

## **Issues of Universities' Governance in Pakistan**

**Mahr Muhammad Saeed Akhtar\***  
**Tahira Kalsoom\*\***

---

### **Abstract**

The study was conducted to analyze some of the issues of universities governance in Pakistan. The objective of the study was threefold, first to investigate some policy considerations regarding governance, second to analyze current practices and third to recommend some “best practices” to the universities’ governance and to draw out some common themes and directions, which are discussed in the Pakistani context in the final section of the paper. It examined the challenges of governance in higher education and how universities were acting in response to them. It addressed the rising role and participation of stakeholders in higher education governance and emerging approaches of management in the governance of higher education in Pakistan. The paper focused mainly on the governing body of the universities, and its roles and relationships with other stakeholders. For the study major sources of data were Institutional and government documents, policy papers and newspapers’ articles. To analyze the information, content analysis was done. The results of the study showed that in Pakistan the state is the key player in the governance of higher education.

**Key Words:** higher education, issues, governance, stakeholders, challenges.

---

\*Professor at IER, University of the Punjab. Email: [mahrsaeed1@yahoo.com](mailto:mahrsaeed1@yahoo.com)

\*\* Ph. D Student at IER, University of the Punjab. Email: [tahira.kalsoom@yahoo.com](mailto:tahira.kalsoom@yahoo.com)

## **Introduction**

At first sight 'governance' seems to be simple and clear: it is an exercise of authority, control or direction. Governance in Higher Education is a process in which institutions are systematically established and managed. Management and governance are different terms. Plainly we can say that, university governance is the way in which a university functions. Altbach (2005, pp. 16-18) has discussed in detail the issue of governance and he well said "there are different models for higher education throughout the world." Common traditions and history of higher education all over the world has also been discussed by Coldrake, Stedman, and Little (2003, pp. 5).

In this rapidly changing world it has been a known fact that universities are being functioned in a gradually more energetic and explosive global environment which needs highly change governance. "... as we move into the twenty-first century, we face more change rather than less, and the pace of change will quicken for both governments and enterprises alike. In particular, we face the challenge of transforming organizations ..... and we must all become change agents now." (Stace & Dunphy 2001, pp. 262-263)

Today there is much more concern being paid to the universities' governance composition in common and specifically on the role of the governing body. There are different reasons for this new state of affairs, most of which originate from the key developments that have accord in university systems all over the world. Universities' governance is meant to be the organizational and managerial decision making process regarding all aspects of issues related to university. Universities' governance can be viewed in many dimensions. Different stakeholders try to manipulate and influence decision making process of universities in Pakistan. Higher education associations, funding organizations, the Pakistan Ministry of Education, related congressional committees, accrediting institutions, governors, students, alumni, senior administrators, and faculty leaders can be considered as stakeholders of any university.

## **Background**

As we know that we have a colonial past and with this reference universities were seen as a major source of progress and development. Universities were expected to play a vital role in the management of resources, eradication of poverty, and to harness development rate of the country. Universities were also expected to work for the development of local knowledge, industry, workforce and to save the sovereignty,

“unambiguously national institutions were set up for national purposes” (Report on students problems 1959). In Pakistan the expansion of higher education in near past has been extraordinary. This was in acknowledgment of the fact that sustainable human development needed a higher education that would provide the society with learning skills and improvement of the quality of standards of living. From independence in 1947, the government of Pakistan has had an innermost role to play in governance of higher education.

The university was considered as a public good with respect to which expenditure of limited public income was a defensible national inevitability. The government sustained higher education because doing so was a national interest. The gap between rapidly increasing ratio of students and available resources is very apparent. Budget for higher education is decreasing day by day and it is leaving bad effects on the development of higher education as well as universities effectiveness. Excessive enrolment, inadequate human and material resources are the main factors of decline of quality in higher education.

The growth and expansion of university education has not been realized without several challenges. Among them are financing, access and equity, quality and relevance, and the advances in technology. There have emerged new challenges posed by globalization, liberalization and internationalization of higher education. These have brought with them numerous demands, dimensions and approaches to the governance of higher education.

University governance is inconsistent, imperfect, problematic and disputable. It varies situation to situation, person to person and on the bases of organizational structure. It can vary as of:

- strategic and institutional needs of a research organization,
- relevant to the identity, validity of prerequisites and consequences and of that culture and those steering devices which pertain to institutional autonomy and individual freedom in their contexts with public responsibility of the institution to be governed,
- based on expert competence, on inclusion and participation, on the rule of law, on the freedom of ethically responsible individuals, and on mutual respect, and to add the notion of “good” governance to the definition of governance of higher education as such - serves these objectives best and at least to an optimum of compromise between conflicting aims and devices.

