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INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AUTONOMY, AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Amjid Khan [1], Imran Muhammad [2], Muhammad Qasim [3], Raheem Ullah [4]

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Affiliations:

[1] CEO, Friends Associates, Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: ceo@friendsassociates.net

[2] Treasurer, The University of Haripur, Pakistan
Email: imran.muhammad@uoh.edu.pk

[3] Deputy Treasurer, Women University, Swabi, Pakistan
Email: qasim9965@gmail.com

[4] Assistant Director, Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC), Pakistan Global Institute (PGI), Rawalpindi, Pakistan
Email: raheemullah.edu@gmail.com

Corresponding Author's Email:

[1] ceo@friendsassociates.net

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Abstract

Effective governance is central to the accountability, academic performance, and institutional development of public universities. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, university governance operates within a framework of provincial legislation, government oversight, and national higher education policy. This paper uses conceptual and qualitative documentary analysis to examine how institutional autonomy, public accountability, transparency, stakeholder participation, and policy implementation relate to governance effectiveness. The analysis draws on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universities Act, 2012, its 2024 amendment, Higher Education Commission quality assurance guidance, and relevant scholarly literature. It distinguishes formal legal arrangements from the organisational conditions required to implement them. The analysis suggests that legislation provides an institutional foundation but does not, by itself, establish effective governance. Clear responsibilities, meaningful consultation, transparent decisions, adequate administrative capacity, and evidence-based review are also necessary. Financial planning and quality assurance should inform institutional priorities rather than operate as isolated processes. The paper offers policy recommendations for more accountable and participatory university governance in KP and identifies questions for future institution-level empirical research. Because the study relies on documents rather than primary data, its conclusions are conceptual and should not be interpreted as evidence of governance performance at individual universities.

Keywords: University Governance, Public Policy, Institutional Autonomy, Accountability, Policy Implementation, Higher Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions contribute to human capital development, knowledge creation, innovation, social mobility, and economic growth. Universities support national development by educating skilled graduates, conducting research, providing professional development, and generating knowledge relevant to public policy. Public universities are particularly important in countries such as Pakistan, where they expand access to higher education and support regional development, social inclusion, and community needs. Their effectiveness depends not only on teaching and research resources but also on how institutional priorities are set, authority is distributed, and policies are implemented (Clark, 1983). University governance encompasses the structures, relationships, decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms through which institutions are directed and monitored. It operates across national and provincial policy systems, regulatory authorities, university governing bodies, and academic units. Universities must therefore respond to statutory requirements while addressing their own academic priorities and organisational needs.

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The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) identifies governance, funding, institutional arrangements, and system performance as interconnected dimensions of higher education. Governance should consequently be understood as both an institutional arrangement and an ongoing policy process (Fielden, 2008; Trakman, 2008).

Public policy establishes educational priorities, institutional responsibilities, resource allocations, and approaches to performance assessment. In higher education, policy addresses university establishment, institutional autonomy, academic recruitment, research, financial management, quality assurance, and access to educational opportunities. However, policy objectives do not automatically translate into institutional practice. Their implementation depends on administrative capacity, leadership, coordination, available resources, and the willingness and ability of institutional actors to carry out assigned responsibilities. An assessment of university governance must therefore consider both policy design and the context in which policies are interpreted and implemented (Hood, 1991).

A central governance challenge is the relationship between institutional autonomy and public accountability. Autonomy enables universities to make academic, administrative, and organisational decisions within legal limits, including decisions about research priorities, academic programmes, and institutional management. Accountability requires universities to demonstrate lawful and responsible use of public resources, transparent procedures, and commitment to educational quality. These principles are complementary, although balancing them can be difficult. Excessive external intervention may limit universities' responsiveness to academic needs, whereas inadequate oversight may undermine transparency and performance review. Effective governance requires clearly allocated authority, appropriate review mechanisms, and safeguards for academic independence and the public interest (Berdahl, 1990; Enders et al., 2013).

Higher education governance in Pakistan involves provincial governments, the Higher Education Commission (HEC), university governing bodies, and institutional administrations. Provincial legislation plays an important role in determining organisational structures and administrative responsibilities, while HEC provides national policy and quality assurance guidance. This multilevel arrangement requires coordination between national standards, provincial law, and institutional priorities. Universities also differ in mission, disciplines, resources, and operating environments. Governance effectiveness therefore depends partly on the clarity of institutional responsibilities and the consistent communication and implementation of policy across levels (Ferlie et al., 2008; Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, 2014).

