

An Exploration of Higher Education Governance and Educational Management Practice Paths from the Perspective of Comparative Education

Kexin Wang

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Newcastle upon tyne, Newcastle upon tyne, UK

Abstract: Domestic higher education has fully entered the stage of massification, and the traditional development model relying solely on expanding institutional scale can no longer meet the practical demands for high-quality, connotative development. To continuously improve educational standards, universities must promptly update their management philosophies and refine their internal governance systems. Currently, the focus of higher education development has shifted significantly—institutional scale is no longer the sole criterion for measuring institutional strength, while governance system construction and internal management capabilities are gradually becoming key factors in enhancing overall competitiveness and core strengths. The quality of university governance directly affects the effectiveness of three core functions: talent cultivation, scientific research innovation, and social service, and serves as a crucial basis for evaluating institutional performance. Existing research reveals notable gaps in comparative studies between Chinese and foreign university governance. Most studies remain superficial, focusing merely on surface-level model comparisons without deeply analyzing essential differences in educational systems or exploring core aspects such as power and responsibility mechanisms, university-government collaboration, and refined management. As a result, there is a relative scarcity of localized research grounded in China's actual university context that can directly guide reform efforts. Based on comparative education theory and drawing from firsthand experience in university administration, this paper examines the strengths and weaknesses of mainstream Western university governance models and identifies practical governance challenges faced by Chinese institutions in areas such as authority allocation, multi-party collaboration, and daily operations. By integrating the unique characteristics of China's higher education development, the paper proposes optimization strategies at three levels—institutional building, empowerment of stakeholders, and smart governance—to offer feasible reference points for advancing modernization of governance and achieving sustainable, high-quality development in Chinese universities.

Keywords: Comparative education; Higher Education Governance; Educational management; Practice approach; Modernization of governance.

1. Introduction

With the completion of the implementation of the national higher education popularization construction task, the overall development logic of the industry has undergone a fundamental transformation. The traditional model of running schools centered on scale expansion has withdrawn from the mainstream development track. During the early stage of China's higher education construction, the overall supply of social educational resources was insufficient. Various universities expanded their enrollment, renovated and expanded campuses, and added popular majors through external expansion methods to quickly fill the gap in regional educational resources and effectively expand the channels for the public to access higher education, laying a foundation for the popularization of higher education. However, this development model that emphasizes quantity over quality has obvious shortcomings [1]. During the construction process, excessive emphasis was placed on the improvement of the school's scale, while the internal governance system and the quality of education were neglected for a long time, gradually accumulating many structural development problems. Under the dual background of industry iteration and talent upgrading, society's requirements for the comprehensive quality and professional ability of high-quality applied talents have continued to increase. The traditional expansive school management model has become less and less suitable for this.

From the actual situation of local universities, serious homogenization of school operation, virtualized internal construction, and rigid governance mechanisms are widespread, directly hindering the formation of a distinctive school operation pattern and restricting the cultivation of core school competitiveness. Currently, the optimization space of conventional quality improvement paths such as teaching reform and scientific research innovation is gradually narrowing. Relying on the optimization of governance systems and the innovation of management mechanisms to break through development bottlenecks has become the core path for local universities to achieve high-quality development with an internal model [2].

Based on the practical management experience of universities, it can be found that the single administrative-led control system is the core problem restricting the improvement of the governance efficiency of domestic universities at present. For a long time, domestic universities have formed an administrative coordination operation mode. Major decisions, daily operation management, and internal resource allocation of the university are all led and promoted by the administrative system. This management model focuses on institutional constraints and process control, emphasizing the standardization of the educational order, but fails to conform to the objective laws of academic development and cannot adapt to the diversified and individualized development needs of teachers and students.

This system is suitable for the special stage of large-scale expansion of higher education, but it is difficult to match the current goal of high-quality and high-level higher education development. Administrative power continuously intervenes in core academic affairs such as discipline construction, teaching reform, and academic evaluation, constantly compressing the space for academic innovation and the autonomy of school operation, directly causing a lack of internal development motivation in universities and low efficiency of the implementation of various reform measures. At the same time, the governance orientation of heavy control and light service has separated the internal administrative management work from the core mission of moral education and talent cultivation, and the governance shortcomings have continued to emerge, promoting the systematic innovation of the university governance system as an inevitable trend in industry development.

