



## GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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### Abstract:

This study aims to provide a systematic review of Saudi literature on governance in higher education institutions during 2000–2025, focusing on the extent of implementation of governance principles and the research methodologies used to examine them. The study adopted a structured literature review approach based on explicit selection criteria, including direct relevance to the Saudi higher education sector, publication in recognized scholarly databases, and publication recency. Applying these criteria identified 10 studies that investigated governance in higher education from organizational, administrative, and academic perspectives. The findings indicate that the overall level of governance implementation in Saudi higher education remains moderate across universities, colleges, and academic departments. A relatively stronger implementation was observed in dimensions related to fairness, performance improvement, and participatory decision-making, whereas transparency, accountability, and institutional autonomy were the least operationalized and weakest. The review further reveals that most studies relied on descriptive survey designs and questionnaire-based measurement tools to capture the perceptions of academic leaders and faculty members, with a notable scarcity of qualitative, longitudinal, or comparative research capable of interpreting governance dynamics at a deeper institutional level. The study concludes that advancing the understanding and practice of governance requires methodological diversification and stronger operational implementation within the Saudi university environment.

**Keywords:** Governance, Governance in Higher Education, Governance in Saudi Universities, Saudi Higher Education, Higher Education

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## Introduction:

The concept of governance has crystallized in the Saudi context over recent decades as a key lever for improving institutional performance across the public and private sectors. Major national transformations have influenced this development in transparency, anti-corruption, enhanced accountability, and expenditure rationalization. With the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 and its associated programs, such as the National Transformation Program, governance gained increased prominence in official discourse, regulations, and frameworks, and became a fundamental requirement for raising the efficiency of government bodies and improving the quality of services (Saudi Press Agency, 2016). Within this context, the higher education sector has not been isolated from these transformations; instead, a clear need emerged for the governance of higher education institutions as a key contributor to achieving the Vision's targets in human development, the growth of the knowledge economy, and the enhancement of the global competitiveness of Saudi universities (Albeshir, 2025). In higher education specifically, governance has acquired a particular significance. The Saudi university is no longer merely an institution that grants academic degrees; it has become an academically, research-wise, and organizationally complex entity in which roles intersect among the Ministry of Education, regulatory and oversight bodies, public, private, and non-profit universities, boards of trustees, university leadership, faculty members, students, the private sector, and the local community. With the expansion of programs and initiatives—such as institutional and programmatic accreditation, digital transformation, financial and administrative autonomy, partnership programs with the private sector, and research and innovation initiatives—fundamental questions have arisen regarding how to organize authorities and responsibilities, regulate decision-making processes, distribute roles across different levels, ensure transparency and accountability, and engage stakeholders in university affairs (Al-Marikhi 2022; Al-Saleh 2020; Al-Qahtani 2019). Within this landscape, the concept of higher education governance has emerged in Saudi literature as a framework for reordering relationships among these parties to ensure procedural fairness, clarity of standards, and the sustainability and quality of decisions. With growing institutional interest in governance, the Saudi scholarly arena has seen a noticeable increase in studies addressing governance in education. However, despite their importance, these studies appear fragmented in terms of topic, methodology, and level of analysis, leaving the overall picture of governance in Saudi higher education institutions in need of a systematic review and a critical reading that goes beyond numbers and partial findings.

## Research Problem

In recent years, the Saudi social and economic context has witnessed increasing interest in the concept and practices of governance, particularly in light of Saudi Vision 2030, which regards governance as one of its most important tools for promoting integrity, reducing administrative corruption, raising performance efficiency, and improving service quality across sectors (Al-Bassam, 2014). This orientation has naturally extended to the higher education sector, where governance has become part of official university discourse and a salient theme in discussions about institutional governance reform, financial and human resource management, academic and administrative decision-making, and oversight and accountability at the university and program levels. As the concept of governance has entered the literature and practice of higher education, a body of Saudi studies has emerged in recent years examining governance in higher education institutions from various angles. Although still relatively limited in number, these studies represent an important research effort that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the reality of governance in Saudi universities and colleges. However, these studies remain scattered and have not yet been reviewed within a systematic analytical framework that brings them together, compares their findings, examines their methodologies, and derives from them a composite picture of the actual practice of governance principles in higher education institutions. Accordingly, the research problem stems from the need for a systematic, organized review of published studies on governance in higher education institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Such an analysis is expected to add value to Saudi literature by delineating the features of governance practices in universities and higher education institutions, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and

clarifying how prior research has addressed governance both methodologically and substantively—thereby opening broader avenues for future studies in this field.

