Academic Governance: Insights and the Way Forward

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Abstract

Academic Governance is a concept of managerial, social, and legal significance. This paper tries to understand the reasons behind the selected malpractices in either the managerial/academic areas or functions of educational institutions. It would help to understand the regulatory mechanisms in academia and their roles in the process and execution of the teaching and learning process. It would help the educationists and activists to come up with areas needing revision and reformation in the academic world. It tries to find the causes/factors leading to certain types of governance issues in academia based on three theories such as governance without government, the new public management/governance, and the network governance theories. It tries to bring out the recent insights as reported articles on the subject from open sources and scholarly publications. Content Analysis using PRISMA Protocol is the research design used in writing the results and discussions. Most of the failure reasons/causes are due to the failures of privatization, and network governance failures. Thus this paper would serve the consolidation of where and why such lapses happen and how to curb them.

Keywords: Academic governance, content analysis, PRISMA, teaching-learning process, governance theories

Introduction

The article takes a glimpse of what it means to the governance of academic institutions. In order to understand it better, the author would like to give a note on what is governance in general applications as follows: The collection of intellectual people shall be known as governance according to academia as reported by Jimoh A, 2022. Whereas in the terms of its legality and legitimacy it is defined in different definitions. They are the political system to resolve conflicts arising out of the stakeholders' interaction and consent to the decisions taken thereupon, and as the proper functioning of the institutions with proper acceptance by the public respectively, (UN ESCAP, 2022). The management of a country's economic and social resources relies on what kind and level of power. This is somewhat similar to what the World Bank (2006) feels about governance.

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It encompasses three major elements of management such as institutional stability in terms of the method of electing, controlling, and replacing authorities; the regulatory forces and efficacy of the government, and also the respect for citizens in terms of transparency, participation, openness, human rights and the legal framework.

Good governance includes some specific features to claim as good for both the institutions and also to the beneficiaries to whom they serve. They are, the public service, an independent judicial system with a clear legal framework to execute the contracts, public funds and its accountability, an independent public auditor, respect for the local laws and human rights at all levels, an institutional structure and a free press (Leftwich, A. 1993). In most of the applications, the term governance creates a huge confusion by its definition over its application. According to Colebatch, H.K. (2014), the term is applied to both, i.e., a set of rules and the whole process of rule. Governance is generally understood as the process of government. But, of late, it also includes non-government participants, due to the same reason it has changed from a legal framework to negotiation framework, (Colebatch, H.K., 2014). It also had increased the importance of social practices than political and bureaucratic practices, Althaus, C., Bridgman, P., & Davis, G. (2013).

At the advent of the modernization in governance, the New Public Management (Hood, 1991; Lapsley, 2009; Pollitt, 2007) and movements like the New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006) have gained significant importance in the governance of the institutions especially in the private sector. In the light of these ideas, the concept of governance with reference to academia has been discussed in this work. According to the World Bank (Smith, B. C. 2007), good governance means the sources of responsible public administration and free fundamental rights. There are two different but interlinked perspectives on good governance. They are governance without government and network governance. In simple terms both sound totally different, but they are talking about the same thing, ie., governance without government says the government is an essential element of governance without which the proper execution of governance is impossible or merely possible, on the other, network governance says government and other stakeholders are the essential elements of governance without whom the proper execution of governance is impossible or merely possible.

The first connotation insists on the involvement of the government in governance as discussed in terms of the rationalistic perspective following the principal-agent theory and game theory (Le Grand & Bartlett, 1993; McQuaid, 2000), at the same time, the second connotation insists on all the stakeholders including the government (Torfing, Pierre, Peters, & Sorensen, 2011) as discussed in the institutionalist perspective (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007; Torfing et al., 2012). It also makes scholars argue that there is a strong feeling that the public administration is a big failure, due to which the involvement of other stakeholders is mandated for a better result of governance (Rhodes, 1996). Here, the governance networks are commonly defined as a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors from the public and/or private sector; who interact with one another through ongoing negotiations; which take place within a relative institutionalized framework with regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary elements; facilitate self-regulation in the shadow of hierarchy (a kind of 'bounded autonomy'); and contribute to the production of public purpose in the broad sense of public values, visions, plans, standards, regulations and concrete decisions (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007).

