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The Changing Role of Governance in Education

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Introduction

As higher education continues to negotiate the complex web of fast societal change, technological advancement, and geopolitical upheavals, the crucial role of governance remains at the forefront of debate (Leisyte & Dee, 2012). This is especially true in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where traditional governance models are rapidly being challenged by requests for more flexible, agile, and inclusive frameworks (Marginson, 2020).

The MENA region's historical, political, and socioeconomic backdrop creates a distinct terrain for higher education governance (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). Governance models must be fluid enough to address

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altering expectations as educational institutions attempt to educate graduates for the demands of the global economy. Traditional top-down management structures have given way to more participatory, collegial approaches that encourage a sense of shared governance and increased stakeholder participation (Aghion et al., 2010). This chapter aims to examine these shifts, shedding insight into the changing role of governance in higher education in the MENA region.

Governance in higher education refers to the process through which institutions establish strategic direction, make policy choices, manage resources, and assess performance (Leisyte & Dee, 2012). Governance can influence the academic community, set the course of the institution, and have a substantial impact on the student experience. The importance of governance in effecting change, guaranteeing accountability, and assuring educational quality cannot be over-emphasized (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004). With extraordinary worldwide change, however, a reform in the governance model is required to reflect and adapt to emerging educational expectations.

We will look at three interconnected issues with respect to governance reforms in higher education in the MENA region. These include how governance is evolving to meet changing cultural standards and technological breakthroughs, as well as the ramifications of these changes on educational quality. We attempt to provide a complete assessment of the current condition of higher education governance in the MENA region, with the addition of constructive insights for future developments.

History and Evolution of Governance in MENA

Historically, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area was ruled by a plethora of political systems, each with its own set of consequences for educational governance. Nonetheless, governance structures in higher education in the MENA region have primarily been defined by centralized, state-controlled institutions with decision-making powers concentrated at the top, mirroring the political systems of the nation's

themselves (Selvik & Utvik, 2020). Governance approaches have accordingly focused on bureaucratic procedures defining higher education administration, curriculum, faculty nominations, and resource distribution (Chapman & Miric, 2009). On one hand, this centralization has enabled standardized educational policy execution and institutional consistency. However, it also has been criticized for hindering innovation, impeding institutional autonomy, and limiting institutions' responsiveness to quickly changing social requirements (Marginson & Considine, 2000).

The MENA region's rich history and geopolitical significance have also unmistakably shaped these governing models. Colonial and post-colonial nation-building efforts have historically influenced the establishment of governance structures in higher education that are fundamentally protective of national identity and culture, typically valuing uniformity over differentiation (Khalaf & Khalaf, 2022). This has ramifications for the breadth and pace of higher education reform because changes in governance systems necessarily involve the risk of affecting national culture and identity.

The rise of the oil sector in several MENA nations has had an impact on governance structures. Countries with significant oil income have used their riches to directly develop higher education institutions, further concentrating power under state control (Crist, 2014). This system of official sponsorship worked to quickly bring necessary higher education to the region, but it has been criticized for favoring allegiance and compliance above intellectual rigor and academic independence traditionally seen in contemporary models of higher education (El-Affendi, 2009). Moreover, the convergence of these political, economic, and historical forces has resulted in a unique approach to governance in higher education in the MENA region. In many cases, the state's power not only affected the structure of higher education but also greatly influenced its function, frequently aligning it with the state's ideological, economic, and political goals (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012).

These early practices are beginning to change as MENA region nations seek more progress. Indeed, with the changing global scene and rising acknowledgment of the role of higher education in driving economic growth and societal progress, there has been an increasing push to alter

these old governance structures in recent years. This entails finding a balance between preserving the benefits of centralized management, such as fair access and uniformity, and building a more adaptive, inclusive, and autonomous educational system capable of meeting the complex needs of the twenty-first century. Many of these nations are rethinking their higher education governance models, realizing that the previous, highly centralized approach may not be appropriate for solving modern difficulties. Global trends stressing innovation, flexibility, and autonomy, together with local demands for higher education quality, relevance, and accessibility, are driving countries to rethink and redefine the role of governance (Romani, 2009).

El-Affendi, A. (2009) effectively argues in his landmark book “The Convolted Modernization of the Middle East: The Case of the Arab University” that the influence of political forces on higher education has frequently resulted in a paradoxical scenario. While universities have long been seen as centers of modernity and invention, political interference in their governance has occasionally limited the intellectual freedom and independent thinking required for meaningful growth.