(Prof. J. Kohler offered an approximate 'definition' of university governance at the Council of Europe's).

## **Review of the Literature**

Governance means things done properly. Governance also means that an institution is organizing and working so perfectly and properly that help to achieve its goals. Governance is also significantly to organize and relate to each other and other key stakeholders like students, professors, society, trade market, industry et

It is said that there is no one accepted model of good governance, accountability, transparency, and effectiveness are key elements for a good governance framework: Osborne in this regard considers: "Calls for good governance seek more participation, transparency, accountability and competition, and less regulation though it is necessary to optimize rather than maximize such qualities" (1998, p.1).

"...facilitate decision-making and appropriate delegation of accountability and responsibility within and outside an organization. This should ensure that the varying interests of stakeholders are appropriately balanced, that decisions are made in a rational, informed and transparent fashion; and that those decisions contribute to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the organization" (ANAO 1999, p. 2).

"one key element in improving economic efficiency is corporate governance, which involves a set of relationships between a company's management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders" (OECD 1999, p. 2).

Public and private vision of governance and organization is totally different and need to be kept in mind. Looking after the interest of all stakeholders is more important in a public organization. Consideration to equity as well as efficiency in methods of operating systems is more vital.

*Participatory governance* is rather modern and most accepted term of particular relevance when desired outcomes are not being achieved by authoritarian governance but shared decision making processes. Participatory governance is defined as: "A set of structures and processes which enhance effective relationships within and across the public, private and community sectors as collaboration is pursued in decision-making on the basis of clearly understood roles and responsibilities" (Edwards, 2000 p. 4).

A brief and beautiful definition is given by Marginson and Considine (2000, p 7) "Governance is broadly defined to encompass internal relationships, external relationships, and the intersection between them". After it they explain the complexity of term:

"Governance is concerned with the determination of values inside universities, their systems of decision-making and resource allocation, their mission and purposes, the patterns of authority and hierarchy, and the relationship of universities as institutions to the different academic worlds within and the worlds of government, business and community without" (2000, p. 7).

### **Purpose of the study**

Examining the implications, and connotation, of applying "best practice" principles of institutional governance to universities and to add understanding to debates about governance by considering developments in university governance in Pakistan in the wider perspective, particularly by examining related developments in the country is the basic purpose of this article.

### **Research Problem**

The higher education system is facing hard challenges, for example inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, quality and standards, lack of autonomy and academic freedom, increasing societal expectations and a growth in demand for higher education. The paper is focusing on the issues and problems related to universities governance in Pakistan. It provides an overview of past, present and future trends in this regard.

### **Research Methodology**

This study used documents as the primary source of data. These included policy papers, reports, credentials and University Policy Documents such as Strategic Development Plans, committee reports, workshop reports, conference reports, other researches which have been carried out in this area, and newspaper articles.

### **Analysis**

To analyze the information, content analysis was done. The data were organized into categories. Information was thus summarized to themes and classified into categories for ease in analysis. These categories were interpreted by both

re-contextualization and de-tantalization to come up with the general picture. Creswell says that "this method has been proved to result into high-level analysis" (1994, p 153).

## **Interpretations of the data and Findings**

### **Government Strategy**

The higher education sector is a rapidly developing field in Pakistan. Musharraf government in the early 2000s, showed a clear commitment to improving higher education, as substantiated by noteworthy boost in expenditure on higher education, soon after the inception of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002. Economic growth rate will be significantly increasing in next 20 years. To cope with this ever growing world we will need to enhance the boundaries of our knowledge and skill and this require highly equipped institutions and skilled faculty and professionals and for this we have to invest in higher education. It is stated in the Sharif Commission Report (1959) that "The Vice Chancellor (VC) should be accountable to the Chancellor for the just and proper performance of his functions. The VC will be the chief academic and administrative office of the institution." A fatal problem here is that the Chancellor, who is supposed to hold the Vice Chancellor accountable, has neither the time nor the expertise for this task."

### **The Trends of Universities' Governance**

Governance trends vary from country to country. The governance of a higher education system reflects the society in which it exists and might be a reflection of the leading political system, thus the governance of the country. "Basing on the function of the state in a variety of higher education organizations in the world, two general steering models have been distinguished and clearly recognized. These are two models, one is state control and the other is state supervising" (Maassen & Vught, 1994).

