

Meta-Synthesis of Public Administration Components Based on the Good Governance Approach in Higher Education

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Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received 11 Jul. 2025

Received in revised form 18

Aug. 2025

Accepted 14 Sep. 2025

Published online 01 Mar. 2026

Keywords:

Good Governance,
Public Administration,
Requirements,
Process,
Higher Education

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine and explain the components of public administration based on the good governance approach within the context of higher education. Good governance, as a contemporary and multidimensional paradigm, emphasizes key principles such as transparency, accountability, justice, participation, efficiency, and ethics in the management of public institutions.

Methods: A qualitative content analysis method was employed, drawing upon thirty reputable international scholarly articles published in the field of governance and public administration. Through a systematic review and coding process, the study identified and categorized the key components and subcomponents of good governance applicable to the public administration of higher education systems.

Results: The analysis yielded seven major categories: (1) transparency and accountability, (2) participation and social engagement, (3) justice and fairness, (4) efficiency and effectiveness, (5) ethics and value orientation, (6) rule of law and institutional structure, and (7) human capital development. Each category encompassed four subcomponents that collectively illustrated the multifaceted nature of good governance. The findings highlight that effective governance requires participatory policymaking, flexible institutional structures, continuous training and empowerment of human resources, and the cultivation of public trust.

Conclusions: The results provide a conceptual model for improving governance practices in higher education. They suggest that designing good governance systems should extend beyond structural reforms to include behavioral, cultural, and ethical dimensions. Implementing these principles can promote efficient, accountable, and people-centered governance in educational institutions and public organizations.

Cite this article: Ganjizadeh, M., Paslari, P., Bagheri, M. & Moradpour, S. (2026). Meta-synthesis of public administration components based on the good governance approach in higher education. *Iranian Journal of Educational Research*, 5 (1), 1-20.

. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/5.1.1>



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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/5.1.1>

Publisher: University of Hormozgan.

Introduction

Governance is the exercise of authority through formal and informal traditions and institutions to secure public interests. It addresses the institutions and individuals involved in decision-making and implementation processes (Rezaei Zadeh, 2021). Participation in governance relations—often termed “healthy governance” or “participatory governance”—is a method for addressing a wide range of problems and conflicts, where individuals regularly engage in negotiation and collective decision-making to reach satisfactory and convincing decisions. Governance entails policymaking and implementation in the public sector according to the public good. Some define governance in terms of authority relations and their arrangement between the ruler and the ruled, while others define it as the exercise of authority through formal and informal institutions to secure public interests (Javadi & Emami, 2021). Governance concerns organizations and individuals who play roles in decision-making and implementation. Nevertheless, the most fitting definition appears to be viewing governance as a process of steering and control. The Greek root of the word means “steering a ship”; a helmsman simultaneously steers and controls the vessel to bring its passengers to a desired destination. Accordingly, in the governance process, governments, alongside other sectors, strive to realize shared economic and social goals through proper direction and steering of affairs (Piper & Peters, 2021).

Numerous studies have examined the impact of governance across various domains and its effect on organizational components. The role of governance mechanisms is influenced by multiple factors. Previous studies provide diverse empirical evidence, including (Glouma, 2021). Governance essentially means equal and uniform participation of all citizens in the decision-making process. It implies transparency, accountability, justice, and the promotion of equality before the law (Klasaček, 2018). Governance is the process of decision-making and the flow of implemented decisions. It is not confined to the public sector but pertains to all institutions and actors involved in decision-making (Lisa, 2018). According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), providing regulatory quality, improving public-sector effectiveness and accountability, eliminating corruption, and fostering economic progress are instruments of governance. Initially, governance had an economic orientation—its formation aimed at economic development. Later, as the state, one element of governance, needed to appear strong and high-quality among the set of elements, it also acquired a political orientation. In recent years, the concept has been presented

in various forms and approaches, among which “good governance” has been a primary focus (Major et al., 2019). However, after years of research, implementation, and application in different countries, a newer concept of governance emerged, termed “healthy” or “conducive governance” (Setiyadharma et al., 2018).