Objectives:

The objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. To give a robust orientation on the concepts interchangeably used in the context of governance with special reference to academia.
2. To understand the background, causes, and factors responsible for the failure of academic governance

Methodology:

Summative Content Analysis is the approach used in the study to classify codes into themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach also lowers concerns regarding trustworthiness due to greater credibility or internal consistency (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Based on the literature gathered from various secondary resources, the author reached towards the findings of the paper. Around 300 scholarly articles, government and non-government reports, and published documents of reputed organizations were collected using the Google Alerts received from November 2021 to June 2022 and selected/rejected while screening using the PRISMA Protocol. The article screening process went through a rigorous exercise in multiple stages and was finalized with content sources from 57 of the total contents based on their quality and genuineness. The inclusion/exclusion strategy using the PRISMA Protocol adopted in the paper is explained in the flowchart hereunder:

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for screening the Articles Used
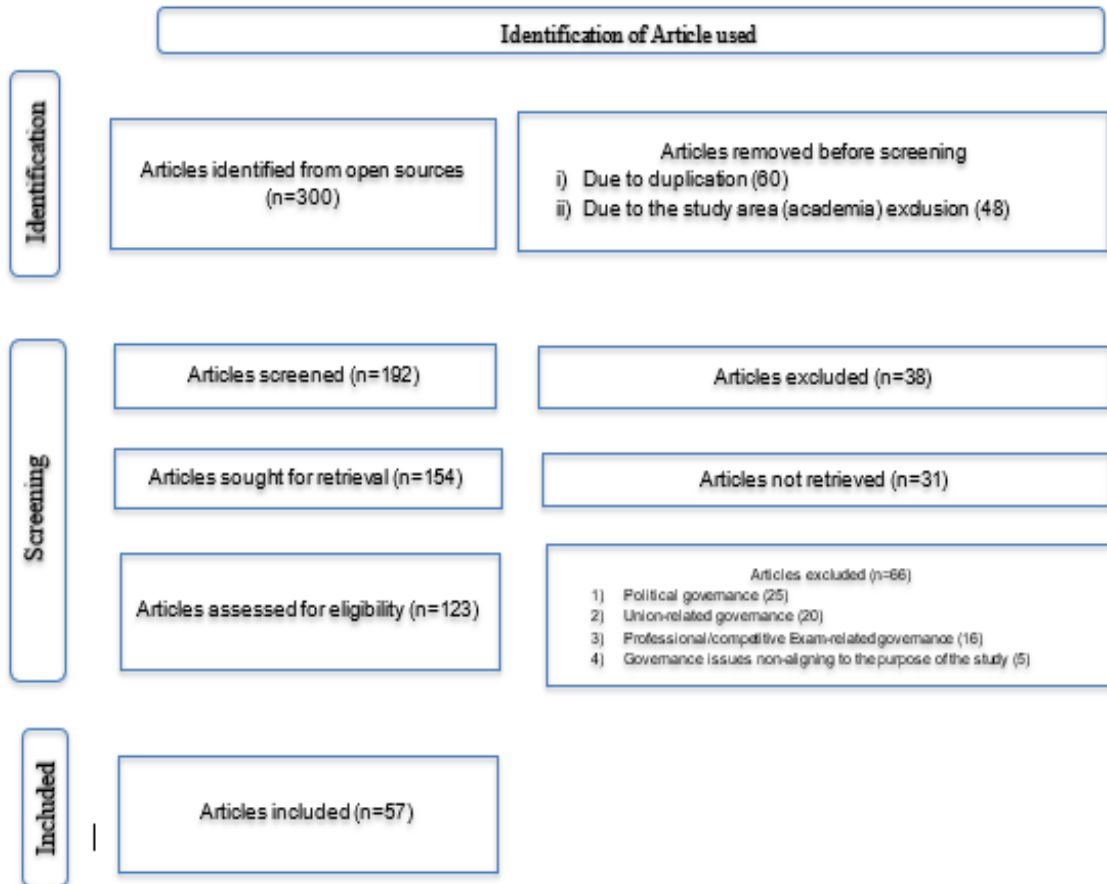
Governance in Academia:

In the efforts of an Eastern Indian University to stop the online mode of examinations, the university teachers writing to the Vice-Chancellor goes with the governance by networking theory. At the advent of the Covid-19 Pandemic, there was a shift in the mode of classes and examinations. The mode of examinations being a subject matter of sole discretion of the government, the university authorities, and the teachers being one of the stakeholders taking such initiatives proves the inclusiveness of the governance (Chowdhury. S. 2021).

With reference to a private college affiliated with the Western Indian University, the alleged corruption against the teachers who asked bribe for making the Master of Business Administration students pass their final year exam especially when the University had given the freedom to conduct a paper valuation on its own due to the strict restrictions on the Covid-19 pandemic (Ganjapure. V., 2021), the behavior of the faculty supports that there is always a room for malpractice when there is not enough control by the government on such matters. This shows the governance failure in terms of privatization or decentralization resulting in a drastic hit on the administration and execution of the decisions.

In another Western Indian University, due to the errors in releasing the students' final mark statements, the University had to fine around nine colleges under its affiliation and its teachers for their erring behavior (The Times of India 2022). This goes with the corporatist network failure in which the gross inadequacy of the faculty is observed and taken for disciplinary actions by the University administration.