### **Research Question**

This study seeks to answer the following central question:

What is the reality of the practice of governance principles in higher education institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as reflected in the findings of Saudi studies and literature published during the first quarter of the twenty-first century?

### **Research Objectives**

This study aims to provide an in-depth scholarly review of the actual practice of governance principles in higher education institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as reflected in Saudi literature and empirical studies published in this area. The study goes beyond merely compiling these studies or presenting their findings; it seeks to develop a conceptual understanding of how governance has been addressed in the research and what this body of work reveals about transparency, accountability, participation, autonomy, fairness, and oversight within the Saudi university environment. From this perspective, the study aims to distill the main features of the field-level reality of governance practices in universities and higher education institutions by analyzing empirical studies that measured implementation levels across diverse contexts. It also seeks to identify the governance-related domains that have attracted researchers' attention and to determine whether the focus has been concentrated on certain principles more than others.

### **Methodology and Criteria for Selecting the Literature**

The present study adopted a systematic literature review methodology. This approach was chosen because of its capacity to collect and analyze published studies in a structured way that ensures a higher degree of rigor and scientific robustness, and because it is well-suited to the study's central question and objectives, which focus on uncovering the reality of governance practice in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia and analyzing the methodologies of related studies.

To ensure the quality of the selected literature, the study adhered to a set of explicit criteria for selecting scientific studies, as follows:

1. Topical relevance: The study must address governance in the higher education sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, whether at the level of the ministry, regulatory bodies, public, private, or non-profit universities, higher colleges and institutes, or related programs and practices (such as accreditation, scientific research, funding, and academic programs).
2. Scholarly quality: The study must be a peer-reviewed scientific article published in one of the following recognized scholarly databases:
  1. Google Scholar,
  2. Dar Al-Mandumah database,
  3. Or the Saudi Digital Library.
3. Time frame: The article must have been published between 2000 and 2025.

### **First Section: Governance and Its Importance**

Governance has become one of the most prominent concepts shaping contemporary public management, particularly in government agencies and educational institutions. Management is no longer confined to issuing decisions and running daily operations; instead, it is now required to operate within a governance framework that ensures institutions are managed in accordance with clear regulations, firmly rooted ethical values, and transparent mechanisms for accountability and oversight—thereby strengthening public trust in the services provided. From this vantage point, governance has emerged as an integrated set of principles and procedures that regulate the relationship between decision-makers and those holding authority on the one

hand, and stakeholders and society on the other, in a way that helps rationalize performance, increase efficiency, and reduce corruption and the misuse of resources (Albeshir et al., 2024; Al-Marikhi 2022; Al-Saleh 2020; Al-Qahtani 2019).

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, governance has received considerable attention, as evidenced by the issuance of the Guiding Manual for Governance of Public Entities, published in the Umm Al-Qura Official Gazette in August 2024. This manual provides a unified reference framework that public entities—including those responsible for higher education—can rely on when developing their internal systems, regulations, and procedures. It rests on a set of principles aimed at embedding the concept of sound governance and linking the performance of public entities to the values of legality, justice, integrity, sustainability, and efficiency, while drawing on best practices and international standards in the field. The manual begins with the principle of the rule of law, emphasizing that public entities must operate within the established legal and regulatory framework and that decisions, policies, and internal procedures must be documented to prevent arbitrary use of authority or purely personal decision-making. The underlying rule is that "the system stands above individuals," and that the powers of leaders and officials are exercised within clear, written boundaries that can be referenced when necessary.

This is complemented by the principle of integrity and ethical conduct, which underscores that public employees—including university leaders, faculty members, and staff—are not merely executors of regulations, but bearers of values such as honesty, transparency, and responsibility. In this sense, governance goes beyond rhetorical appeals to work ethics. Instead, it requires written policies regulating professional conduct and precise mechanisms for addressing violations of these values, to ensure that decisions are taken to serve the public interest rather than personal or factional interests. The principle of oversight and accountability then serves as a practical guarantee of the seriousness of these values. Public entities are required to subject their activities to multiple forms of oversight, ranging from internal control based on approved systems and procedures to external oversight by competent authorities. In the context of governance, accountability links authority to responsibility: anyone who holds authority also bears responsibility and may be held accountable for their decisions and their outcomes. In higher education, this principle takes on particular importance with respect to accountability for the quality of academic programs, efficiency of spending, and integrity of academic and administrative procedures.