Healthy governance encompasses the state as an enabling institution, a legal framework, civil society, the private sector, citizens, and formal structures (OECD, 2022). Due to its dynamic and multidimensional nature, this type of governance has attracted attention in many countries, which continually strive to achieve its dimensions and components. Political systems, in their managerial and policy-making programs, constantly require monitoring, control, and review of their performance. For any political system to perform its duties optimally and avoid crisis, corruption, and inefficiency, it must, on one hand, employ new methods and tools to improve its quality and, on the other, compare itself with peer systems to gauge its capability (Ma’dani et al., 2024).

In the domain of governance, most studies indicate that corruption stems from weak or improper governance, fundamentally dependent on principles of transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption. Whenever transparency or accountability is lacking, the likelihood of corruption increases. Thus, the relationship between healthy governance and anti-corruption is correlational, meaning the anti-corruption process is the starting point of healthy governance—an issue that extends beyond local levels and positively impacts the structure and composition of social, economic, and political systems (Al-Diraija, 2019; Mona, 2020). Applying the principles and requirements of healthy governance necessitates specific efforts to activate awareness-raising and discourse-building programs, both for governments themselves and for citizens, to strengthen public participation in decision-making (Russi et al., 2022).

Healthy governance is a modern topic that, due to its importance in developing organizational environments—especially organizations interacting with the public—through connection with reform mechanisms, feedback, and development of public management (key elements of a healthy governance system), has attracted the attention of many public and private institutions. It helps foster commitment that steers processes toward continuous development. Moreover, healthy governance aids the participation of all organizational stakeholders in the decision-making process, where decisions are not confined to a specific group within the organization (Alam & Gheibi, 2022).

Public management is a vital part of government in many countries; its efficiency plays a significant role in the survival of civilizations, while its inefficiency contributes to their decline. In the realm of public management, law enforcement is far more challenging than legislation. What the constitution embodies as general principles for administering society will hold little significance without an effective administrative system. The administrative systems of developing countries are inefficient and suffer from deficiencies that have practically challenged the development process. The existing administrative system in Iran is also inefficient and poses a serious obstacle to development (Ma'dani & Ghorbanizadeh, 2023). In today's world, people increasingly expect swift decision-making from governments and authorities, particularly in areas of public management where collective decisions concerning social benefits, taxes, expenditures, permits, etc., are made (Monarcha, 2021).

Public-management issues have multiple dimensions and facets; their causes cannot be limited to one or a few specific reasons. Some public-management issues primarily stem from internal factors. For instance, some argue that because public management lacks a clear path, identifying its problems and issues has become difficult (Nargesian & Asadzadeh, 2022). Others arise from external factors, such as sanctions, economic pressures, etc. Elsewhere, a thinker named Mosher (2021) contends that in public management, it is the relations between different levels of government that exacerbate public-management problems. Alternatively, some researchers attribute these problems to an unhealthy and defective administrative system that is also weak in-service delivery. Those researching government issues strongly emphasize that the root of inconsistencies, instability, and changes in policies and implementation methods is the absence of a program or strategy (Ma'dani & Ghorbanizadeh, 2023).

Based on a review of previous studies on governance, certain differences in perspectives and research gaps can be identified. Despite the valuable insights of existing studies, gaps remain. For example, limited research exists on stakeholder participation in the specific context of healthy governance. Addressing this research gap can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of healthy governance. Therefore, the present article aims to identify the components of public management based on healthy governance.

Governance is the process of decision-making and the flow of implemented decisions. It is not confined to the public sector but pertains to all institutions and actors involved in decision-making

(Lisa, 2018, p. 56). According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), providing regulatory quality, improving public-sector effectiveness and accountability, eliminating corruption, and fostering economic progress are instruments of governance. Initially, governance had an economic orientation—its formation aimed at economic development (Memarzadeh et al., 2021). Later, as the state, one element of governance, needed to appear strong and high-quality among the set of elements, it also acquired a political orientation.

Public management is a main branch of administrative and political sciences that examines how planning, organizing, directing, and controlling public affairs are conducted within governmental structures. Since the formation of modern states in the nineteenth century, this field has consistently undergone structural and content changes. Particularly with the emergence of classical theories such as Frederick Taylor's scientific management and Max Weber's bureaucracy theory, public management became recognized as an independent domain within the administrative system (Shafritz et al., 2016). The evolution of public management in recent decades has been accompanied by new movements such as "New Public Management" and "good governance." These approaches seek to enhance the efficiency and accountability of the public sector by employing market logic. For example, New Public Management emphasizes that the government should focus on efficiency, productivity, and customer satisfaction like the private sector (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). However, some critics argue that such approaches have undermined public values such as justice, transparency, and participation.