A Contemporary Perspective in the MENA Region

As of late, there has been a noticeable movement in the MENA higher education scene toward managerial and structural governance reforms. This transition is moving institutions away from traditional, centralized governance by rule and toward models that promote performance, efficiency, and competitiveness, inspired by global trends, and spurred by regional socioeconomic upheavals (Kapur & Crowley, 2013). This trend of increased “managerialism” is not unique to higher education the MENA region but is certainly being witnessed on the heels of the prior dominance of highly controlled centralized systems.

Managerialism in higher education refers to an approach that draws techniques and concepts from the business sector and applies them to university administration and management. This strategy often focuses on performance measurements, accountability, strategic management,

and economic efficiency, mimicking the operations of a business (De Boer et al., 2007). While the MENA region's educational institutions have generally been driven by state-centric governance, the last decade has seen a steady acceptance of management methods (Romani, 2009) to progress its own institutions toward contemporary trends and standards witnessed in higher education.

This transformation's structural part entails considerable changes in the organizational framework of higher education institutions. Developments in decision-making processes, diversification of financing sources, curriculum revision, and redefined connections between the state, the institution, and society at large are examples of these changes (Marginson & Considine, 2000).

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a prime example of this transition, with governance reforms aimed at aligning higher education with national economic diversification plans. The UAE has formed the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) to manage higher education's strategic growth. The MOHESR operates on a management paradigm, establishing performance goals for institutions and tying financing to the attainment of these goals (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012).

In "Governance and Accountability: History, Issues, and Trends," D. Chan (2014) notes that the transition toward managerialism and structural changes has resulted in discussions over responsibility. As universities become more business-like in their operations, there is growing concern about who they are accountable to and how this affects their fundamental goal of education and research. The rising emphasis on performance measurements and financial results may distract from intangible, yet vital, parts of higher education such as critical thinking, civic involvement, and the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowing.

To many, this governance change has meant progress for higher education in the MENA region as it moves toward a more mature state of existence following practices witnessed elsewhere. However, in MENA, adopting managerial and structural techniques is fraught with difficulties. Balancing the benefits of enhanced efficiency and effectiveness against the danger of jeopardizing academic freedom and institutional

autonomy is a significant concern (Chan, 2014). Whereas “managerialism” has added progress, the key ingredient of encouraging innovation through academic freedom might be hampered unless centralized administrative structures are comparatively devolved through shared governance. In many traditional institutions, managerialism is balanced for the better by strong academic decision-making influence. Accordingly, the complexity of the MENA region’s sociopolitical atmosphere dictates that the governance reform process be attentive to local settings and consistent with global best practices.

The managerial and structural approach to governance in higher education has also sparked discussions about institutional autonomy in the MENA region. Although this strategy can increase efficiency and accountability, if not adopted carefully, it has the potential to limit the flexibility and creativity inherent in academics. Saudi Arabia, for example, has highlighted education as a critical pillar for its socio-economic change in its Vision 2030 initiative. As part of this strategy, the government has implemented several structural reforms in higher education governance to increase efficiency and align with labor market demands and many best practices. These reforms will have to be balanced with means of promoting the vitality of academic freedom and institutional autonomy to allay the concern of some that progression may otherwise be hindered (Hamdan, 2021). Moreover, there is a risk of creating a culture of short-termism, in which institutions place an overabundance of emphasis on immediate outcomes and measurable results at the expense of long-term strategic thinking and sustainable development (Pucciarelli et al., 2016).

Despite the obstacles and concerns, the managerial and structural governance method offers a viable route for propelling needed change in higher education in the MENA region. It provides a paradigm for managing higher education institutions’ expanding complexity, including concerns of quality, relevance, and responsiveness to social requirements. This method, if intelligently implemented and customized to the region’s particular environment, might provide a road for the modernization of higher education in the MENA region, allowing its integration into the global educational scene.

Challenges and Trends Affecting Current Governance in MENA

Traditional Governance

Existing governance techniques in the MENA region face significant challenges and limits in a rapidly changing higher education landscape. Having moved to more managerialism is important, but not sufficient change on its own to face new challenges. These traditional systems, which are frequently characterized by centralized decision-making and state control, are increasingly considered incompatible with the requirements of modern, internationally networked higher education institutions (Gallagher & Garrett, 2013).

