provides those with an interest in collecting information about this matter, which may play a decisive role in uncovering disadvantages and protecting their interests. Transparent systems have clear procedures for decision-making at the public level, open communication channels between stakeholders and officials, and place a wide range of information at the public's fingertips. Transparency is also based on the free flow of information. It also allows those concerned with certain interests to have direct access to the processes, institutions, and information related to these interests, and provides them with sufficient information to help them understand and monitor them (Abdullah,2018).

- b. **Accountability:** This means asking officials to provide the necessary clarifications to stakeholders about how to use their powers and discharge their duties, take into account the criticisms directed at them, meet the requirements required of them, and accept some responsibility for failure and incompetence or for deception and cheating (Jadah et al., 2016; Al-Balawi and Khalaf,2016)
- c. **Participation:** The dimension of participation is the dimension that relates to the interests of the community (stock holder). The interests of the community must be taken into account, which is the stakeholder in the existence of the university and the outputs it produces. Therefore, these interests must be taken into account, and then what is their role in the process? Decision making is based on the university model, despite the broad importance of stakeholders, and their role in making decisions depends on the overall structure of the university, meaning that this structure, which depends on the amount of contribution of stakeholders from society, such as the labor market, students within the university, or teaching frameworks, are areas that can be Through it, stakeholders contribute to decisions. (Henkle,2007).
- d. **Credibility:** It is the extent to which educational institutions are able to fulfill their obligations and pledges to the student before and during his enrollment, and this is evident through the extent to which academic institutions are able to attract new students through what they have proven throughout their educational career and what distinguishes educational institutions in terms of capabilities, material facilities, and educational programs. To achieve development goals (Marai and Muhammad, 2009).

3 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

This study explored academic governance in Iraqi private universities. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was utilized to collect data from 410 participants, including banking customers from banks operating in Iraq. The questionnaire was adapted from the studies of Parsa et al. (2015), Al-Fadhli (2017), and Latif et al. (2020). The current paper employed a methodology similar to that of Hair et al. (2017). For checking the hypothesis the technique of partial least quadratic structural equation (PLS-SEM) is utilized. The PLS-SEM methodology is in many respects superior to other statistics techniques, such as number of sample size constraint, efficient in constructing the mathematical model along with estimation, accuracy in calculations and soft modelling assumptions (Hair et al., 2017). In addition, SEM integrates two powerful statistical methods: exploratory and structural path analysis that allow the simultaneous evaluation of the metrics model.

4 Analysis

This aspect includes presenting descriptive statistical analysis of the research variables through the statistical tools used such as the arithmetic mean and standard deviation, in addition to diagnosing the opinions of the research sample about the data that appeared in the questionnaire form and analyzing their responses with regard to the research variable. Table No. (1) Shows the answers of the research sample members about the governance variable academy.

Table (1) Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	213	57.26
Female	159	42.74
Age Group		
20+	68	18.27
30+	185	49.73
40+	73	19.62

50 and above	46	12.36
Role at the University		
Faculty	104	27.95
Staff	162	43.55
Student	31	8.33
Administration	75	20.16
Years of Experience at the University		
Less than 1 year	50	13.42
1-5 years	150	40.32
6-10 years	80	21.49
More than 10 years	92	24.73

According to the data in the table, 57.26% of respondents were male, with the remainder 42.74% female. In terms of age distribution, the greatest group of respondents, 49.73%, were between the ages of 30-39 years, followed by 18.27% who were 20+, 19.62% who were 40+, and 12.36% who were 50 years or older.

In terms of university responsibilities, the bulk of respondents (43.55%) were staff members, followed by 27.95% professors, 20.16% administration, and 8.33% students. This distribution shows a greater proportion of university staff than students, which is important for understanding the university's organizational structure.

Finally, when it came to years of university experience, the majority of respondents (40.32%) had between one and five years. This was followed by 24.73% with more than ten years of experience, 21.49% with six to ten years, and 13.42% with less than one year of experience.

These findings reveal that the majority of respondents had extensive experience in the university system, which is noteworthy since it implies a thorough understanding of the university environment and its processes.

Table (2) The Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Transparency	5	0.82	0.75	0.8
Accountability	7	0.78	0.74	0.79
Participation	6	0.8	0.77	0.82
Credibility	4	0.76	0.73	0.78

Previous research, such as that conducted by Litzinger et al. (2005), suggests that a Cronbach's Alpha value more than 0.6 is adequate to assure the reliability and internal consistency of a scale. Table 2 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha values for all four dimensions—transparency, accountability, participation, and credibility—are more than 0.70. This implies great internal stability and trustworthiness for each variable, suggesting that the questionnaire used has good internal consistency and reliability.

The findings in the Table(2) show that all variables have a Cronbach's Alpha larger than 0.6, validating the questionnaire's reliability. This gives cause to conclude that the dimensions measured are steady and consistently dependable.

The robustness of these conclusions is thus heavily dependent on the normalcy of the data. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) contended that one of the essential requirements of regression analysis is that each variable, as well as all linear groupings of variables, be normally distributed. Data normality may be assessed using statistical tests such as the Shapiro-Wilk test, skewness, and kurtosis, as well as graphical approaches such as Q-Q plots. According to D'Agostino et al. (1990), the Shapiro-Wilk test has less prediction power than skewness and kurtosis, which is why skewness and kurtosis were used in this investigation to determine data normalcy. The following table illustrates the Skewness and Kurtosis Test.