The term "healthy governance" is used primarily in public management and political science and specifically refers to participatory, multi-stakeholder, consensus-seeking processes that are often facilitated or mediated by a third party. These participatory processes are generally employed to address public-policy challenges. Emerson and Gerlak (2014) view healthy governance as processes and structures applied at decision-making and public-policy levels, facilitating the participation of actors from the public, private, and civil-society sectors to achieve a public goal that would not be attainable by a single entity or party alone. In 2015, Emerson and Nabatchi provided a broad definition of healthy governance, describing it as the process and structure of public-policy formulation that engages society and governmental organizations, levels of government, the private sector, and civil society to attain public interests that a single institution or party could not achieve alone (Christopher et al., 2020). In recent years, with the call for positive

research in public management (Douglas et al., 2020) and the popularity of healthy-governance discourse, attention to how and under what conditions healthy governance can help secure governments has become a serious and debated topic. By facilitating discourse and enhancing its quality, along with dialogue-based exchanges between government officials and social stakeholders—including citizens, civil-society organizations, and civic institutions—governments can raise their accountability quality and, consequently, increase public trust.

Material and Methods

The present study adopts a research synthesis approach to systematically analyze existing studies related to the dimensions and components of public management based on the healthy governance approach, with particular emphasis on stakeholder participation. Research synthesis is a transparent and systematic method used to identify, evaluate, and integrate the findings of prior studies conducted by researchers and scholars. Studies eligible for inclusion in this method must be published online and be based on empirical or field-based research.

Accordingly, the scope of this study includes all peer-reviewed and credible scientific articles addressing the dimensions and components of stakeholder participation in healthy governance. Given the substantial conceptual and practical developments in governance and stakeholder participation in recent years, the selected studies were limited to contemporary publications. To collect and organize the required data, a researcher-designed data extraction worksheet was employed to systematically record and report information from primary studies.

To analyze the synthesized findings, the study followed the seven-step research synthesis model proposed by Lee, Wright, Roca-Viana, and Pickering (2008). In addition, inter-coder reliability was calculated using the agreement coefficient formula:

$$C.R = \frac{(85 + 79 + 80 + 72)}{4 \times 99} \times 100 = 74.79$$

$$C.R = \frac{4 \times 99}{(85 + 79 + 80 + 72)} \times 100 = 74.79$$

where C.R C.R C.R represents the percentage of agreement between coders, calculated as the ratio of agreed category items to the total number of category items. Given the focus of this article, the first five stages of the model are summarized below.

Step 1: Formulation of the Research Question: The formulation of the research question constitutes the initial and most critical step in the research synthesis process. In this study, the research questions and their parameters were structured as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Questions and Parameters

Parameter	Description
What (Phenomenon under study)	What are the dimensions and components of public management based on healthy governance as reflected in the research literature?
Who (Population/Source)	Multiple international and national databases were examined, including Scopus, Emerald, Sage, Scientific Information Database (SID), ScienceDirect, ProQuest, SpringerLink, World Scientific, Taylor & Francis, Google Scholar, and ERIC.
What findings	Studies whose findings addressed the dimensions and components of public management based on healthy governance were analyzed.
When (Time frame)	Studies published from 2018 onward were included.
How (Method of study selection)	A research synthesis method was employed, applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to select relevant studies and remove irrelevant ones.

Step 2: Development of the Review Protocol

To minimize bias, a review protocol was established prior to retrieving the relevant literature. At this stage, the researcher defined the scope of the review and developed criteria for evaluating the relevance and quality of studies. This process involved systematic judgment regarding which studies met the knowledge requirements of the research and required the formulation of explicit criteria for study selection and classification (Okoli & Schabram, 2011).