One of the most serious weaknesses of conventional MENA governance institutions is their lack of adaptability and flexibility. In an era of rapid technological innovation and shifting socioeconomic trends, higher education institutions require governance frameworks that can react quickly and effectively to change. The bureaucratic nature of traditional governance models usually impedes firms' ability to adapt to new situations and capitalize on emerging opportunities (Looney, 2014).

Another problem with traditional governance structures is their disconnect from the general population. Universities' duties in modern higher education extend beyond teaching and research to encompass community, industry, and government participation. With their inward-looking perspective, traditional governance models generally struggle to develop these critical ties, limiting institutions' potential effect (Madsen, 2013). Modern governance thinking requires input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders to have the pulse on being most responsive and effective.

Furthermore, traditional governance models usually limit institutional autonomy, limiting strategic decision-making and restricting academic independence. This limitation has been a major source of contention, as academic freedom and institutional autonomy are viewed as important to the purpose of higher education (Middlehurst, 2013) and the ability to quickly innovate and adapt to changing circumstance. Both centralized power structures and managerial models with top-down decision-making

are increasingly known in all sectors, and not just business, to be ill-equipped to respond to an increasingly fluid and complex world.

Furthermore, traditional governance models sometimes prioritize political considerations over academic brilliance and excellence. This tendency might result in a mismatch between educational outputs and labor market demands, restricting institutions' ability to adequately educate graduates for the labor market (Gonzalez-Serrano & Calero, 2016). Good governance will require building in necessary controls for strategic and fiduciary oversight without these becoming controlling of an institution's creative, innovative, and responsive core.

It is fair to acknowledge that, while traditional governance models cause problems, they have not been without value. In certain cases, these models created stability and continuity, providing a sense of national identity and aiding nation-building efforts. It is the role of modern higher education reform to balance the benefits of existing governance models with the need for change, promoting an evolution that respects the region's cultural and sociopolitical situations (Middlehurst, 2013).

Modern Governance

Critical elements for a modern governance structure of academic institutions continue to be based on some long-held fundamental principles of shared governance, power dynamics, and the freedom to conduct research and teach. It must also be newly accountable to innovation and adaptiveness in the face of change.

– Academic Freedom and Institutional Accountability in a Balance

One of the pillars of higher education is academic freedom, which is the right of researchers to conduct their research and teach without unwarranted intervention. Institutional responsibility, on the other hand, is necessary to maintain a balance and make sure that educational institutions fulfill their responsibilities to students, donors, and society at large. This balance can be accomplished by adopting precise rules that uphold students' constitutional rights while also outlining acceptable

standards of behavior. This balance can also be kept by being open about decision-making procedures and regularly evaluating academic results.

– **Considering the Dynamics of Power in Governance Structures**

The functioning of higher education institutions can be strongly impacted by power dynamics within governance systems. These dynamics frequently involve conflicts between various parties, including administration, academics, students, and outside organizations. Addressing these dynamics calls for candid communication, respect for one another, and a dedication to shared governance, where all parties participate in decision-making. It also entails identifying and resolving any power disparities, such as those brought on by hierarchy, knowledge, or resource access.

– **Managing Political Influences on the Governance of Higher Education**

Political factors can have a big impact on how higher education is governed, having an influence on everything from funding to curricular choices. Understanding the political environment and being dedicated to upholding the institution's academic integrity are essential for navigating these forces. It might entail promoting legislation that supports higher education, cultivating connections with legislators, and participating in public debates on the importance of higher education. It also calls for a dedication to institutional autonomy and academic independence in the face of political pressure.

– **Innovation and Adaptability Using Governance**

Universities must be creative and adaptive in a world that is becoming more complex and changing quickly. By promoting an innovative culture, promoting risk-taking, and enabling continual learning, governance structures can play a significant part in this. To do this, it may be necessary to establish areas for experimenting, offer resources for

invention, and recognize and honor creative approaches. By being adaptable and responsive, frequently examining and updating policies and procedures, and being open to change, governance structures can also encourage adaptability.

Possible Changes to Improve Governance in MENA

As we enter a time of needed progress for institutional governance, what applies to the MENA region is both the same as elsewhere, in addition to emphasis in certain areas. It is clear that certain fundamental good governance principles remain constant, new dimensions will have emerged, and local challenges will continue to require a particular attention for its meaning and implications.