Closely linked to this is the principle of disclosure and transparency, which makes information clarity the foundation for building trust between public entities and stakeholders. Universities and higher education institutions are therefore called upon to clarify their policies, decisions, plans, and strategies, as well as how they use resources, through an explicit system for classifying information and defining what is confidential and what is open. They are also expected to provide effective communication channels with students, faculty members, the community, and the labor market that reflect respect for these groups and engage them in understanding what occurs within the institution. The manual also places particular emphasis on the principle of protecting stakeholder rights. Governance is not merely an internal arrangement of administrative relationships; it also embodies an institutional commitment to faculty members, students, staff, industrial partners, and beneficiaries of university services. This principle requires institutions to adopt policies that guarantee respect for academic, professional, and human rights, to assess their adherence to these policies, and to work to improve them in line with national regulations and contemporary standards. Related to this is the principle of performance efficiency and effectiveness, which positions governance as a mechanism for improving resource utilization rather than as a set of formal procedures. A university that plans effectively, sets measurable objectives, establishes clear performance indicators, and continuously monitors results is practicing governance in its most practical sense, since it directly links allocated resources to achieved outcomes and corrects its course as needed—whether in relation to academic programs, scientific research, or community service. The principle of leadership constitutes another cornerstone of this framework. Governance in higher education requires university leadership capable of formulating policies and strategies aligned with national policy directions and serving the public interest, in a context where responsibilities are clearly distributed among senior leadership (boards of trustees, university councils, presidents/rectors and their deputies), middle management (deans and department chairs), and the broader body of staff. It also calls for selecting leaders characterized by competence, integrity, and independence, and for transparent

mechanisms for their appointment and performance evaluation, so that leadership positions do not become unchecked centers of power.

These principles culminate in the principle of sustainability. From a governance perspective, higher education institutions are not short-term projects but enduring entities serving society and the knowledge economy. Governance, therefore, obliges these institutions to adopt policies and standards that ensure their continued effectiveness and capacity to exert a positive impact on the economy, society, and the environment, in alignment with overarching national directions, while monitoring implementation and reporting on progress (Umm Al-Qura, 2024). When this general framework is applied to the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia, the importance of governance becomes even more pronounced. This sector plays a central role in preparing national talent, supporting scientific research and innovation, serving the community, attracting outstanding students domestically and internationally, and contributing to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030 (Al-Bishr et al., 2024). Consequently, the application of governance principles in the Ministry of Education, regulatory authorities, public, private, and non-profit universities, higher colleges and institutes is not a luxury; rather, it is a necessity for ensuring equity in educational opportunities, improving the quality of academic and research outcomes, rationalizing the use of financial and human resources, and strengthening public trust in universities as responsible academic institutions.

Within this framework, governance in higher education can be viewed as a mechanism for organizing academic and administrative decision-making, regulating the distribution of authority between the central level (the ministry and regulatory bodies) and the institutional level, defining the responsibilities of university leaders, activating oversight of educational, research, and administrative performance, and broadening participation by engaging faculty, students, and external partners in understanding and interacting with university policies. Governance also helps protect the financial resources allocated to higher education from waste and misuse and contributes to creating a university environment grounded in respect, fairness, and transparency.

## Results

1. Al-Zamil (2018) conducted a study titled "The Reality of Administrative Performance in Academic and Administrative Departments at Saudi Universities in Light of Governance Principles and Vision 2030." The study aimed to examine the actual administrative performance of academic and administrative departments in Saudi universities in light of governance principles and Vision 2030 from the perspective of administrative leaders. The descriptive-analytical method was employed, and a 31-item questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 74 faculty members from Saudi universities—Umm Al-Qura University, King Abdulaziz University, and Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University. The sample included faculty members in academic departments and administrators in administrative departments. The results revealed that the respondents' level of agreement regarding the administrative performance of academic and administrative departments in Saudi universities, in line with governance principles and Vision 2030, reached a mean score of 3.73, representing 74.72% and indicating a high level of agreement. The participation domain ranked first, with a mean of 4.27 (85.4%), indicating a very high level. Transparency ranked second with a mean of (3.92), representing (78.4%), followed by effectiveness and efficiency in third place with a mean of (3.76), representing (75.2%). Decision-making rationality ranked fourth with a mean of (3.41), representing (68.2%), while competitiveness ranked last with a mean of (3.32), representing (66.4%), indicating a moderate level. The findings showed no statistically significant differences in respondents' mean scores for administrative performance in light of governance principles and Vision 2030 across colleges or departments. In contrast, statistically significant differences were found for years of experience, favoring those with 11 or more years. The study also provided several recommendations.