The current academic research in the field of university governance in China mostly focuses on summarizing local educational scenarios and practical experiences, and the research perspective is relatively fixed, making it difficult to deeply solve the structural contradictions in university governance. The research system also has certain limitations [3]. Compared with a single local research paradigm, comparative education research, relying on the research advantages of cross-national and cross-system, can break free from the constraints of the existing research thinking, by sorting out the governance structure, operation mechanism and practical experience of mature universities abroad, accurately identify the governance shortcomings of domestic universities, and provide new research ideas for local governance reform. European and American universities, based on their long-term educational accumulation and institutional optimization, have formed a mature governance model that is suitable for their own social systems and market environments, and its governance concepts and operation models have high reference value. However, there are essential differences between Chinese and foreign education systems, institutional governance models do not have a universal applicable template, and cannot be directly transplanted and applied. The reform practices of many domestic universities have also fully confirmed that blindly copying overseas governance models will lead to insufficient institutional adaptability and unsatisfactory implementation results of reforms. Based on the above research background, this paper takes comparative education as the core research perspective, combines the practical management experience of first-line universities, dialectically analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the mainstream university governance models in China and abroad, and specifically completes the localization transformation of advanced governance concepts from abroad, exploring governance paths that are in line with China's national conditions and fit the actual development situation of local universities, providing practical theoretical references and practical support for the modernization construction of university governance in China [4].

2. Comparison of Core Governance Models of Higher Education between China and Foreign Countries from the Perspective of Comparative Education

The governance systems of universities in different

countries have gradually developed based on local economic, cultural and educational needs, and each has its unique institutional characteristics. There is no universal governance template applicable worldwide. Currently, some academic research has a one-sided understanding, simply taking the governance systems of Europe and America as the optimal templates for reference, while ignoring the applicable conditions and inherent flaws of different models, resulting in limited reference value for the research conclusions. Only by conducting multi-angle and in-depth comparative analysis and objectively evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of different governance models can we provide scientific basis for the reform of local universities.

Each country's university governance model has its own strengths and weaknesses. There is no single system that can fit all educational scenarios and avoid all governance problems [5]. Domestic universities cannot simply copy the overseas educational experience. Systematically comparing the operational logic, advantages and weaknesses, and applicable scenarios of the governance models of China and abroad can help us identify the governance pain points of domestic universities and formulate reform ideas that are in line with the actual operation of the universities and can be implemented.

2.1. Typical Models and Core Characteristics of Higher Education Governance Abroad

Among the global university governance systems, the market-oriented autonomy model of the United States and the public checks and balances model of Europe have the widest coverage and the strongest representativeness. American universities closely align their operations with market rules and have extremely high autonomy. Both public and private universities can independently arrange core tasks such as talent cultivation, professional layout, and research breakthroughs. The government mainly conducts top-level supervision through legislation, financial subsidies, and policy regulation, and does not interfere with the specific operations and daily management of universities, providing them with sufficient space for autonomy [6].

The relaxed autonomy environment for university operation enables American universities to have strong market adaptability. Universities can adjust their professional structures, update training plans, and promote the market-oriented transformation of research achievements in a timely manner, precisely aligning with regional industrial upgrading needs. From a long-term perspective, the completely market-oriented educational model has obvious flaws. A single market orientation will trigger various deep-level governance issues and weaken the core attribute of higher education as a public education institution.

Competition in the market can drive universities to improve their educational quality, but a purely market-oriented model will make university operations overly profit-driven. To enhance educational benefits and social recognition, American universities focus on building application-oriented majors with high employment rates and high returns, while investing insufficient resources in basic disciplines, humanities, and social sciences [7]. The long-term imbalance in resource allocation has led to an imbalance in the development of university disciplines, deviating from the essence of higher education and this is also the main reason why this model is not suitable for the development of higher education in China.

The governance model of European universities is completely different from that of the United States. These universities take public service as their core goal and have established a standardized governance framework with multi-party participation and balanced rights and responsibilities. After long-term institutional refinement and practical optimization, European universities have formed a clear rights and responsibilities, stable operation system. Government, universities, academic teams, and social institutions each perform their duties, mutually restrain, and cooperate to effectively regulate university operations and steadily improve educational quality.

European universities have assigned the decision-making power for core tasks such as professional construction, teaching reform, faculty selection, and academic evaluation to the academic committee. This approach can effectively restrain the disorderly expansion of administrative power and maintain the academic essence and public education color of universities. At the same time, the improvement of information disclosure and social supervision mechanisms can avoid power abuse and management chaos, ensuring the university operation process is standardized, transparent, and fair, and laying a solid institutional foundation for the stable development of the institution [8].

The balanced governance model has significant advantages in regulating operations and preventing risks, but the overall operational efficiency is relatively low. The multi-party participation and multi-level review operation mechanism ensures the standardization of operations, but significantly reduces the speed of decision-making and reform promotion by universities. In response to external changes such as industrial upgrading, policy updates, and changes in talent demands, universities respond slowly and lack flexibility, making it difficult to adapt to the rapid development of society.