New Dimensions of Governance

– Diversity and Inclusion in Governance Structures

In higher education governance frameworks, diversity and inclusion have emerged as essential factors (de Wit & Altbach, 2020). This trend is being pushed by a recognition of the benefits of having a wide collection of experiences and perspectives in decision-making. Inclusive governance may strengthen the sense of ownership and commitment of a diverse stakeholder group, resulting in more imaginative and effective decision-making (Beerkens, 2021).

Efforts are being undertaken throughout the MENA region to increase governance diversity and inclusion, with varying degrees of success. More actions are needed to ensure that all stakeholder groups have a voice in governance processes, regardless of gender, color, ethnicity, or social background (Maassen, 2020). To be sure, the MENA has seen significant changes in the past decade on the front of inclusiveness across various nations. With more progress on the horizon, and in the hopes of many, this stands a chance of rendering impactful changes in governing success.

– Ethical Considerations in Decision-Making

In response to rising public demand for accountability and honesty, ethical challenges in higher education governance have gained prominence (Davis, 2017). Higher education decisions are being scrutinized for fairness, transparency, and adherence to ethical norms.

The need for ethics in governance is acknowledged throughout the MENA region, yet incorporating ethical issues into decision-making remains difficult (Abouchedid & Eid, 2004). This is because of factors such as power dynamics, cultural norms, and resource constraints, among others. Global alliances and interactions among such institutions of higher learning can be strengthened on such grounds, and many now demand it as part of the partnership and alliance. As the MENA nations grow with hope of taking a seat as a global player, ethical consideration and transparency will be an important facet for progress.

Evolving Governance Structures

– Shared Governance and Collaborative Decision-Making

Shared governance and collaborative decision-making have emerged as essential components of contemporary higher education governance. This strategy acknowledges and includes the aggregate experience of numerous stakeholder groups, including professors, administration, students, and staff, in decision-making (Kezar & Eckel, 2017). Shared governance promotes a democratic spirit in higher education by encouraging the active participation of various voices in decision-making and establishing a sense of shared ownership. By taking into consideration diverse viewpoints, the inclusive feature of this technique can foster a deeper commitment to institutional goals and enhance decision-making quality (Gehrke & Kezar, 2018). In the MENA region, shared governance is still a work in progress. While some institutions have achieved headway in involving a wider range of stakeholders in decision-making, others have challenges owing to cultural traditions, aversion to change, or a lack of expertise with these participatory techniques (Romani, 2009).

– **The Role of Governing Boards in Strategic Planning and Oversight**

Governing boards play a significant role in the strategic planning and supervision of higher education institutions. They are responsible for ensuring that institutions, which carry out their purposes, are financially healthy, and follow legal and ethical guidelines (Middlehurst, 2017). The role of the governing board has evolved in response to changing demands and expectations. Boards are increasingly being asked to contribute to strategy creation, make resource allocation choices, and evaluate institutional performance with respect to strategic goals (Deem & Eggins, 2017). Because of the intricate interaction of cultural, political, and economic factors, governing boards in the MENA region have unique challenges. Thus, having a deep appreciation for the broad spectrum, role, history, and potential of academic institutions is critical. Nonetheless, their involvement in strategic planning and monitoring is becoming more recognized as vital for the future of higher education in the area (Badran, 2021).

Decentralization and Autonomy of Academic Institutions

Decentralization in higher education governance refers to the shift of decision-making powers from central authorities to individual academic institutions. This allows institutions to have more control over their academic programs, research initiatives, and administrative processes. The idea is to promote innovation, responsiveness to local needs, and overall efficiency. In the context of the MENA region, some countries have made strides toward decentralization. For instance, in some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, universities have been granted more autonomy to design their curricula and establish partnerships with international institutions. However, the extent of decentralization varies across the region, with some countries maintaining more centralized control over higher education.

– **Integration of Stakeholders in Governance Processes**

Stakeholder integration in governance processes refers to the inclusion of various stakeholders—such as faculty, students, staff, and external

partners—in decision-making processes. This approach recognizes the value of diverse perspectives and aims to promote transparency, accountability, and a sense of ownership among stakeholders. In the MENA region, there's a growing recognition of the importance of stakeholder integration. For example, some universities have established faculty senates or student councils to ensure that these groups have a voice in governance. Similarly, partnerships with industry and community organizations are becoming more common, reflecting a broader trend toward more inclusive and participatory governance.

There exists a range of ways that integration has been practiced, and the depth of power and influence that each representative group wields can vary considerably across regions. This range and depth will be delicate balance over time as institutions progress. For the MENA, this process has largely just begun and there will be those watchful of its impact for institutional success.