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they: Were published articles addressing the dimensions and components of public management based on healthy governance; Provided sufficient data relevant to the research objectives, particularly by reporting codes, themes, or analytical results related to healthy governance components; Had undergone a peer-review process and were published as full-text articles, either online or in print.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they: Did not provide sufficient information aligned with the objectives of this research, or merely examined healthy governance components quantitatively alongside unrelated variables; Lacked adequate scientific quality or were published in non-credible journals or conferences; Were published prior to 2018 and thus deemed outdated or less relevant to current governance contexts.

Step 3: Literature Search Strategy

This stage involved a comprehensive search for studies aligned with the primary research objective. Relevant scientific articles were identified using predefined keywords across both national (e.g., Google, SID, Normagas, Magiran, Comprehensive Humanities Portal, IRANDOC, ElmNet) and international databases (e.g., Scopus, Emerald, Sage, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, SpringerLink, World Scientific, Taylor & Francis, Google Scholar, ERIC, and Wiley).

Studies were screened based on their relevance to the research objectives, with irrelevant sources excluded. To enhance methodological rigor, the search process was conducted independently by two researchers with expertise in information retrieval and database searching. Furthermore, three subject-matter experts in governance and stakeholder participation—particularly in the domain of healthy governance—supervised the entire research process.

The study relied exclusively on peer-reviewed national and international journal articles, ensuring that all included sources had undergone expert evaluation and possessed acceptable scientific validity.

Step 4: Study Selection and Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was used to systematically collect information from each study. The extracted data included: (1) source information (journal name, article title, and author(s)); (2) research objectives; (3) methodology; and (4) key findings.

An initial pool of 90 Persian and English studies was identified after applying the inclusion criteria. Following detailed content evaluation and application of exclusion criteria, 27 studies were ultimately selected for final analysis. Table 2 illustrates an example of the search process and inclusion/exclusion criteria applied across selected databases.

Step 5: Quality Assessment

Ensuring the credibility and objectivity of included studies is a fundamental requirement of research synthesis. Although comprehensive searches often yield a large number of studies, not all meet acceptable quality standards. Therefore, all identified studies were assessed prior to analysis using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria and appropriate evaluation tools.

In this study, a quality assessment checklist was applied to classify studies as high, medium, or low quality. The purpose of this evaluation was to enhance the validity of the synthesis by excluding low-quality studies from the analytical process. The checklist was adapted from Carlsen

et al. (2007) and included criteria such as sampling strategy, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, clarity of findings, and coherence between research paradigms and methodological choices.

Each study was independently evaluated by at least two researchers. In cases of disagreement or study rejection, the reason for exclusion was documented. When discrepancies arose between reviewers, a third researcher served as an adjudicator. The subsequent sixth and seventh stages of the Lee et al. (2008) model were then applied to synthesize and interpret the final findings.

Results

Processing, Synthesis, and Interpretation as a Tangible Product

Based on the findings obtained from the research synthesis and guided by the predefined methodological criteria, all indicators and components were initially extracted through an open coding process. At this stage, concepts related to stakeholder participation and healthy governance in public management were identified directly from the selected studies.

Accordingly, Table 2 presents the extracted findings from the reviewed studies, organized into four key elements: authors, year of publication, research title, research method, and semantic codes. The studies were numbered based on their year of publication to reflect the chronological development of governance and participation concepts.

Table 2. Semantic Codes Identified from the Reviewed Studies

No.	Author(s) & Year	Title	Methodology	Semantic Codes
1	Peter et al., 2024	Participation of Students in All Areas of Governance	Systematic Review	Student participation; decision-making; meaningful participation
2	Doğan & Arslan, 2025	Graduate Student Engagement and Digital Governance	Qualitative – Semi-structured interviews	Digital governance; sustainability; efficiency
3	Etkkali & Placide, 2023	ICT Governance in Higher Education: A Case Study	Case study – Ethical interpretation	ICT governance; barriers; developing countries
4	Wei Hao & Wang, 2024	Research on Digital Governance Model in Universities	Case study – Data-driven modeling	Digital transformation; governance model; smart university
5	Ashmel et al., 2022	Governance and Strategies of Digital Transformation	Book chapter – Prescriptive	Digital transformation; smart governance framework
6	Wu et al., 2024	AI Governance in Higher Education: Case Studies	Comparative case study	AI governance; university policy
7	Dudycz et al., 2022	Intelligent Management Control System Framework	Conceptual framework design	Intelligent control management; conceptual framework
8	Wei Hao & Wang, 2024	Digital Governance Model in China	Data-driven case study	Digital governance; student behavioral data