Public universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provide a useful context for examining the relationship between governance and public policy. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universities Act, 2012, establishes legal arrangements for university authorities, administration, and oversight. Its subsequent amendments, including the 2024 amendment, form part of the province's evolving legal framework (Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2012, 2024). These instruments help define institutional responsibilities and the relationship between provincial policy objectives and university decision-making. Three governance concerns are especially relevant. First, authority needs to be allocated clearly among provincial bodies, university governing authorities, senior administrators, and academic units. Second, universities need transparent and accountable procedures for budgeting, recruitment, academic planning, and institutional development. Third, faculty members, students, administrative staff, and external representatives need meaningful opportunities to inform decisions rather than merely formal representation (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson, 2004).

Policy implementation links legal provisions and institutional objectives to administrative practice. It requires coordination among university departments, staff training, adequate funding, reliable information systems, and mechanisms for monitoring progress. An important question is whether those responsible for implementing a policy understand their duties and have the resources to fulfil them. Governance reforms may introduce new procedures without producing corresponding changes in institutional practice if communication, capacity, and evaluation remain insufficient. Formal structures should therefore not be treated

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as evidence of effective implementation; the relationship between rules and administrative practice must also be examined (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980).

Quality assurance connects university governance with educational policy. Universities are expected to maintain academic standards, review programmes, support research, and respond to changing expectations regarding graduate outcomes and institutional performance. HEC quality assurance framework emphasises accountability, evidence-based assessment, and continuous improvement (HEC, 2023). Quality review is most useful when its findings inform strategic planning, curriculum development, resource allocation, and corrective action (Harvey & Green, 1993; Stensaker, 2008). Implementation also varies across institutions because public universities differ in size, location, academic focus, student population, and administrative capacity. Common legal standards may therefore require institution-specific support. Distinguishing policy design from implementation capacity is essential when evaluating governance arrangements across the province.

Legislation and formal administrative bodies provide only partial evidence of governance effectiveness. Governing bodies may have defined responsibilities, yet their practical contribution depends on how decisions are made, documented, implemented, and reviewed. Similarly, prescribed transparency procedures are useful only when reliable information is available and appropriate follow-up occurs. Formal stakeholder representation does not necessarily ensure meaningful participation. A conceptual analysis must therefore distinguish the objectives stated in laws and policies from the institutional conditions required to achieve them (Kezar, 2004; Kezar & Eckel, 2004; Shattock, 2013).

Against this background, the present paper examines governance and public policy in KP public universities through conceptual analysis of legislation, higher education policy documents, and scholarly literature. It considers institutional autonomy, public accountability, transparency, stakeholder participation, policy implementation, and institutional capacity as interconnected elements of governance. The paper does not report original fieldwork or compare individual universities' performance. Instead, it clarifies conceptual relationships between formal governance arrangements and the processes through which institutional objectives may be achieved.

The paper has four aims: to examine the provincial legal and policy context; to explain the connections among autonomy, accountability, transparency, and policy implementation; to identify governance questions requiring further investigation; and to outline policy measures that may strengthen university administration. It contributes to public administration and higher education policy discussions by connecting formal authority with practical decision-making, administrative capacity, and mechanisms for review. The resulting framework may also guide future empirical research on governance in KP public universities.

1.1 Problem Statement

Public university governance involves complementary but sometimes competing objectives. Universities must maintain academic standards, use public resources responsibly, support research, and respond to societal needs while retaining sufficient authority to make academic and administrative decisions. The central problem examined here is the gap that may arise between formal governance structures and the conditions required for policy implementation. Legislation can establish governing bodies and prescribe procedures, but effective governance also depends on how authority is exercised, decisions are explained, stakeholders participate, and administrative resources are used (Musselin & Teixeira, 2014). Analysing these relationships in KP's provincial and national policy context can help move governance debates beyond formal institutional design towards implementation and accountability.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the legal and policy framework governing public universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To explain the relationships among institutional autonomy, public accountability, transparency, and policy implementation.
3. To identify conceptual governance challenges and questions requiring further investigation.
4. To propose policy measures that may strengthen university governance and institutional effectiveness.