The government of Pakistan plays a central role regarding the management of higher education. It is done through a range of method such as direct funding, appointment of university governing bodies, legislative regulations and day-to-day direct involvement or interference in the procedures of these institutions. Higher education has been the center of Pakistan's national politics with different groups competing for control and influence. The state in Pakistan has not adopted the supervisory model of governance as it still feels a stake in higher education (Task Force Report).

"Pakistan public universities are governed according to their relevant rules and regulations, which stipulate the laws providing for their establishment and control, their governance, administration and other associated purposes"(Education Policy 1998-2010). The common actors in organizational and management of the

public universities were as follow; the chancellor, the syndicate, faculties, departments and students.

As a matter of fact the President or the Governor is the Chancellor of all public sector universities. As Chancellor and the head of these universities, he appoints the Vice Chancellor and some members of the other university governing bodies. He has powers to direct an inspection, inquiry or visitation into the teaching, research, general administration and organization of the university. Since as Governor he has his political obligations, these permeate into university appointments and decision-making, and have always led to discontentment among students, staff and the wider society.

Because of the political basis of his appointment, he holds devastating powers and, in some cases, has run the universities more politically than managerial point of view.

From funding perspective, decisions about higher education budget, expansion, enrollment policies and cost of education are usually done at governmental level and not at institutional level.

The mid 1980s marked the wave of change in Pakistan with the introduction of multiparty democracy. In the universities, staff and students were calling for more freedom in the institutions. Internal governance of these institutions has been characterized by bureaucracy, and inflexible practices which have been reinforced by their political vulnerability due to the influence of politics in decision-making.

High powers of deans and heads of departments have not proved well for the academic staff. Among other issues, staff also complained of low salary, lack of motivation, irregular promotion to some staff, diminishing academic freedom, is deficient in resources for teaching and research and pitiable working environment. The private universities have a different organizational structure from that of the public universities. Their links with the government in terms of governance are weaker so the government has a much lesser say in their governance. The government's role was mainly in their accreditation, evaluation and review of their programmes. These institutions made their own management decisions and they are more autonomous. Their small size enables them to make quick decisions, as there are fewer bureaucracies and fewer committees. For instance, University of Management and Technology (UMT) has a Board of Trustees as the highest organ, followed by a Board of Directors then Management Council headed by the rector as

the university chief executive. The organization structure is not as broad as that of the public universities, possibly because of their size.

### **Governance & Higher Education Commission**

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) established in 2002 also plays a significant part to create a liaison between the government and the institutions. The rationale for the commission as stated on the website of HEC is "to better provisions for the advancement of university education in Pakistan and advise the education minister responsible regarding the promotion of higher education in Pakistan through the establishment and development of universities".

The Commission accredits private universities and is also involved in the long term planning, in the coordination of the financing and budgeting for public universities, and it also liaises with government departments and the communal and private sectors in the planning of the training and skills required for national development. It advises the government on higher education policy and supervises university operations.

The chairman and executive secretary of HEC are both appointed by the president. It is the view of the commission that because higher education is a priority to the government, the government will continue to have a say in what goes on in the universities. The commission has also had its share of challenges and criticisms. It has been accused of not having full authority over the management of the universities. The Vice Chancellors, due to their political appointments, and through the Vice-Chancellors` Committee, have been too powerful and always by-passed the commission in many aspects. Mostly they deal directly with the Chancellor or Minister for Education instead of the commission. Thus HEC is weakened in performing its statutory requirements.

### **The funding role of the Government**

The government still remains the main financier of higher education and draws most of its authority in higher education governance from this funding role. Government funding has however proved inadequate to the rising needs of the institutions. The universities depend on state funding. "Universities` income and expenditure analysis indicated excess of expenditure over income in all public universities and there was a building up of deficits between capital income and capital



expenditure” (Memon, 2007). The issue of funding has therefore become a major factor in the governance of Pakistani universities. The rapid increase in higher education influences finances and physical resources. The number of students in the universities outweighs the governments funding capacity.

“The current higher education system can be described as ‘Non market-framed’. The whole thrust of Pakistan government policies and regulatory interventions not gearing universities to market needs and market principles” (Education Policy 1998-2010).

### **Relationship with other stakeholders**

University are now being governed by the Chief Executive Officers and university academics are increasingly being defined as employees, subject to management. “Those who profess and provide academic leadership are replaced by those who manage and organise academics. Discourse about academic leadership shifts into discourse about successful management” (The Boston Group Report on Higher Education in Pakistan).