The two types of mainstream governance models from outside have their own advantages and disadvantages. The American model has strong market adaptability and flexible operation, but has prominent problems such as profit-driven operation and disciplinary imbalance; the European model is stable and adheres to the public attribute, but has low reform efficiency and weak market adaptability. When domestic universities carry out governance reforms, they can combine their own educational positioning and development needs, selectively absorb the high-quality experiences of these two models, avoid inherent flaws, and build a localized governance system that is adapted to the domestic educational environment [9].

2.2. The current situation and core problems of higher education governance in our country

Our country's higher education has long adopted a governance model of government coordination and administrative leadership. This management system played a significant role during the stage of popularizing higher education. Through efficient resource integration and policy implementation capabilities, our country completed the comprehensive popularization of higher education within several decades, achieved the transition from elite education to mass education, and established a large-scale and comprehensive higher education system, laying a solid foundation for the long-term development of the industry.

After entering the stage of internal-oriented development, the adaptability of the traditional governance model has

continuously declined, and various structural and deep-seated governance problems have emerged. Multiple governance contradictions are intertwined, restricting the high-quality development of universities [10]. From the perspective of frontline management practice, the ambiguity of the boundary between power and responsibility is the most common and core governance issue in domestic universities, and it is also the main root cause of various governance chaos.

At present, there are no detailed and implementable standards for the division of responsibilities and rights for the governance entities of the government, universities, and society in China. Administrative forces often intervene in specific educational affairs such as discipline adjustment, teaching reform, and research application, resulting in the inability of universities to truly implement their legal autonomy in education. The cumbersome multi-level approval process further reduces the autonomy of universities in running their own affairs, causing the decision-making of universities to lag behind market changes, weak market adaptability, and making it difficult to carry out innovative development.

Apart from the ambiguity of the division of responsibilities and rights, the imbalance of the internal governance structure is also a common problem in domestic universities. The planning of most universities, daily management, and major decisions are led by administrative power, and the decision-making authority of the academic committee is significantly reduced. Teachers and students, as well as social organizations, lack stable participation channels and are unable to deeply participate in the core governance work of universities [11]. The modernized governance pattern of multi-party participation has been unable to be implemented in a timely manner, and the professionalism and comprehensiveness of internal governance cannot be guaranteed.

From the reform cases of universities across the country, most internal reform plans are independently designed and implemented by administrative departments, without sufficient investigation of the needs of teachers and students, nor lacking professional argumentation support. Many reform measures are the actual teaching situation and fail to achieve the expected implementation results. Some universities still adhere to traditional control thinking, mainly focusing on institutional constraints and campus order management, ignoring the core role of service education and empowering teachers and students, causing management work to deviate from the core main business of cultivating virtue and fostering talents and deviating from the original intention of higher education [12].

These governance problems have accumulated over time and have an impact on each other, continuously suppressing the vitality of university operation, reducing management efficiency, and hindering the implementation of reforms. They have become the core bottleneck restricting the high-quality development of domestic higher education and must be solved through systematic, precise, and localized reforms.

3. Comparative Education Draws on The Practical Path of Optimizing Higher Education Management in Our Country

The legal systems, diversified governance models and refined governance concepts of foreign universities provide a

clear reference direction for the modernization transformation of domestic university governance. There are significant differences in the institutional environment, market structure, educational positioning and educational goals between China and foreign countries. Directly adopting foreign models is likely to result in inadaptability and cultural incongruity. This article, by combining the pain points of domestic university governance and the local educational characteristics, reasonably draws on high-quality foreign experiences, avoids inherent drawbacks, and builds a practical and operable local reform path, helping to upgrade the governance system of universities.

3.1. Clarify the boundaries of responsibilities and authorities, and establish a legal governance system framework

The unclear boundaries of responsibilities and authorities, as well as excessive administrative intervention in specific educational affairs, are the main sources of various governance in domestic universities, and also hinder the advancement of governance modernization [13]. If universities want to solve their governance problems, they must first clarify the relationship of responsibilities and authorities among the three levels of government, universities, and departments, and establish a standardized and legal institutional framework. Domestic universities do not need to blindly copy the single autonomous or balancing model of overseas universities. They can retain the advantage of government's macro-overseeing role, while also expanding the autonomy of universities in running their own affairs, and balancing the relationship between standardized management and innovative development.