1.3 Research Questions

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1. Which legal and policy instruments shape the governance of public universities in KP?
2. How can institutional autonomy and public accountability be balanced in university governance?
3. What conceptual challenges do the legal framework and scholarly literature identify for governance and policy implementation?
4. Which policy measures could strengthen transparency, participation, and administrative effectiveness?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to debates on higher education policy and public administration by bringing institutional autonomy, public accountability, and policy implementation into a single analytical framework. The discussion offers policymakers, university administrators, academic staff, and researchers a structured basis for evaluating governance arrangements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It also identifies questions for future empirical work on how statutory provisions are interpreted and applied within individual universities.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Understanding University Governance

University governance comprises the structures and practices through which institutions make decisions, distribute authority, assign responsibilities, and assess performance. In higher education, governance operates at both system and institutional levels. Governments and regulatory bodies establish legal requirements, policy priorities, and quality standards; university authorities manage academic programmes, allocate resources, and set internal administrative priorities (Clark, 1983; Trakman, 2008). Musselin (2021) distinguishes institutional decision-making from the wider relationships among universities, governments, and higher education systems. This distinction is especially relevant in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where university-level decisions operate within provincial legislation and national policy guidance. Effective coordination must accommodate the different missions, resources, and local circumstances of public universities (de Boer et al., 2007).

2.2 Institutional Autonomy

Institutional autonomy refers to a university's ability to make academic, administrative, and organisational decisions within applicable laws and regulations. It may include decisions about programmes, research priorities, staffing, internal administration, and resource allocation (Enders et al., 2013; UNESCO, 1997). Autonomy does not remove the obligation to account for institutional decisions and public expenditure. Rather, it enables universities to respond to their academic missions while remaining subject to lawful oversight. A comparative study of Asian higher education governance notes that reforms to institutional autonomy can introduce challenges involving finance and staff participation (Varghese & Martin, 2014). In KP, autonomy must therefore be considered alongside provincial legal responsibilities and national higher education standards. Both inadequate discretion and insufficient oversight can weaken governance (UNESCO, 1997).

2.3 Public Accountability and Transparency

Public accountability requires institutions and officeholders to explain and justify decisions, demonstrate compliance with relevant rules, and remain subject to appropriate scrutiny. In public universities, this includes educational quality, financial management, recruitment, planning, and the responsible use of public resources (Bovens, 2007). Transparency supports accountability by making relevant policies, procedures, decision criteria, and institutional information accessible to oversight bodies and stakeholders. HEC's Pakistan Precepts, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education provide a national reference for accountability, participation, and continuous improvement (HEC, 2023). Accountability should extend beyond procedural compliance to institutional learning and corrective action. Clear standards, accessible information, review processes, and documented follow-up are therefore important elements of effective oversight (Bovens, 2007).

2.4 Public Policy Implementation

Public policy implementation is the process through which policy objectives and formal requirements are translated into institutional decisions and practices. Policy formulation and implementation are related but distinct; implementation depends on resources, organisational arrangements, leadership, coordination, and

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monitoring (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). In universities, implementation may involve applying legislation through institutional statutes, establishing functioning governing bodies, following recruitment and financial procedures, meeting quality assurance requirements, and reviewing performance (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). Changes in legal responsibilities require interpretation and action by institutional actors. Consistent communication, administrative coordination, and opportunities for review therefore shape implementation quality (Musselin & Teixeira, 2014).

2.5 Analytical Framework

The analysis is organised around three interconnected concepts:

1. Institutional autonomy refers to the discretion to make appropriate academic and administrative decisions within the law.
2. Public accountability refers to the obligation to justify decisions, follow applicable rules, and demonstrate responsible institutional conduct.
3. Policy implementation refers to the translation of formal policy objectives into operational practice.