The governance challenges facing Pakistani universities and the deficiencies of the state require the involvement of other stakeholders. This shift in government funding and the questioning of the governments interference in the governance of higher education leads to a expedition for new governance relationships. The gap created by the withdrawing funding from the government had to be filled. This meant that the universities needed to recognize new sources of funds or stakeholders to enable them meet their shortfalls. As a result of their worsening financial situation, Pakistani universities specifically private universities are now establishing links with industry, the private sector, joint research endeavors with the private sector and focusing on income generation. In the market model of financing university education, advertising the university’s core services to the customers at market rates is being encouraged. It shifts power to the clients and to the units that produce and sell the services (Task Force Action Plan). Thus faculties are being asked to assume fund raising roles. As a result, new organizational forms of partnership between higher education and other stakeholders have emerged.

As a shift to diversification, the Pakistani public universities have started Privately Sponsored Student Programmes. The students in these programmes bear the full cost of their education. The response to these programmes was tremendous and now poses new challenges to the universities especially on facilities and standards. They replicate a shift towards directly fulfilling job market needs.

Another venture towards income generation is the establishment of companies by the Universities, specifically private universities to manage their income generating activities or vis a vis. In some cases big companies or industrial groups are establishing their own universities. Higher education is important in all societies. As these institutions move from the periphery to the center, they naturally receive more attention from the society and have to address the changing expectations of the societies. A country like Pakistan with colonial past needs such a powerful higher education system to fulfill societal demands. In the beginning higher education was an elite activity. At present, privatization of higher education in Pakistan causes discomfort and fear that the spirit of commerce will intrude into fateful decisions about who will receive the benefits of higher education, which forms of knowledge to be pursued and also that it has implications for the emergence of social stratification that has already reached worrying levels.

The intrusions of Industrial forces show that the state is no longer the only central stakeholder in higher education. Industrial forces now apply significant influence on the nature and direction universities. In the country like Pakistan where the Industrial forces are adequately developed that they decide the employment opportunities of university graduates, it plays a vital role.

Students are also core stakeholders in higher education. Education is related to students, socialization of students, to convert them in a workforce, and good citizenship, and professionalism.

The challenges facing the Pakistani universities at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have direct implications for the students. The fact that they have to pay for their education, and compete for jobs, that cannot be anymore taken for granted. With the challenge of the market to developing countries like Pakistan, this reality is like chasing the wind. Institutional governance should be responsible to constituencies both internal and external to the institutions. The strong presence of the state vis a vis other stakeholders need to be reviewed.

### **Role of the state**

This study revealed that except for the aspect of funding, governmental position has changed much over the years. The Govt. still holds onto the sector with inexorable interest. "The Govt. has a legal role to take care of the public interest in higher education. Thus it has designed and regularly adapted the regulatory frameworks of higher education, and has for a long time been the main, if not the sole, founder of higher education for a long time"(National Education Policy and Implementation Plan 1979).

The essence of this is that public institutions will continue to educate a large share of the Pakistani students even if the role of the private sector is strengthened. The public will expect this and accept the government's legitimate authority in defining and working towards the public interest. The funding role of the Govt. therefore remains significant.

Even though government spending on higher education has been reducing, the higher education sector in Pakistan could find it impossible to operate without Govt. funding.

Due to this major funding role, it is sensible for the government to oversee what these institutions do with public money. The government has to be accountable to the public thus universities have to be accountable to the governments. "The Ministry of Education and HEC will have to continue working with higher education institutions for both sectors to reciprocally relate to one another" (White paper on Education, 2006).

Higher education has to play a role in attaining the country's development goals and is also in enabling the country achieving its educational goals. With respect to success in these goals, the state cannot be a bystander on the affairs of higher education.

The new forces influencing reforms in Pakistan's higher education such as the market require the presence of the state.

The government of Pakistan ought to reexamine and set clear objectives for university education, revise the Universities, Acts in accordance with the current reforms and emphasize on efficient utilization of resources in the institutions. The state needs to steer away from the nitty-gritty of daily university management to give the institutions some space of self-determination. The government of Pakistan has to start reforming and revitalizing university management to give meaningful autonomy.

There have to be limits to the involvement of the state in higher education matters. Over emphasized state control will suppress rather than enhance good governance in the sector. Issues like the Governor being Chancellor of the universities, political interference, appointments of council members and vice-chancellors and relationships with staff and students need redress.

## **Discussion**

Higher education system relies on universities. In order to govern and manage their academic, administrative and financial functions, universities should

have independence and self-reliance from all extraneous influences, particularly, in terms of recruiting, assessment, faculty development; and selecting, training and educating their students. The present organizational bodies as Senates and Syndicates have many weaknesses of which the most important is an inadequate sense of governance.