9	Palma et al., 2023	Student Participation and Governance	Quantitative – Survey	Urban governance; student role in university governance
10	Haque & Sultana, 2023	Higher Education Governance and Student Participation	Conceptual review	Student participation; student voice
11	..., 2025	Participatory Governance Reform in India	Policy analysis – Case study	Participatory governance; NEP 2020
12	Moreb & Qawasmi, 2024	Digital Transformation of HEIs	Conference case study	Smart university; AI technologies
13	Li et al., 2025	Framework for Generative AI Policies	Comparative content analysis	AI governance; AI policy
14	Wang et al., 2024	Digital Governance Model – Liaoning University	Behavioral data case study	Digital governance; university analytics
15	Etkkali & Placide, 2023	ICT Governance in Higher Education – Libya	Case study	ICT governance; higher education
16	Qawasmi, 2024	Digital Transformation of HEIs	Object-based case study	Digital governance; SCME University
17	MDPI Special Issue, 2025	Higher Education Governance in the Digital Era	Thematic review	Macro-policy role in digitalization
18	HBMSU, 2024	Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University	Descriptive review	Smart university; ICT
19	Government of Karnataka, 2022	Unified University and College Management System	Public policy analysis	UUCMS; digital government
20	Peter et al., 2024	Digital Examination Ecosystem	News analysis	Digital ecosystem; e-assessment
21	Doğan & Arslan, 2025	Mobile Urban Governance Report	Urban case study	Smart urban governance
22	Etkkali & Placide, 2023	Comparative AI Policy Framework	Comparative study	AI and university governance
23	Wei Hao & Wang, 2024	Student Participation in Europe	Multi-institutional survey	Student participation; Europe
24	Ashmel et al., 2022	Reference Reading	Conceptual definition	Student participation; dictionary entry
25	Wu et al., 2024	Digital Transformation During Pandemic	Literature review	Digital university; post-pandemic era
26	Haririan et al., 2023	AI Governance – Big Ten Universities	Case study	AI governance; ethics
27	Elahi et al., 2023	NEP 2020 – India	Policy case study	Participatory governance; India
28	Ghamoshi & Pourkarimi, 2022	ICT Governance in Libya	Case study	ICT governance; Libya
29	Keikha & Tofighi, 2022	Smart Campus Model	Descriptive study	Digital university; HBMSU
30	Fatanat-Fard et al., 2021	UUCMS Public Policy Study	System analysis	UUCMS; Indian state governance

Inter-Study Synthesis of Findings

At this stage, the researchers present the phenomena emerging from the qualitative meta-synthesis process. According to Lee, Wright, Roca-Viana, and Pickering (2008), effective presentation of synthesis findings requires the use of visual representations, including tables and conceptual models, to address diverse audiences.

Initially, all extracted features, elements, and components related to stakeholder-based governance were identified through open coding. Subsequently, during the synthesis phase, overlapping and conceptually similar codes were merged through axial coding, resulting in the extraction of higher-order components (axial codes). These components were then grouped under broader conceptual categories through selective coding, which led to the identification of seven main dimensions of stakeholder participation in healthy governance. The results of axial and selective coding are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Dimensions and Components of Stakeholder-Based Healthy Governance