These concepts are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Transparency and stakeholder participation connect them, while institutional capacity and review processes influence their practical operation. The analytical framework therefore treats governance effectiveness as a relationship among formal rules, decision-making authority, organisational resources, and feedback mechanisms (Emerson et al., 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual documentary-analysis design to examine governance and public policy in KP public universities. It analyses published legal and policy materials and relevant scholarly literature rather than collecting primary data (Bowen, 2009). The study is organised around five core themes: institutional autonomy, public accountability, transparency, stakeholder participation, and policy implementation. Financial governance and quality assurance are considered as related dimensions of institutional decision-making and improvement. The themes provide an interpretive framework rather than a validated measurement scale (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.2 Sources of Data

The analysis draws on secondary sources, including provincial legislation, national higher education policy documents, HEC quality assurance guidance, and scholarly publications on university governance. Principal policy sources include the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universities Act, 2012, its 2024 amendment, and HEC's PSG-2023 guidance. The scholarly literature provides concepts for examining autonomy, accountability, participation, and relations between universities and public authorities. These documents are used to interpret governance expectations and potential implementation conditions, not to establish the actual practices or performance of every public university in KP.

Table 1

Policy and Legal Documents Examined in the Analysis

Source	Scope	Use in this analysis	Limitations
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universities Act, 2012	Provincial law	We examined the formal arrangement of university authorities, their roles, and the principles of accountability and representation.	The Act describes the legal structure; it does not tell us how each university works in practice.
KP Universities (Amendment) Act, 2024	Amendment to provincial law	We considered the changes to the province's legal setting for public university governance.	The effects of these changes need to be checked in individual university records.
HEC quality assurance guidelines (PSG-2023)	National quality assurance guidance	We used this framework to discuss accountability,	The guidelines set expectations; they do not show whether those

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Source	Scope	Use in this analysis	Limitations
		institutional review, and continuous improvement.	expectations have been met.
Pakistan Vision 2025 (2014)	National development policy	We considered the wider policy priorities for education, institutional reform, and development.	This is national policy context, not evidence about the performance of a particular university.
UNESCO recommendation (1997)	International guidance	We used its principles to help explain academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and responsibility.	It is a guiding reference and does not replace provincial legislation.

Note. The sources establish legal and policy context. This study did not assess compliance by individual universities.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The documentary analysis was organised into three interpretive stages, drawing on established approaches to document analysis and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

1. We examined legislative and policy documents to identify formal governance objectives, institutional responsibilities, and provisions relating to management, accountability, and transparency.
2. We interpreted the identified provisions through concepts developed in the governance literature, particularly autonomy, accountability, stakeholder involvement, policy implementation, and organisational capacity (Bowen, 2009).
3. We brought the themes together to develop the conceptual findings and policy implications. In doing so, we distinguished what the legal and policy texts state, what can be inferred from the scholarly literature, and which recommendations are proposed by the authors. This distinction is necessary because the study does not measure the governance performance of individual universities.

3.4 Analytical Categories

The documentary material was interpreted through the following analytical categories:

Institutional autonomy: The distribution of responsibility for academic, administrative, and organisational decisions between public authorities and universities.

Public accountability: The obligation to explain decisions, comply with applicable rules, and account for the use of public resources.

Transparency: The availability of institutional policies, decision criteria, administrative procedures, and other information relevant to oversight and accountability.

Stakeholder participation: Opportunities for faculty, students, administrative personnel, and other relevant groups to contribute meaningfully to institutional decisions.

Policy implementation: The translation of legal and policy requirements into institutional activities through assigned responsibilities, coordination, resources, and monitoring.

Financial governance: The relationship between institutional objectives, budgeting, expenditure, resource allocation, and financial oversight.

Quality assurance: The integration of academic review, institutional assessment, and continuous improvement into governance. These categories guide interpretation of the documents; they are not a validated measurement scale and do not produce numerical university-level scores.

Table 2

Governance Dimensions Examined in the Documentary Analysis

Governance area	Analytical focus	Evidence for future research	Supporting literature
Institutional autonomy	The scope universities have to make academic and	University statutes, delegated powers, programme	Berdahl (1990); Enders et al. (2013); UNESCO (1997).