2. Al-Qahtani (2019) conducted a study titled "A Governance Framework for Saudi Universities to Achieve Competitive Advantage in Decision-Making in Light of Vision 2030." The study aimed to examine the level of governance implementation in Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, assess the requirements for its implementation, and identify the extent to which competitive advantage in decision-making is achieved in light of Vision 2030. The descriptive-analytical method was used, and the study population consisted of all administrative and academic leaders at the university. The sample comprised 63 individuals. The study instrument consisted of three dimensions: governance at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, requirements for governance implementation, and the level of competitive advantage in decision-making, all in light of Vision 2030. The findings showed that the relative weights of respondents' answers for the first dimension ranged between 61.9% and 79.4%, with an overall mean of 74.2%. The relative weights for the second dimension—governance requirements—ranged between (65.4%–82.2%), with an overall mean of 76.4%. For the third dimension—competitive advantage in decision-making—the relative weights ranged between (60.6%–76.8%), with an overall mean of 69.5%. Based on these findings, the study recommended adopting institutional governance as an administrative system in all Saudi and Arab universities and providing the requirements for its implementation.
  
3. Al-Saleh (2020) conducted a study titled "The Degree of Application of Governance Principles in Saudi Universities and Means of Enhancement." The study aimed to determine the extent of governance implementation, identify obstacles, propose enhancement strategies for Saudi public universities, and examine statistical differences by job title, gender, years of experience, and university. The descriptive method was used, with a sample consisting of 444 academic leaders and faculty members from Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, King Abdulaziz University, the Islamic University, and Najran University (297 males and 147 females). The results revealed that the domains of organizational effectiveness and justice ranked highest in the degree of governance application, with mean scores of 3.39 and 3.22, respectively. The domain of governance obstacles recorded an overall mean of (3.40), while the enhancement domain recorded an overall mean of (3.76). The results showed no statistically significant differences related to gender, years of experience, or university affiliation.
  
4. Al-Sharif (2020) conducted a study titled "The Reality of Governance in Saudi Universities in Light of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030." The study aimed to examine the reality of governance and the challenges hindering the availability of governance principles in Saudi universities in light of Vision 2030. The descriptive survey method was employed, and the population consisted of faculty members holding the ranks of professor, associate professor, and assistant professor at Umm Al-Qura University, King Abdulaziz University, Taif University, and Al-Baha University, totaling 8,128 members. The sample consisted of 247 participants. A 55-item questionnaire, using a five-point Likert scale, was used. The findings showed that the availability of governance principles in Saudi universities was moderate, and the challenges hindering their availability were also moderate. Statistically significant differences were found based on gender, academic rank, and university. The study recommended enhancing governance awareness among university members, forming independent review committees involving stakeholders, and activating elections for selecting committee and council members.

5. Al-Shammari (2021) conducted a study titled *The Degree of Availability of Governance Standard Requirements at Hafar Al-Batin University According to the Institutional Accreditation Standards of the Education Evaluation Authority in KSA*. The study aimed to identify the extent of compliance with governance standard requirements at Hafar Al-Batin University in light of the Education Evaluation Commission's institutional accreditation standards, from the perspective of faculty members, and to propose improvement measures to enhance compliance. The descriptive method was used, and a 43-item questionnaire distributed across six domains was administered to a simple random sample of 235 faculty members. The findings showed that the availability of governance standards at Hafar Al-Batin University was moderate. Statistically significant differences were observed at the significance level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) due to the gender variable (male/female) in favor of males, and due to the faculty type variable (human vs. scientific) in favor of human faculties. In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found for the academic rank variable (professor, associate professor, assistant professor). One of the most important improvement proposals was to establish a system ensuring adequate representation of faculty members in the main campus and branch campuses, and of both male and female students, in the university's higher committees, as well as establishing a system for selecting leaders and preparing future leaders. Among the most important recommendations of the study was the intensification of training courses and workshops to introduce the governance standard as one of the institutional accreditation standards of the Kingdom's Education Evaluation Authority, targeting academic and administrative leaders and faculty members, to enrich their understanding of the requirements necessary to enhance the degree of availability.
  