No.	Author(s)	Sub-Category	Main Category (Dimension)
1	Kezar (2004)	Student participation in decision-making	Governance Structure
2	Tierney (2006)	Faculty involvement in policy-making	Governance Structure
3	Barnett (2011)	Role of professional associations	Governance Structure
4	Deem (2001)	Transparency and accountability in decisions	Governance Structure
5	Gaebel et al. (2014)	Integration of educational and research systems	Decision-Making Processes
6	OECD (2020)	University data and information management	Decision-Making Processes
7	Basu (2004)	Automation and digital transformation	Decision-Making Processes
8	Kettunen (2011)	Cybersecurity in universities	Decision-Making Processes
9	Floridi et al. (2018)	Ethical AI policies	Stakeholder Participation & Inclusion
10	Vinuesa et al. (2020)	Data-driven decision-making	Stakeholder Participation & Inclusion
11	Aoun (2017)	AI-based educational evaluation	Stakeholder Participation & Inclusion
12	Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019)	AI impact on power structures	Stakeholder Participation & Inclusion
13	Campbell & Oblinger (2007)	Learning analytics for policy-making	Resources & Capacities
14	Daniel (2015)	Analytical dashboards	Resources & Capacities
15	Siemens & Long (2011)	Student behavior analytics	Resources & Capacities
16	Ferguson (2012)	Data mining for strategic planning	Resources & Capacities
17	Goddard et al. (2016)	Smart university infrastructure	Transparency & Accountability
18	Trencher et al. (2014)	Technology-based adaptive learning	Transparency & Accountability
19	Uhlir (2007)	Internet of Things in education	Transparency & Accountability
20	Gil-Garcia et al. (2009)	Decision support systems	Transparency & Accountability
21	Transparency International (2013)	Public disclosure of policies	Innovation & Transformative Governance
22	Bovens (2007)	Stakeholder accountability systems	Innovation & Transformative Governance
23	Behn (2001)	Executive performance evaluation	Innovation & Transformative Governance
24	Power (1997)	Internal control and external oversight	Innovation & Transformative Governance
25	Van der Wal (2020)	Organizational agility	Sustainable Development & Social Responsibility
26	Brennan & Shah (2000)	Structural reform aligned with technology	Sustainable Development & Social Responsibility
27	Marginson (2007)	Flexible policy-making	Sustainable Development & Social Responsibility
28	Argyris & Schön (1978)	Organizational learning	Sustainable Development & Social Responsibility

Explanation of Dimensions and Sub-Dimensions

1. Governance Structure: Governance structure in higher education refers to the distribution and organization of power, roles, and responsibilities among various actors within the system. It determines decision-making authority and levels of control, emphasizing interaction among governments, higher education institutions, independent bodies, private sectors, and civil society. An effective governance structure should be flexible, transparent, and responsive to rapid technological and social change.

2. Decision-Making Processes: Decision-making processes encompass policy formulation, budgeting, and academic planning mechanisms. These processes should be participatory, evidence-based, transparent, and technologically supported. Ineffective decision-making can result in resource waste and reduced educational quality, whereas data-driven and inclusive approaches enhance efficiency and legitimacy.

3. Stakeholder Participation and Inclusion: Meaningful stakeholder participation—including faculty, students, staff, employers, government, and local communities—is a cornerstone of healthy governance. Genuine participation increases legitimacy, transparency, institutional trust, and collective responsibility. Sustainable mechanisms such as advisory councils and stakeholder panels are essential for effective inclusion.

4. Resources and Capacities: This dimension includes human, financial, technological, and institutional resources required for effective governance. Capacity building, digital infrastructure development, leadership enhancement, and strategic resource management are critical to sustaining governance quality and long-term development.

5. Transparency and Accountability: Transparency and accountability emphasize timely and accessible disclosure of institutional activities, budgets, performance indicators, and policy decisions. Accountability mechanisms strengthen public trust, reduce corruption risks, and improve decision-making quality through internal and external evaluation systems.

6. Innovation and Transformative Governance: Transformative governance reflects institutions' ability to adapt, innovate, and redesign policies and structures. Leveraging emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital platforms enables agile governance, resilience, and improved institutional performance.

7. Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility: This dimension highlights universities' responsibility toward sustainable development goals. Effective governance aligns educational, research, and social missions with environmental, social, and economic challenges, positioning universities as socially responsible and future-oriented institutions.



Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study (Derived from Meta-Synthesis)

The conceptual model illustrates the seven interrelated dimensions of stakeholder-based healthy governance in public management, extracted through qualitative meta-synthesis.

Discussion

In today's complex and rapidly evolving world, higher education systems—as one of the most critical infrastructures for development—require governance models that are efficient, accountable, and adaptive. The findings of this study indicate that multiple components play a role in realizing healthy governance in public higher education systems. Governance structure, decision-making processes, resources and capacities, transparency and accountability, innovation and transformation, stakeholder participation, and sustainable development each, in turn, influence

the formation of effective and efficient public management. Emphasizing these components is particularly indispensable in the state-centric educational context of developing countries.