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Governance area	Analytical focus	Evidence for future research	Supporting literature
	administrative decisions within the law.	approvals, and appointment procedures.	
Public accountability	How universities are expected to explain decisions and account for public resources.	Annual reports, audit records, decisions of oversight bodies, and follow-up actions.	Bovens (2007); HEC (2023).
Transparency	Whether rules, reasons for decisions, and relevant information can be made clear to stakeholders.	Published rules, reports, decision criteria, and access to information.	Bovens (2007); HEC (2022).
Stakeholder participation	Whether faculty, students, and administrative staff have meaningful opportunities to contribute.	Committee minutes, consultation records, and evidence of how feedback was considered.	Ansell & Gash (2008); Bryson (2004); Kezar & Eckel (2004).
Policy implementation	The steps needed to turn official policy into day-to-day university practice.	Implementation plans, assigned responsibilities, staff training, budgets, and progress reports.	Pressman & Wildavsky (1984); Sabatier & Mazmanian (1980).
Financial governance	How financial planning and spending relate to academic and institutional priorities.	Approved budgets, expenditure statements, and records of resource allocation.	Fielden (2008); OECD (2019).
Quality assurance	How academic review is linked with improvement in university planning and activities.	Quality assurance reports, review findings, and documented corrective steps.	Harvey and Green (1993); HEC (2023); Stensaker (2008).

Note. These categories guided the conceptual analysis. The records listed as potential evidence were not collected or scored in this study.

3.5 Methodological Limitations

The study does not include interviews, questionnaires, direct observation, or university-level financial and performance data. It therefore cannot determine the prevalence of governance problems, compare the performance of particular universities, or estimate the effects of governance structures on academic outcomes. The conclusions are limited to the conceptual relationships identified through documentary interpretation. Future empirical studies should examine how these arrangements operate in practice. Although the principal documentary sources and analytical themes are identified, this paper does not claim to be an exhaustive systematic review or a statutory compliance audit.

4. Documentary Analysis

4.1 Legislative Framework

University governance in KP is shaped by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universities Act, 2012, and subsequent amendments. These legal instruments establish institutional authorities and administrative arrangements and provide a formal basis for oversight, accountability, and stakeholder representation (Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2012, 2024). From a public policy perspective, legislation creates structures through which governmental objectives may be pursued. However, the allocation of authority in law must be distinguished from the exercise of that authority in practice. Governing bodies, procedures, and reporting requirements provide a foundation, but their effectiveness depends on consistent implementation and follow-up. Consequently, statutory provisions are evidence of formal governance design, not proof of governance performance. University statutes, governing-body minutes, institutional reports, and

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administrative records would be needed to evaluate how the framework operates in particular institutions (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

4.2 Institutional Autonomy and Accountability

The literature treats autonomy and accountability as linked elements of higher education governance. Institutions need discretion to make academically appropriate decisions while remaining responsible for legal compliance, public funding, and educational quality (OECD, 2019; Varghese & Martin, 2014).

In KP public universities, this relationship raises questions about the allocation of decision-making authority. Provincial authorities have a legitimate role in establishing and overseeing the legal framework, while universities require sufficient discretion to organise academic programmes, determine research priorities, and manage internal affairs within that framework.

The analysis indicates that clear boundaries between these responsibilities could strengthen governance. When decision-making powers and obligations are defined, university authorities may act with greater clarity while remaining accountable for their decisions. Conversely, overlapping or uncertain responsibilities can complicate coordination and implementation (Kezar, 2004).

These are conceptual implications rather than evidence that the same difficulties occur across all KP universities. Institution-specific analysis is required to determine whether particular arrangements create practical problems.

4.3 Transparency and Accountability

Accountability and transparency are central to public university governance because institutions must demonstrate responsible use of public resources and compliance with relevant requirements. HEC's quality assurance framework provides national guidance on institutional review, accountability, and continuous improvement (HEC, 2023).

Procedural accountability concerns compliance with rules, reporting requirements, and administrative processes. Substantive accountability concerns whether institutional decisions advance stated objectives and whether identified weaknesses lead to corrective action.

Both dimensions are important. Formal reporting may establish whether procedures have been followed, but outcome assessment and documented follow-up are also needed. Transparency becomes meaningful when stakeholders can understand institutional decisions and evaluate the responsibilities attached to them (Bovens, 2007).

For KP public universities, this suggests linking documented procedures with performance review and corrective action. Relevant evidence might include strategic plans, annual reports, financial statements, quality assurance findings, and records of follow-up. The present analysis does not claim that these mechanisms are either present or absent in all institutions.