The education authorities need to accelerate the transformation of their functions, reduce their intervention in the specific educational affairs of universities, and focus their work on top-level planning of higher education, policy design, and compliance supervision. Relevant departments can refine the list of responsibilities and authorities, clarify job responsibilities, and simplify approval processes. They can orderly delegate core educational authorities such as discipline construction, teaching reform, scientific research innovation, and teacher training to the universities, further consolidating the position of the universities as the main body of education, and activating the internal development momentum of the institutions [14].

Based on the optimization of the external governance system, the focus of internal governance reform in universities is to balance the operation relationship between administrative power and academic power. Universities should operate under the framework of the president's responsibility system under the leadership of the Party committee, continuously optimize the functions of the academic committee, and enhance the decision-making power of academic teams in core affairs such as professional construction, teaching reform, academic evaluation, and scientific research review. The school can clarify the scope of operation and the rules of balance of the two types of power through regulations, improve the current imbalance of power within the school, and solve the long-standing governance problems such as unclear responsibilities and management inefficiency from the root cause.

3.2. Build a diversified platform and create a collaborative governance operation pattern

The single administrative-led governance model is a significant reason for the lack of vitality in university operations and the failure of reforms to be practical. In the traditional governance system, the administrative department controls all the internal management work of the university. The participation channels for teachers, students, and social forces are limited and their voices are weak, which often leads to one-sided decision-making and a lack of alignment with teaching and industry realities [15]. We can draw on the mature experience of multi-party co-governance from abroad to build a multi-party governance platform that connects both within and outside the university, enhancing the scientificity, professionalism, and practicality of university governance.

To optimize the internal governance system, the first step is to establish a regular mechanism for teachers and students to participate. In the past, the revision of campus regulations, teaching reforms, and daily management were all pushed forward unilaterally by the management level. As the core operating entity, teachers and students have long lacked effective participation and feedback channels, resulting in some reform measures deviating from the actual teaching and industry situations. Schools can establish teacher and student councils, teaching evaluation groups, and online feedback platforms to allow teachers and students to participate in campus governance throughout the process, ensuring that the reform plans are in line with practical teaching and preventing formalistic reforms at the source [16].

While optimizing the internal governance, improving the external collaboration system can effectively address the common problem of superficial cooperation between universities and enterprises, or between universities and localities. Universities should actively connect with local enterprises, research institutions, and third-party evaluation agencies, and introduce professional social forces to participate in core governance aspects such as professional setting, update of training programs, employment guarantee, and teaching evaluation. Colleges and universities can adjust their governance models based on regional industrial development and market talent demands, precisely aligning with social development needs, and building a mutually beneficial and win-win, multi-party, linked, and resource-sharing positive university operation ecosystem.

3.3. Innovate management thinking, promote the transformation to refined and intelligent management

The loose control model and outdated service concepts have long constrained the improvement of university governance quality. Most local universities rely on rigid systems for their management work, and there are widespread problems such as ambiguous standards, cumbersome processes, and weak services [17]. The traditional management model no longer meets the needs of the new era's high-quality development of universities with an internal nature. Compared with advanced governance concepts that are refined and service-oriented from abroad, domestic universities need to promptly update their management thinking and upgrade their operation models.

Innovation in thinking is the foundation for the transformation of governance models. Universities should

abandon the loose and one-size-fits-all control thinking and establish a modern governance concept that is people-oriented, precise and efficient, and prioritizes services. Schools can refine management standards, standardize operation processes, and improve evaluation systems around core tasks such as talent cultivation, faculty building, research services, and logistical support, and shift campus management from rigid control to flexible and precise services to ensure that all governance work is centered around the core of education [18].

The popularization and application of digital technology provide strong technical support for the refined governance of universities. The traditional manual management model is inefficient, inaccurate, and slow in response, and cannot meet the needs of modern educational development [19]. Universities can rely on big data and artificial intelligence to build an integrated smart management platform to achieve digital coverage of all educational affairs such as teaching, faculty building, students, research, and logistics. Technological empowerment can simplify redundant processes, integrate educational resources, precisely manage campus affairs, and comprehensively improve the efficiency and quality of university governance, aligning with the development trend of digital and modernization in higher education [20].

4. Conclusion

This article is based on comparative education theory and focuses on analyzing the two mainstream university governance models in the United States (marketization autonomy) and Europe (public checks and balances). It also examines the advantages and shortcomings of these two foreign governance systems. The article combines the institutional characteristics of China's government-led higher education and the actual situation of local education to summarize the core governance issues of domestic universities in terms of power and responsibility allocation, governance entities, and management concepts. Based on this, the article has established a three-dimensional governance upgrade framework of institutional optimization, diversified collaboration, and intelligent transformation. It has also formed a complete research system for problem analysis, experience reference, and practical implementation.