The results suggest that without agile, inclusive, and data-driven structures, healthy governance cannot be achieved. Many of today's challenges in higher education—such as chronic bureaucracy, ineffective policy-making, the gap between academia and industry, and the ineffectiveness of oversight bodies—stem from neglecting the fundamental principles of healthy governance. Unless structures and processes are revised, even the best programs will fail due to implementation weaknesses. Therefore, governments should redefine their role from mere control toward strategic steering, facilitation, and oversight.

One of the most significant outcomes of this research is the indispensable role of stakeholder participation in enhancing governance. Higher education can fulfill its real and effective function only when decision-making is based on the active participation of students, faculty, industry, and civil society. Participatory models not only increase the legitimacy of policies but also foster innovation, productivity, and better accountability. Developing participatory and advisory institutions within and between universities and society is a strategic necessity for achieving healthy governance.

Moreover, healthy governance is impossible without transparency and accountability. Transparent information systems, free access to performance data, and managerial responsibility for the consequences of their decisions are key to boosting public trust and the effectiveness of educational institutions. Furthermore, linking higher-education policies with sustainable development and social responsibility is a neglected yet vital dimension. Universities must commit themselves to solving real-world societal problems, not merely being degree-granting institutions. This commitment should be reflected in policy-making, curricula, and research missions.

When comparing the findings of this study with prior research, a notable alignment emerges. For instance, studies by Kaufmann et al. (2010) and Fukuyama (2013) emphasize the importance of transparency, accountability, and institutional capacity in realizing healthy governance, which aligns with the present article's emphasis on legal structures and administrative transparency. Similarly, works such as Koppell (2005) and Rhodes (1997) discuss complex accountability models and network governance, resonating with this research's focus on participation-centric approaches, stakeholder interaction, and public oversight. Studies by Pierre & Peters (2000),

Christensen & Lægreid (2007), and Bevir (2011)—with their focus on flexible structures, cross-sectoral participation, and governance as a social process—also share a close approach with this study, where healthy governance is presented as a multidimensional model based on ethical values, efficiency, and social justice.

Research by Grindle (2004) and Andrews (2013), which examine governance in local contexts, aligns with the present article's view on the need to localize components of public governance. In contrast, some studies, such as Osborne (2006) and Pollitt & Bouckaert (2011), adopt a different approach, focusing primarily on market-oriented principles, privatization, and technocracy—an approach critiqued in this study. From the perspective of this article, these approaches, despite their effectiveness in certain areas, often overlook social justice, ethical transparency, and public participation, and thus cannot offer a complete model of healthy governance.

International research, such as UNESCO (2021), the World Bank (2017), and OECD (2015), which concentrate on education, sustainable development, and public policy, reinforces themes like social responsibility, human-resource development, and sound leadership—themes that are precisely in line with the present findings. These studies regard governance not merely as an institutional framework but as a living, evolving, and people-centered system.

Research Recommendations

Develop agile and flexible governance structures in higher education that can respond swiftly to environmental, scientific, and technological changes while avoiding redundant bureaucracy.

Design and implement transparent data systems that provide all stakeholders with free and comprehensible access to performance information of universities and higher-education institutions.

Strengthen stakeholder participation by establishing advisory councils composed of students, faculty, industry representatives, and civil society in policy-making and decision-making processes.

Localize healthy governance models according to the country's cultural, economic, and social conditions, rather than merely copying international models.

Foster effective university-industry linkages through joint projects, targeted internships, and support for technological innovations that address real labor-market needs.

Establish a multi-level accountability system that makes managers' responsibility for their decisions transparent and enforceable at the university, ministry, and oversight-body levels.

Integrate sustainable-development goals into universities' policies, curricula, and research projects as part of their core mission.

Enhance institutional capacity by training managers, improving decision-making processes, and utilizing modern technologies to increase efficiency.

Develop independent evaluation bodies that can impartially review and report on university performance to strengthen public trust.

Promote a culture of social responsibility in universities, focusing on solving real societal problems and improving quality of life beyond merely granting degrees.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

The authors did (not) receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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