4.4 Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholder participation matters because university decisions affect academic staff, administrators, students, and external groups in different ways. Formal representation can provide an opportunity for diverse views to enter institutional deliberations, but it does not necessarily amount to meaningful participation (Bryson, 2004; Emerson et al., 2012).

Three conditions are particularly relevant: access to appropriate information, opportunities to contribute to deliberation, and procedures showing how input is considered. Together, these conditions distinguish nominal representation from participation that informs decisions (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Academic staff can contribute disciplinary and teaching expertise; students can raise concerns about learning and services; and administrative personnel can identify implementation constraints. Their contributions are more likely to improve decisions when institutions provide structured opportunities to consider and respond to them.

The analytical focus should therefore extend beyond committee membership to the extent and quality of participation. Whether existing arrangements meet these conditions in KP universities remains an empirical question requiring institutional documents and stakeholder perspectives.

4.5 Policy Implementation and Institutional Capacity

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Policy implementation involves translating formal objectives into institutional activities. The literature indicates that implementation requires coherent policy design, assigned responsibilities, administrative expertise, adequate resources, and monitoring (Musselin & Teixeira, 2014).

Even a clearly stated policy requires implementation plans, interdepartmental communication, staff training, and progress review. Where these conditions are weak, implementation may be inconsistent or difficult to assess. These are potential governance risks identified conceptually; they should not be treated as documented deficiencies in every KP university.

Implementation conditions may differ across universities because institutions vary in size, academic mission, administrative capacity, and operating context. A common policy framework can establish consistent standards while allowing different forms of implementation support (Ferlie et al., 2008).

Policy adoption and implementation should therefore be assessed separately. A sound review would consider whether responsibilities have been assigned, resources provided, progress monitored, and problems identified and addressed.

4.6 Financial Governance and Quality Assurance

Financial governance concerns how institutional priorities shape budgeting, expenditure, and financial oversight. Quality assurance concerns the evaluation and improvement of educational provision. Although distinct, these functions are closely connected within university governance (Harvey & Green, 1993).

Institutional plans require adequate resources, and spending decisions should reflect educational and organisational priorities. Quality assurance findings may identify areas requiring investment, administrative adjustment, or changes in academic practice (Stensaker, 2008).

HEC's quality assurance framework provides a basis for incorporating review and continuous improvement into institutional governance (HEC, 2023). The conceptual implication is that quality assurance should inform planning and budgeting rather than operate as an isolated administrative exercise.

This documentary analysis cannot determine the financial condition of KP public universities or the effectiveness of their quality assurance arrangements. Such conclusions would require verified budgets, audited accounts, institutional review reports, and evidence of subsequent action.

5. Conceptual Findings

The findings presented here are derived from thematic interpretation of legislation, policy guidance, and scholarly literature. They are conceptual conclusions rather than statistical results or findings representative of governance practices across all KP public universities.

5.1 Formal Governance Structures Provide an Institutional Foundation

Provincial legislation establishes a formal basis for university organisation, authorities, and responsibilities. This is an essential starting point for governance, but the existence of a legal structure does not establish the quality of decision-making or implementation.

Governance assessment must therefore distinguish formal institutional arrangements from the ways in which they operate in practice.

5.2 Institutional Autonomy and Accountability Are Complementary

The literature suggests that institutional autonomy and public accountability are complementary. Universities need sufficient discretion to fulfil academic responsibilities, while public authorities and other stakeholders have legitimate interests in legal compliance, transparency, and responsible resource management (Berdahl, 1990).

Balancing autonomy with oversight is consequently a central governance concern. Clear responsibilities, regular review, and credible accountability mechanisms offer a basis for achieving this balance.

5.3 Transparency Requires More Than Formal Reporting

Transparency is most useful when institutional information is relevant, understandable, and accessible enough for stakeholders to assess decisions and responsibilities. Formal reporting contributes to oversight, but meaningful accountability also requires review and follow-up (Bovens, 2007).

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Accountability should therefore support institutional learning and corrective action, not only procedural compliance.

5.4 Stakeholder Representation Does Not Ensure Participation

Formal stakeholder representation can create opportunities for engagement, but meaningful participation also requires access to information, opportunities to contribute, and procedures for considering feedback (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

The quality of participation should be considered when evaluating governance. Whether current arrangements achieve meaningful participation in individual KP universities requires further empirical investigation.