There is no universal fixed model for higher education governance reform. Each country's governance system must be optimized and adjusted according to its own local system, market, and cultural environment. Although the mature governance models in Europe and the United States have practical advantages, they are limited by multiple real conditions and cannot be directly applied to the higher education system in domestic universities. Domestic universities promoting governance modernization must base themselves on national conditions and educational development characteristics, localize and transform advanced foreign experiences, avoid various governance drawbacks, and explore characteristic reform paths that suit their own educational positioning.

This research has certain limitations. The research mainly focuses on macro model comparison and theoretical analysis, without conducting stratified empirical research on different levels and types of universities, and lacks specific university cases and quantitative data support. The targeted and practicality of the research conclusions still have room for improvement. Future research can refine the research objects,

design differentiated governance plans based on the differences in the operation of different universities, and test the reform effectiveness through field research and empirical data. It can continuously improve the local higher education governance system and contribute to the high-quality development of higher education.

References

- [1] Gornitzka, Å., Maassen, P., & de Boer, H. (2017). Change in university governance structures in continental Europe. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 71(3), 274–289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12130>.
- [2] Kwiek, M. (2015). The unfading power of collegiality? University governance in Poland in a European comparative and quantitative perspective. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 43, 77–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.04.003>
- [3] Dobbins, M., & Knill, C. (2017). Higher education governance in France, Germany, and Italy: Change and variation in the impact of transnational soft governance. *Policy and Society*, 36(1), 67–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2017.1278727>
- [4] Broucker, B., De Wit, K., Verhoeven, J., & Leišytė, L. (2019). New public management and higher education governance reforms: A comparative analysis of 12 European countries. *Higher Education Policy*, 32(4), 547–566. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-018-00118-0>
- [5] Bleiklie, I., Enders, J., & Lepori, B. (2011). New public management, network governance and the university as a changing professional organization. *Higher Education*, 61(4), 409–424. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9347-9>
- [6] Stensaker, B., & Välimaa, J. (2013). Re-configuring higher education governance: A comparative analysis of national reforms. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(2), 211–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2012.730112>
- [7] Stransky-Can, K. (2022). In between new public management and network governance in Austria, Finland and Scotland: Potential conflicts in autonomy understandings of governments and universities. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 14(3), 2742–2766. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-022-00964-8>
- [8] Gándara, D., & Daenekindt, S. (2022). Accountability or equity: Combining topic models and qualitative analysis to examine public rhetoric about performance-based funding. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 44(4), 734–758. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737221092148>
- [9] Gándara, D., & Rutherford, A. (2018). Mitigating unintended impacts? The effects of premiums for underserved populations in performance-funding policies for higher education. *Research in Higher Education*, 59(6), 681–703. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-017-9484-3>
- [10] de Boer, H., & Maassen, P. (2020). The limits of managerial governance in European higher education. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(5), 523–540. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2019-0134>
- [11] Pruvot, E.-B., Estermann, T., & Popkhadze, G. (2023). Institutional autonomy in European higher education: Twenty years of change. *Higher Education Policy*, 36(3), 489–510. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-022-00223-8>
- [12] Leišytė, L., & Dee, J. (2012). University governance and management: A comparative perspective on organizational change. *Higher Education*, 64(5), 627–642. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-012-9524-2>
- [13] Shin, J., & Kim, Y. (2018). Changing patterns of higher education governance under neoliberalism: Global and East Asian perspectives. In J.-C. Shin (Ed.), *Higher education*

- governance in East Asia (pp. 223–241). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0162-3_12
- [14] Nguyen, T. L., Cornish, P., & Minichiello, V. (2025). Becoming a university president: An accidental meritocratic career trajectory. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 79(1), 112–128. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12480>
- [15] Chant, C., & McPherson, M. (2018). Global trends in higher education governance: State steering and institutional management. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 40(3), 245–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2018.1457789>
- [16] Huang, F. (2021). State-university relationships in Chinese higher education: A comparative perspective. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 51(7), 1042–1060. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1785371>
- [17] Christensen, T., & Læg Reid, P. (2021). Autonomy and accountability in university governance reforms in a comparative perspective. *Higher Education*, 82(2), 311–328. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00634-4>
- [18] Vukasović, M., & Bowman, N. (2022). Stakeholder participation in university governance: Cross-national patterns. *Higher Education Policy*, 35(2), 317–338. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-021-00200-0>
- [19] Mok, K. H. (2019). The quest for world-class universities and higher education governance in East Asia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 66, 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.12.003>
- [20] Capano, G., & Pritoni, A. (2020). The governance of higher education between change and persistence: A comparative analysis. *Policy and Society*, 39(4), 477–494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2020.1780862>