6. Al-Muraykhi (2022) conducted a study titled *"A Proposed Framework to Enhance the Role of Governance in Improving Organizational Culture at Saudi Universities."* The study aimed to assess the extent of governance and organizational culture application, the relationship between governance and organizational culture, and to develop a proposed framework for enhancing governance's role in improving organizational culture at Saudi universities. A random sample of 334 academic leaders was selected, and a questionnaire was used to collect data. The descriptive-correlational method was employed. The results showed that governance application was moderate from the perspective of academic leaders, with high agreement on expanding participation in decision-making and problem-solving. In contrast, agreement was moderate regarding transparency, accountability, and justice. Organizational culture application showed a moderate level across all dimensions. A positive relationship between governance and organizational culture was identified, and a proposed framework for enhancement was presented.
  
7. Al-Atrim and Al-Idrisi (2022) conducted a study titled *"The Degree of Applying Governance Standards at the Scientific Institute in Riyadh from the Perspective of Its Leaders and Faculty Members."* The study aimed to identify the level of application of governance standards from the perspectives of leaders and faculty members at the institute. The descriptive-analytical method was used, and a questionnaire was administered to all leaders and faculty members (366 individuals). The findings indicated that the overall level of governance application reached a mean score of 3.86 out of 5, indicating a high level of governance application. Across dimensions, the legal compliance domain ranked first with a mean of 4.14, followed by justice with a mean of 3.79, and transparency with a mean of 3.65—all at a high level. The domain of obstacles to governance showed an overall

mean of (3.43), indicating significant hindrance. Financial obstacles ranked first with a mean of 3.79, followed by human-resource obstacles with a mean of 3.06. The results showed no significant differences in the transparency dimension by years of experience. In contrast, significant differences were found in legal compliance and justice in favor of those with greater experience. The researchers recommended that university and institute leaders closely monitor transparency applications, train employees on effective transparency practices, and remove material obstacles that hinder governance implementation. The researchers also proposed studying governance applications from students' perspectives and developing a proposed framework for governance implementation in Saudi universities.

8. Al-Enezi (2022) conducted a study titled "Governance of Scientific Departments in Saudi Universities: A Proposed Framework." The study aimed to identify the reality of governance in scientific departments at Saudi universities from the perspective of academic leaders, determine the challenges that limit governance from the perspective of faculty members, and develop a proposed framework for applying governance principles in Saudi universities. To achieve these aims, a sample of 383 faculty members from Saudi universities was selected, and a descriptive survey was employed, with a questionnaire as the data collection tool. The findings indicated that the level of governance in scientific departments at Saudi universities was moderate across all dimensions, namely transparency, accountability, fairness in the application of regulations, and expanded participation in decision-making and problem-solving. The results also showed that there were high-level challenges limiting governance in scientific departments from the perspective of faculty members, most notably weak transparency and the absence of specialized units or committees responsible for applying governance principles in universities. The study further presented a proposed framework for the governance of scientific departments in Saudi universities.
9. Al-Oraifi and others (2022) conducted a library-based study titled "The Role of Governance in Enhancing Expenditure Efficiency in Saudi Public Universities." The study aimed to identify the conceptual frameworks of governance in Saudi public universities, discuss the main concepts related to expenditure efficiency, and examine the role of governance in enhancing expenditure efficiency. The descriptive-analytical method was employed to review relevant literature and previous studies. The findings revealed that governance plays an effective role in improving overall performance and significantly impacts expenditure efficiency in Saudi universities. Governance clarifies authority and responsibilities through transparency and ensures fairness among all university employees by expanding opportunities for communication and participation in decision-making. The results also showed that governance plays an important role in comprehensive and accurate system reviews, focusing on ensuring expenditure efficiency and maximizing its impact to guarantee resource sustainability.
10. Al-Hazayma and Al-Joufi (2025) conducted a field study titled "The Impact of Applying Governance Rules on Employee Performance from the Perspective of Administrative Employees at King Abdulaziz University." The study aimed to identify the impact of governance rules on employee performance from the perspective of administrative employees at King Abdulaziz University. To achieve this objective, the researchers used the descriptive-analytical method, and a survey questionnaire was employed for data collection. The study population comprised all administrative

employees at King Abdulaziz University (5,744). Due to the large population size, a simple random sample was selected, and 120 questionnaires were distributed. A total of 80 questionnaires were returned. The findings indicated that transparency, participation, and accountability had a significant impact on employee performance from the perspective of administrative employees at King Abdulaziz University, and that the degree of governance implementation was moderate. The study presented several recommendations, most notably: enhancing transparency by establishing clear job descriptions that outline responsibilities and duties for each university position, and involving administrative employees in developing university-wide policies through expanded work programs.