The New Indian Express (2021) and Times of India (2021) report that the teachers of a Southern State of India had requested the University Grants Commission to reduce the fraudulent means adopted by aspirants for the post of Professor through any strong means of actions, which means there had been such practices from time immemorial across the country. This makes evidence of the failure in the form of purely private governance.

Another case was reported by Smart. P. (2021) that the administrators of one of the popular universities located at the Konkan coast / west coast of India had been practicing malpractice in getting admission, ie., having compromised the admission policy recommended by the regulations for a foreign student in the Department of Psychology. This shows the prevalence of failure in the form of purely private governance.

As reported by Outlook Web Desk (2021), the Commissioner of a particular State Council of Examinations being arrested by the cyber cell of the State for alleged malpractice in the conduct of the Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) for the State gives a proof o how the governance reforms played a significant role in the administration of examinations.

Times of India (2022 and 2021) and Khan. M.I. (2021) reported that the university employees were asking for bribes from the students who requested their provisional certificates or such documents in two Universities in the southern part of India. The key authorities in the universities had reported that the universities are following a strict cmpliance with a zero-tolerance policy toward financial corruption. But, how these cases keep on popping up at regular intervals is a mystery which leads our attention to the prevalence of government failure and network failure as well.

The Hindu (2021) reported that the request for one of the Education Minister's of a Southern State of India for reexamination for a technical university would set a wrong precedent as reported

by a former minister of the same portfolio and an eminent academic. This is an example of the prevalence of the failure of government governance and networked governance.

Another incident reported by Arakal R.A. (2021) throws light on how the students and teacher community interacts, understand, or misunderstand each other for their language and intentions from each other and shows clearly that there is a huge gap between these two and thus it results in numerous issues of trust and integrity. This is an example of the failure in governance in terms of the government and networked governance.

The report by The New Indian Express (2022), had another classic example of government failure in terms of governance. In one case, it had been reported that the sitting Minister for Education had been misled by the VC and Registrar of a State University in the southern part of India regarding the matters connected to corruption and malpractices adopted by the consolidated pay staff members. In another case, it had been reported that the university authorities had been allegedly involved in awarding pre-and post-exam automation work, exam scandals, financial irregularities, flouting of tender norms, irregularities in assigning/outsourcing confidential exam work, irregularities in temporary appointments made by the controller of examinations, and misuse of authority by the VC and registrar (in-charge).

Discussions

Governance failures are discussed in numerous forms such as governance reforms, de-governmentalization or networked governance, purely private governance, government failure, market failures, network failures, and capitalistic network failures, are the major ones.

Governance reforms are the major reasons for the governance failure (Ramesh & Howlett, 2006; Ramesh, Araral, & Wu, 2010). Those reforms may include administrative restructuring, de-regulations, decentralizations and privatizations. These kinds of efforts were actually the factors pushing the involvement of the government out of the scenario. Thus, creating a huge impact on the control and regulations of the institutions at large.

De-governmentalization or networked governance due to which the dissolution or reorganization had been getting tougher and harder and power had been defused in the networked arrangements (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Pestoff, 2006, 2012; Pestoff, Osborne, & Brandsen, 2006).

Purely private governance without or least involvement of government, Peters (1996), Considine and Lewis (1999), Newmann (2001), Kooiman (2003) and Cashore (2002). This kind of scenario totally eliminates the involvement of the government due to which the enforcement of regulations and policies becomes tougher or even nil.

Government failure due to information gaps, lack of incentives, and undue political interference, Wu and Ramesh (2014). Due to the lack of coordination between government authorities and regulatory mechanisms, the information gap arises. The involvement of the government executives always relies on monetary or rewarding experiences if they are lacking or nil, then the real-time enforcement of the policies and regulations gets loosened or nil.

Market failures due to the externalities hindrance, lack of credible commitments and information asymmetries arise, Wu and Ramesh (2014).

Network failures due to poor networking capabilities and capacities, inability to establish networks due to poor or nil experience with it, and poor steering abilities, Wu and Ramesh (2014).

Corporatist network failures due to weak associational structures and lack of capabilities and capacities, Wu and Ramesh (2014).

Most of these failures are attributed to either the first order failures, i.e., the mismatch of problem context and governance mode, or the second order failures, i.e., the mismatch of governance mode and governance capacity, (Weaver, 2014, and Osborne, 2006).

Conclusion

Due to a lack of political will or technical ability, none of the major countries have come up with fruitful initiatives in terms of governance, especially in academia (Cristina. Z. 2014). The inseparability of the government from the academic administration as education is the product of the academia, the utilitarian service of the society is another challenge due to which autonomy and anti-corruption initiatives are merely impossible, Newmann (2001), Kooiman (2003) and Cashore (2002). Communication and information gap is another challenge due to which the problems arising out of them like lack of proper networking or poor networking make the system paralysed and results in bad governance, Wu and Ramesh (2014).

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