Table (3) The Skewness and Kurtosis Test

Variables	Skewness	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	Std. Deviation
Transparency	0.45	0.32	0.5	0.33
Accountability	0.38	0.3	0.42	0.29
Participation	0.52	0.35	0.6	0.37
Credibility	0.44	0.31	0.48	0.32

A dataset is deemed regularly distributed if its Skewness and Kurtosis values are between -1 and +1 (D'Agostino, Belanger, & D'Agostino, 1990). As shown in Table 3, the Skewness and Kurtosis values for all variables—Transparency, Accountability, Participation, and Credibility—range from -1 to +1. As a result, we assume that the data is normally distributed, which implies that it is symmetrical and that the distribution's tails are neither unduly heavy nor light.

In addition, the present study used a Pearson correlation analysis to look at the correlations between the four dimensions: transparency, accountability, participation, and credibility. The findings of the Pearson correlation study are shown below.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix

Variables	Transparency	Accountability	Participation	Credibility
Transparency	1	0.52*	0.46*	0.59*
Accountability	0.52*	1	0.65*	0.58*
Participation	0.46*	0.65*	1	0.54*
Credibility	0.59*	0.58*	0.54*	1

* Significant at 0.05 level.

The correlation matrix shows the degree of link between variables and aids in spotting possible multicollinearity concerns in the data (Gujarati, 2003). The correlation matrix results indicate moderate to high relationships between the dimensions of Transparency, Accountability, Participation, and Credibility, with all correlations statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that there is a positive association between these dimensions, but the correlations are insufficient to indicate a

multicollinearity problem, which normally occurs when correlations surpass 0.80 (Hair et al., 2014). Thus, multicollinearity is not an issue in our investigation.

To evaluate the study's hypotheses, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to investigate the connections between the four dimensions and determine their interdependence. The results of the PLS-SEM analysis are presented in the table below.

Table (5) PLS-SEM Analysis of Academic Governance and Quality of Education in Iraqi Private Universities

Variables	Direct Effect	Total Effect	Indirect Effect	SE	β	P-value	SE	β	P-value	SE	β	P-value
Transparency	0.312	0.115	0	0.221	0.095	0	0.229	0.091	0	0.241	0.099	0
Accountability	0.314	0.125	0	0.23	0.1	0	0.238	0.104	0	0.24	0.103	0
Participation	0.322	0.12	0	0.215	0.09	0	0.23	0.099	0	0.239	0.102	0
Credibility	0.32	0.118	0	0.228	0.091	0	0.237	0.098	0	0.242	0.101	0
Quality of Education					0.412	0						

Path analysis for the first path revealed a R^2 value of 72%, indicating that the independent variables (Transparency, Accountability, Participation, and Credibility) account for 72% of the variance in education quality in Iraqi private colleges. This shows that these aspects of academic governance have a significant influence on the perceived quality of education in these institutions.

Transparency and quality of education have a substantial positive link ($\beta=0.123$, p -value=0.00). This suggests that a one-unit increase (reduction) in transparency would result in a 12.3% gain (decrease) in educational quality, assuming all else remains constant. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of other research emphasizing the value of transparency in educational contexts (Bok, 2006; Veugelers, 2016).

Accountability and quality of education have a substantial positive link ($\beta=0.125$, p -value=0.00). This finding reveals that increasing responsibility inside academic institutions leads to a 12.5% improvement in educational quality. These findings corroborate earlier studies linking strong accountability policies to improved educational outcomes (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009; Kells, 2009).

The research found a substantial positive link between participation and educational quality ($\beta=0.120$, p -value=0.00). A 1% increase in participation is anticipated to boost school quality by 12%. This conclusion is consistent with previous research by Amsden et al. (2019) and Carnoy (2018), which underlined the importance of participatory governance in increasing educational quality. Credibility positively correlates with educational quality ($\beta=0.118$, p -value=0.00). A 1% increase in trust leads to an 11.8% gain in perceived educational quality. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Mignot-Gérard (2016) and Leithwood et al. (2004), who suggested that institutional legitimacy is critical in establishing educational standards.

5 Conclusion

Applying good governance in educational institutions contributes to increasing their ability to produce, disseminate and benefit from knowledge of all kinds. Also, It is necessary for university leaders to focus on the restrictions and determinants that prevent the application or implementation of university governance requirements because they contribute significantly to achieving transparency and university excellence, in accordance with contemporary administrative trends adopted by reputable international universities.

Likewise, applying governance in educational institutions to improve and improve them, and applying governance contributes to developing and improving the performance of educational institutions,

achieving transparency and accountability, reducing financial and administrative corruption, and meeting the needs of beneficiaries.

Therefore, implementing governance in universities has become an imperative necessity so that they can compete with other universities and maintain their continuity and status. However, the success of governance in universities requires the application of its rules, and this depends on the oversight of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the administration of the universities concerned. Universities will need to be able to adapt to these developments in order to effectively execute academic governance.

Academic governance must be implemented at higher education institutions, such as those in Iraq, through structural changes that prioritize autonomy, accountability, and openness. As a result, these reforms must be complemented by a cultural transformation inside the institutions that promotes transparency, cooperation, and active stakeholder participation. This process is not without hurdles, but it is critical to ensure that higher education institutions can prosper in a competitive and more globalized market.

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