Inappropriate responsibilities to their role in order to govern their academic, administrative, managerial and financial functions are being dysfunctioned. A person himself should be accountable for his/here performance and as the fundamental organizational principle he should have full authority to take decisions within his power without outside interference, and his responsibilities must be suited to his expertise.

Alignment of role, responsibility and authority is necessary for effective administrative structures implementation.

Relevant people are not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. They actually do not know that what role they have to play and what they are doing and how effectively they can perform their duties and what role actually they don't have to play. Universities cannot work in isolation or indifferent from society. Close and respectable relationship should be created between universities and society, market and industry. Standards and Measures for performance should be established.

For the better accomplishment of the future requirements following recommendations are made:

- The administration of public universities should be independent. Higher authorities must monitor that the functioning of the universities is in accordance with the university calendar.
- The syndicate should make decisions regarding university policies.
- Syndicate should appoint Vice Chancellor and he should be answerable to them.
- Only university administration should manage and be responsible for University's affairs.
- The university administration should be fully autonomous body to make decisions.
- Faculty according to their needs and requirements should be selected by the department under given criteria by the syndicate.

- The performance assessment criteria should be based on research, teaching and services.

## References

- Altbach, R. O, Berdahl & P. J. Gumport. (Eds.), *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*, (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Australian National Audit Office. (1999). *Principles and Better Practices: Corporate Governance in Commonwealth Authorities and Companies*, Discussion Paper.
- Bell, J. (1963). *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First- time Researchers in Education and Social Science*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Coaldrake, P, Stedman, L & Little, P. (2003). "Issues in Australian University Governance." Brisbane: QUT
- Creswell, W.C. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. London: Sage Publications.
- Edwards, Meredith (2000). "Governance: Meaning and Issues" in *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration*, no.96, June
- Edwards, Meredith (2000). "Participatory Governance: From Choice to Voice", Paper presented to QCOSS Conference, November
- Government of Pakistan. (1983-88). Action Plan for Educational Development. Islamabad: Ministry of Education
- Government of Pakistan. (2006). *Education in Pakistan: A white Paper*. Islamabad: Ministry of Education.
- Government of Pakistan. (1972). National Education Policy. Islamabad: Ministry of Education.
- Government of Pakistan. (1979). National Education Policy. Islamabad: Ministry of Education.

- Government of Pakistan. (1979). National Education Policy and Implementation Plan  
Islamabad: Ministry of Education
- Government of Pakistan. (1992-2002). National Education Policy. Islamabad:  
Ministry of Education.
- Government of Pakistan. (1998-2010). National Education Policy. Islamabad:  
Ministry of Education.
- Government of Pakistan. (2009). New Education Policy. Islamabad: Ministry of  
Education.
- Maassen, P. & Van Vught F. (1994). "Alternative Models of Governmental Steering  
in Higher Education: An Analysis of Steering Models and Policy Instruments  
in Five Countries" in Goedegebuure, L. and van Vught, F. eds. *Comparative  
Policy Studies in Higher Education*. Utrecht: CHEPS
- Marginson, Simon & Considine, Mark. (2000). *The Enterprise University: Power,  
Governance and Reinvention in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
University Press.
- Memon, G. R. (2007). Education in Pakistan: The Key Issues, Problems and the New  
Challenges. *Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 1,  
(Spring 2007).
- OECD. (1999). "*OECD Principles of Corporate Governance*", ad hoc taskforce on  
Corporate Governance.
- Osborne, Denis. (1998). "Governance Partnership and Development", paper prepared  
for the International Institute of Administrative Scientists, working group on  
governance.
- Report of the Commission on Students Problems & welfare.(1959). Ministry of  
Education Government of Pakistan.
- Report of the Commission on Students Problems & welfare.(1966). Ministry of  
Education Government of Pakistan.
- Stace, D & Dunphy, D. C. (2001). *Beyond the boundaries: Leading and re-creating  
the successful enterprise* (2nd ed.). McGraw Hills: Sydney.
- The Boston Group Report on Higher Education in Pakistan: Towards a Reform  
Agenda.The Task Force Report, Ministry of Education Islamabad, Govt. of  
Pakistan

- Van Kersbergen, K. & Van Waarden, F. (2001). "Shifts in Governance: Problems of Legitimacy and Accountability". Paper prepared as part of Strategic Plan 2002-2005 of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).
- Virk L. M. (1998). *Universities of Pakistan*. Islamabad: University Grants Commission publications.