5.5 Policy Implementation Depends on Institutional Capacity

The conceptual analysis identifies administrative resources, expertise, coordination, and monitoring as important conditions for policy implementation. The formal adoption of legislation or policy does not, by itself, demonstrate successful implementation (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980).

Governance assessment should therefore examine the processes linking stated policy objectives with institutional activity, review, and corrective measures.

5.6 Financial Planning and Quality Assurance Should Be Integrated

Financial planning and quality assurance are interconnected because institutional improvement requires resources, and resource allocation should reflect academic priorities. Quality assurance findings can inform planning, while financial monitoring can help assess whether approved priorities are being supported.

This relationship suggests a need to integrate institutional planning, financial governance, and quality review in university policy.

5.7 Institution-Specific Evidence Is Necessary to Assess Performance

Public universities differ in mission, size, location, resources, and organisational structure. A province-wide conceptual framework therefore cannot be used to infer uniform governance performance across institutions.

Reliable conclusions about governance effectiveness require institution-specific evidence. Such evidence would help determine how formal arrangements operate and whether governance challenges differ among universities.

Table 3

Conceptual Conclusions and Their Policy Implications

Theme	Conceptual conclusion	Evidence needed in practice	Policy implication
Formal governance	We found that legislation provides the structure for governance, but legal provisions alone cannot establish how effectively it works.	University statutes, meeting minutes, and records of decisions and follow-up.	Make responsibilities and decision-making authority clear.
Autonomy and accountability	Our analysis treats institutional independence and public oversight as connected responsibilities rather than competing goals.	Rules on delegated authority, approval procedures, and accountability reviews.	Clarify which decisions belong to universities and which require public oversight.
Transparency	We concluded that reporting matters most when information can be understood and used to improve decisions.	Access to reports, disclosure practices, and records of corrective action.	Make key information accessible and connect reporting with follow-up.
Stakeholder participation	We distinguished having representatives on a committee	Consultation records, meeting minutes, and	Create regular opportunities for

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Theme	Conceptual conclusion	Evidence needed in practice	Policy implication
	from giving stakeholders a real voice in decisions.	responses to suggestions.	consultation and explain how feedback is used.
Policy implementation	We identified resources, administrative capacity, coordination, and monitoring as conditions for putting policy into practice.	Work plans, staffing and training records, budgets, and progress reviews.	Pair policy changes with practical plans and the resources to carry them out.
Finance and quality assurance	We found a clear conceptual link between budgeting, university priorities, and continuous academic improvement.	Budgets, audited accounts, quality reviews, and evidence of follow-up.	Use quality reviews to inform planning and resource allocation.

Note. These conclusions synthesise the legal, policy, and scholarly sources reviewed. They are conceptual interpretations, not observations or measured results from individual KP universities.

6. Discussion

The analysis conceptualises university governance as the interaction between formal institutional structures and the processes used to implement public policy. This perspective is consistent with higher education research that treats autonomy, accountability, funding, and organisational arrangements as interrelated aspects of system performance (OECD, 2019).

First, governance design must be distinguished from governance practice. Legislation can establish responsibilities and accountability procedures, but their effectiveness depends on institutional capacity, coordination, and monitoring. For KP, assessment of the provincial legal framework should be complemented by evidence on how its provisions are applied within individual universities.

Second, institutional autonomy and public accountability require a coherent allocation of authority. Universities need discretion to respond to academic priorities, while public oversight safeguards responsible use of resources. Governance arrangements should clarify which decisions require external approval and which can be made at institutional level, consistently with applicable law.

Third, accountability mechanisms should contribute to institutional improvement. Reporting requirements are necessary, but effective oversight also involves using evidence to identify problems, implement corrective measures, and monitor progress. This approach accords with quality assurance frameworks that emphasise review and continuous improvement (HEC, 2023). Accountability is therefore relevant not only to compliance but also to better institutional decision-making.

Fourth, stakeholder participation contributes to legitimacy and administrative effectiveness. University decisions affect different academic and administrative groups, and formal representation alone cannot establish whether their views influence outcomes. Future evaluations should examine both the composition of governing bodies and the procedures through which stakeholder input is considered (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Fifth, the administrative capacity required to implement policy may vary across institutions. Common provincial standards can coexist with tailored support in the form of staffing, training, resources, or technical assistance. This does not imply different accountability standards; rather, it recognises that implementation problems may arise from limited capacity or unclear procedures as well as from noncompliance (de Boer et al., 2007).