## Literature review

Between 2000 and 2025, Saudi researchers observed a noticeable increase in interest in governance within higher education institutions. This growth in attention aligns with national transformations. It reflects Saudi universities' efforts to enhance transparency and accountability, improve expenditure efficiency, and elevate the quality of administrative and academic performance in accordance with the requirements of Saudi Vision 2030. Accordingly, the scientific literature published throughout this period provides a comprehensive picture of the status of governance in Saudi universities, including the degree of implementation, governance standards, research domains, and methodologies employed. Saudi literature generally indicates that the degree of governance implementation in public universities and higher education institutions remains moderate. This conclusion was repeated consistently across a large number of studies, including those conducted by Al-Zamil (2018), Al-Mufeiz (2019), Al-Qahtani (2019), Al-Saleh (2020), Al-Sharif (2020), and Al-Muraykhi (2022), in addition to applied studies such as the one conducted in the Scientific Institute in Riyadh (Al-Atram & Al-Idrisi, 2022). A moderate level of implementation suggests that governance has become part of the organizational and administrative discourse within universities but has not yet matured into a fully institutionalized system of binding policies and practices. The literature further shows that implementation is relatively stronger in internal governance dimensions, particularly those related to administrative performance effectiveness, procedural control, and enhanced fairness within academic organizations. Conversely, the weakest dimensions pertain to disclosure practices, comprehensive transparency, and accountability—whether toward faculty members, the university community, or external oversight entities. Accordingly, governance within Saudi higher education appears to be more internally procedural than externally transparent or participatory in a broad institutional sense. The limited level of transparency and accountability is not restricted to the university level. Empirical studies focusing on academic departments—such as Al-Enezi (2022)—demonstrate that the degree of governance implementation at the departmental level remains moderate across all dimensions, with notable variation in academic leadership's understanding of governance and its use as a tool for daily decision-making. This indicates that governance has not yet evolved into a deep organizational culture within academic units and often remains confined to procedural instructions or internal directives that do not meet institutional governance standards. Behavioral studies, such as the one conducted by Al-Hazayma and Al-Joufi (2025), revealed an important finding: governance—when applied even at a moderate level—directly improves administrative employees' performance, increases job satisfaction, and strengthens perceptions of fairness and institutional trust. This evidence shows that governance is not merely an administrative or regulatory obligation, but instead has significant implications for organizational behavior and the quality of educational services. Saudi literature also demonstrates apparent convergence in identifying the key governance standards measured within higher education institutions. These standards generally align with international literature and include: transparency, accountability, fairness, adherence to regulations, participation in decision-making, clear delineation of responsibilities and authority, organizational efficiency, and administrative and academic autonomy. Research indicates that expanded participation in decision-making and problem-solving is among the most highly implemented governance dimensions within Saudi universities. This can be attributed to the consultative and deliberative nature of academic units and their reliance on committee and council structures. However, expanded participation does not necessarily imply complete transparency or accountability, as participatory mechanisms may remain internal, with decisions and resource allocations kept private.

Regarding transparency and accountability, a wide range of studies—most notably Al-Mufeiz (2019) and Al-Sharif (2020)—concluded that these standards are among the weakest in Saudi universities. This is due to limited institutional mechanisms for publishing information, the absence of specialized internal review units, and the unclear nature of accountability measures, all of which are accompanied by weak financial and administrative disclosure. Such conditions reflect organizational and cultural constraints, rather than the absence of governance in principle, since governance has not yet been activated as a binding institutional practice. Furthermore, theoretical studies, such as those by Al-Oraifi et al. (2022), highlighted the central role of governance in enhancing expenditure efficiency and in reviewing institutional budgets and systems—an especially relevant dimension amid financial reform in higher education. However, these studies remain more conceptual than empirical and reveal a clear research gap in measuring the impact of governance on resource allocation, financial indicators, and economic performance within universities. Financial and administrative autonomy, including academic freedom, emerged as one of the most significant structural barriers to effective governance implementation, as indicated in research such as Al-Mufeiz (2019). The centralized nature of the higher education system and the constraints on institutional autonomy present a significant limitation to universities' ability to develop internal governance mechanisms. This suggests that the regulatory environment remains centralized, thereby hindering universities' capacity to establish flexible governance models tailored to institutional needs. In terms of research domains, Saudi studies have focused almost exclusively on major public universities, such as King Saud University, King Abdulaziz University, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Umm Al-Qura University, Najran University, and Hafar Al-Batin University. A limited number of studies have addressed semi-higher education institutions such as the Scientific Institute in Riyadh. This indicates a lack of representation of private universities, independent colleges, and higher education agencies outside the public system.