Recommendations for Effective Governance

– Enhancing Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

In today's higher education environment, when accountability and transparency are increasingly expected, successful governance involves institutions displaying integrity and dedication to their mission. Increased transparency creates trust among stakeholders, allowing them to hold institutions accountable for their decisions and actions (Kruyen, 2021).

Publicly discussing institutional goals, decision-making methods involved in reaching those goals, and decision-making outcomes is one method for promoting openness (Wilkins, 2013). This might include leveraging digital platforms to make information more accessible, participating in governance processes, and streamlining administrative procedures. Stakeholders should have access to and understand strategic planning, policies, and financial figures, among other critical information.

Clear processes for reviewing institutional performance and responding to the results of such evaluations should be in place to

encourage accountability (Altbach & de Wit, 2021). It could be beneficial to develop a system of indicators to track achievement in both academic and administrative settings. These metrics can be used to gauge progress toward the institution's objectives, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate accountability to stakeholders.

While there has been progress in enhancing transparency and accountability in the MENA region, more efforts are needed to develop governance institutions that are tailored to the region's specific concerns as well as growing global norms (Badran, 2021). This is one of the primary ways we can expect to see institutions in the region build reputation, trust, and international recognition from stakeholders and outsiders.

Fostering Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

The active engagement and collaboration of a wide variety of stakeholders are becoming more important for effective governance in higher education. These stakeholders may include students, instructors, administrative workers, local communities, government agencies, industry partners, and others, each with their own set of perspectives and interests (Mampaey & Huisman, 2022).

Collaboration across these various groups may lead to more informed decision-making, a deeper commitment to institutional goals, and enhanced opportunities for innovation and adaptability. It demands the implementation of a governance framework that promotes communication, mutual understanding, and meaningful involvement in decision-making processes (Beerens, 2021).

Even wider than the notion of including stakeholder in governance practices, is our intuitions' permeability to all stakeholders as a public-facing intuition. Stakeholder engagement may be increased by regular consultations, polls, open forums, participatory decision-making bodies, and joint activities. Furthermore, the use of digital platforms can allow for broader and more inclusive participation (Marginson, 2020).

Stakeholder participation is increasingly being recognized as an important component of higher education governance in the MENA region. However, important obstacles must be addressed, such as cultural norms, power dynamics, and capacity constraints, among others (Badran, 2021). There is still much to explore, learn, and experience in how and in what

forms powerful social digital networks can have bearing on this change. Governance practices need lead at this adaptation.

Higher education institutions may increase their responsiveness to the various needs and expectations of their stakeholders by encouraging collaboration and stakeholder engagement, therefore contributing to the institution's long-term viability and success.

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Conclusion

Governance structures and procedures must develop to meet the shifting demands and expectations of a diverse range of stakeholders as the landscape evolves (Clark, 2021). As outlined in this chapter, this entails shifts in old paradigms, new dimensions of governance, and a plethora of new challenges and opportunities.

Traditional governance structures, characterized by a centralized and hierarchical structure, have disadvantages in today's climate, including restricted stakeholder contact and adaptability and innovation potential (Mampaey & Huisman, 2022). Global trends, regional dynamics, and rising recognition of the significance of more inclusive, flexible, and responsive government structures in the MENA region have all contributed to a continuous shift away from traditional forms.

These trends are reflected in developing governance models such as shared governance, governing board expansion, decentralization, and increasing stakeholder integration (Romani, 2009). These events emphasize the growing complexity of higher education governance and the need for frameworks that can balance different interests and demands.

Diversity and inclusion, ethical problems, digitalization, and environmental sustainability have all emerged as new governance components. These features reflect broader societal changes as well as increased expectations of higher education institutions to positively contribute to society and model best practices in their operations (Marginson, 2020).

These shifts present both challenges and opportunities. Key problems to investigate include balancing academic freedom and institutional accountability, addressing power dynamics, navigating political constraints, and leveraging governance for innovation. These challenges need a thoughtful and nuanced response informed by a complete understanding of the individual circumstances and motivated by a dedication to the basic goals of higher education (Biesta, 2020).

Among the ideas for excellent governance are improved openness and accountability procedures, more stakeholder participation, improved leadership competence, and support for research and evidence-based decision-making (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2021). These techniques have the potential to increase the legitimacy, responsiveness, and efficacy of governance in higher education, so contributing to the institution's long-term survival and success.

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