Sixth, financial governance and quality assurance should be linked through institutional planning. Resource allocations ought to reflect academic priorities, and quality review findings should inform future decisions. However, the practical operation of these relationships in KP cannot be assessed without verified institutional financial and administrative records.

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Taken together, these arguments suggest that governance reform should not be limited to statutory amendments or additional administrative bodies. Attention is also needed to implementation processes, information quality, institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring and evaluation. These elements help explain how formal authority may contribute to institutional effectiveness (Fielden, 2008).

Future empirical research could compare selected KP public universities using governing-body records, institutional reports, financial documents, university statutes, and stakeholder interviews. Such work would help establish whether the conceptual issues identified here occur in practice and how they differ across institutional contexts (Bowen, 2009).

7. Policy Recommendations

The following measures are proposed on the basis of the conceptual analysis.

7.1 Clarify Institutional Responsibilities

Provincial authorities and university governing bodies should clearly specify decision-making, implementation, and oversight responsibilities in relevant legislation, statutes, and institutional procedures.

7.2 Strengthen Evidence-Based Accountability

Universities should connect reporting requirements with institutional objectives and documented follow-up. Performance indicators should reflect institutional missions and be supported by verifiable evidence.

7.3 Improve Access to Institutional Information

Universities should maintain accessible, up-to-date information on relevant policies, administrative procedures, strategic plans, and appropriate financial and performance reports, subject to applicable legal and privacy requirements.

7.4 Establish Meaningful Stakeholder Consultation

Universities should provide structured opportunities for faculty, students, and administrative personnel to contribute to relevant policy discussions. Clear procedures should explain how feedback is considered and how decisions are communicated (Bryson, 2004).

7.5 Support Policy Implementation

Major policy initiatives should identify responsible units, required resources, implementation timelines, and monitoring arrangements. Administrative training and coordination should be provided where needed (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

7.6 Align Budgeting with Institutional Priorities

Financial planning should be aligned with strategic objectives, academic development, research support, student services, and quality assurance findings. Appropriate financial oversight should assess whether spending follows approved priorities (Stensaker, 2008).

7.7 Strengthen Institutional Review

Structured governance reviews could assess implementation capacity, legal compliance, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation across public universities. Reviews should be evidence-based and identify both effective practices and areas requiring support (Harvey & Green, 1993).

8. Conclusion

This paper has conceptually examined governance and public policy in KP public universities through provincial legislation, higher education policy guidance, and scholarly literature. It has considered institutional autonomy, public accountability, transparency, stakeholder participation, policy implementation, financial governance, and quality assurance as interconnected dimensions of institutional governance. The analysis indicates that legislation provides a necessary institutional foundation but cannot, on its own, establish effective governance. Clear responsibilities, appropriate institutional discretion, accessible information, meaningful participation, and the capacity to implement policy are also important. Accountability should contribute to organisational learning and corrective action, while quality assurance should inform planning and resource allocation. These conclusions support policy measures that clarify authority, strengthen evidence-based review, promote consultation, and connect governance processes with institutional priorities. The study is limited by its conceptual and documentary design: it does not include

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primary data or institution-level performance evidence and therefore cannot estimate the prevalence of governance problems or compare university effectiveness. Its contribution lies in clarifying governance relationships and identifying priorities for further investigation.

Future studies should examine selected universities through institutional records, documentary review, and interviews with relevant stakeholders. Comparative research could assess differences in implementation, accountability arrangements, institutional capacity, and policy outcomes.

Overall, strengthening public university governance in KP requires more than formal legal compliance. It requires a workable balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability, transparent and participatory decision-making, adequate implementation capacity, and systematic use of evidence for institutional improvement.

Ethical Approval

This study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from published sources, including peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and regulatory documents. No human participants were involved in the research. Therefore, formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required. However, all ethical considerations were strictly followed, including proper citation of sources and adherence to academic integrity.

Authors' Contributions

All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author/s declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The authors are committed to transparency and will provide detailed methodological information and analysis protocols upon request.

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