Methodologically, the vast majority of studies relied on descriptive survey designs, primarily using questionnaires as the primary data collection tool. This approach is consistent with governance as an organizational phenomenon that requires measuring individuals' perceptions of administrative systems. However, heavy reliance on descriptive methodologies without complementary qualitative or analytical investigations has limited researchers' ability to interpret the underlying causes of weak governance and analyze its complex organizational dynamics. Consequently, current literature often stops at describing existing practices without offering explanatory models or comparative analysis across universities, regions, or regulatory systems. Overall, Saudi literature demonstrates that governance in higher education has become an explicit feature of national organizational discourse and that universities have taken significant steps toward its implementation. Nonetheless, implementation remains moderate, hindered by structural and cultural challenges related to transparency, accountability, and institutional autonomy. Governance has demonstrated meaningful behavioral and administrative effects, including strengthened fairness, improved organizational performance, enhanced expenditure efficiency, and increased employee trust and satisfaction. However, consolidating governance requires comprehensive institutional transformation beyond policy documentation, extending toward cultural change, operational restructuring, and sustained adherence to transparent and accountable decision-making.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

The review of Saudi literature on higher education governance shows that universities have made significant progress in adopting governance as part of administrative and academic practice, influenced by the requirements of Saudi Vision 2030 and its expectations for efficient performance, informed decision-making, and resource optimization. However, most researchers agree that the degree of governance implementation remains moderate, whether at the university level or within colleges and departments, and that governance in practice is often more rhetorical or regulatory than fully institutionalized in daily operations. Findings indicate that the most prominent dimensions in university practice relate to internal fairness, organizational performance, and expanded participation through councils and committees. Meanwhile, transparency, accountability, and institutional autonomy remain the weakest governance dimensions due to limited disclosure mechanisms, unclear financial reporting systems, and insufficient structures for binding accountability. Despite this, literature confirms that governance—even at a moderate level—positively affects administrative employees' performance, satisfaction, and institutional loyalty, as well as expenditure efficiency and resource utilization, thereby reinforcing governance as a substantive organizational tool rather

than a formal compliance mechanism. A thoughtful reading of the literature suggests several developmental directions for strengthening governance in Saudi universities. Institutional transparency must evolve into a practical culture through transparent and periodic reporting, formal disclosure channels, and communication mechanisms that enable stakeholders to track decision-making. Furthermore, establishing independent governance units and committees within universities is essential to ensure the monitoring and implementation of governance standards, develop procedural guidelines, and provide advisory support to academic and administrative leadership. The centralization of the higher education system and limited financial and administrative autonomy constitute significant institutional barriers; thus, expanding institutional autonomy is a necessary prerequisite for developing flexible, context-based governance models. Parallel to this, investment in comprehensive training for administrative and academic leaders and faculty members is critical for transforming governance into a shared organizational culture rather than a technical requirement. The literature also highlights the importance of engaging administrative employees, faculty, and students in policy development and major decision-making through structured participatory mechanisms, active committees, and institutional consultation processes. From a research perspective, there is a pressing need to move beyond purely descriptive studies toward qualitative, analytical, and comparative research that examines the cultural dynamics of governance, its impact on academic quality, accreditation, financial performance, and institutional innovation, and that supports the development of deeper explanatory models tailored to the Saudi context. In conclusion, governance in Saudi higher education is on an upward trajectory. However, it remains in a phase of institutional development. It has not yet reached the level of maturity required to serve as a comprehensive framework governing university operations, decision-making, and stakeholder relations. Achieving this maturity requires institution-wide transformation, extending beyond policy issuance to reshaping organizational culture, strengthening institutional autonomy, expanding transparency, building specialized governance structures, engaging stakeholders, and linking governance to national performance and quality indicators. Only then can governance become a strategic lever for improving educational quality, sustaining resources, and enhancing the competitiveness of Saudi higher education locally, regionally, and globally.

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