

# Governance Models and Educational Policy Reforms: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Institutions

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## Abstract

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The governance of higher education institutions plays a decisive role in shaping their strategic direction, quality assurance mechanisms, and responsiveness to policy reforms. In India, the coexistence of a large public sector and a rapidly expanding private sector presents distinct governance challenges and opportunities. This study conducts a comparative analysis of governance models in public and private higher education institutions, with particular focus on their alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reforms. Using a mixed-method multiple-case study design, the research investigates governance structures, decision-making processes, and stakeholder participation, alongside their influence on the implementation of policy mandates related to autonomy, accreditation, and quality enhancement. Data will be collected through policy document analysis, semi-structured interviews with institutional leaders and faculty, and surveys of academic and administrative staff. The study aims to identify best practices and governance-sensitive strategies that can bridge performance gaps between the two sectors, ensuring that both are equally equipped to meet the evolving demands of higher education in India.

**Keywords:** Governance models, higher education, public institutions, private institutions, educational policy, NEP 2020, quality assurance, institutional autonomy, policy reform, comparative study

## 1. Introduction

Governance in higher education has emerged as a central determinant of institutional quality, accountability, and strategic direction. Globally, the rapid expansion of higher education systems has necessitated governance models that balance autonomy with accountability, academic freedom with market responsiveness, and tradition with innovation. In the Indian context, the challenges of governance are amplified by the coexistence of a vast public sector (universities, state colleges, central institutions) and a rapidly growing private sector that now accounts for over 65% of total higher education enrolment. Public institutions traditionally operate under state-led or regulatory-heavy governance systems, often shaped by bureaucratic oversight and political influence. Private institutions, while enjoying greater operational flexibility, face scrutiny over quality, equity, and transparency. Policy reforms such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aim to overhaul governance frameworks in both sectors to create a more coherent, quality-driven, and equitable higher education ecosystem.

This study explores how different governance models affect the implementation and outcomes of educational policy reforms, comparing the governance practices, constraints, and adaptive capacities of public and private institutions.

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## 2. Background and Policy Context

India's higher education governance landscape is **multi-layered**:

- **Accreditation agencies:** National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Board of Accreditation (NBA).
- **State higher education councils:** Policy alignment and funding oversight for state universities.
- **Institutional bodies:** Boards of Governors, Academic Councils, and Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs).

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 Evolution of Governance Models in Higher Education (1990–2024)

- **1990s–2000s:** Expansion of private universities and self-financing colleges; governance largely adapted from public models but with corporate-style decision-making (Tilak, 2003).
- **2010s:** Introduction of accreditation-linked funding and autonomy categories; managerialism begins to dominate governance debates (Altbach & Salmi, 2011).
- **Post-2020:** NEP 2020 emphasizes autonomy, decentralization, and multidisciplinary governance models (GoI, 2020).

### 3.2 Typology of Governance Models

- **Collegial / Shared Governance** – Faculty-led decision-making, common in older public universities.
- **Bureaucratic / State-led Governance** – Strong government control, more prevalent in state universities.
- **Corporate / Managerial Governance** – Board-led, performance-oriented management, dominant in private universities.

### 3.3 Governance and Quality Assurance

Research consistently shows a strong link between governance and institutional performance (World Bank, 2018; OECD, 2019).

- Public institutions score high on **academic credibility** but lower on **adaptability**.
- Private institutions tend to be more **entrepreneurial** but face concerns about **profit motives** overshadowing academic goals.

### 3.4 Comparative Studies (Public vs Private)

- **India:** Studies by Agarwal (2019) and Jayaram (2021) find that governance flexibility in private universities enables faster adoption of new courses and technology but public universities have stronger research cultures.

**Global:** Similar patterns found in China, Malaysia, and Latin America — governance model shapes how quickly and effectively reforms are implemented.

### **3.5 Challenges to Governance Reform**

Political interference in public institutions.

Lack of trained leadership in governance roles.

Compliance-heavy accreditation regimes that can stifle innovation.

Balancing institutional autonomy with accountability in private sector.

## **4. Objectives of the Study**

To identify structural and functional differences in governance frameworks between public and private institutions.

To evaluate the role of governance in operationalizing NEP 2020 reforms.

To assess governance impact on quality assurance, equity, and institutional innovation.

To provide policy recommendations tailored to the governance realities of each sector.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Research Design**

Comparative multiple-case study with mixed methods:

**Qualitative:** Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis.

**Quantitative:** Surveys measuring perceptions of governance effectiveness, autonomy, and policy responsiveness.

### **5.2 Sampling**

Purposive sampling to include:

3 public universities (1 central, 2 state)

3 private universities (1 deemed, 2 state-private)

### **5.3 Data Sources**

Policy and governance documents.

NAAC accreditation reports./

Meeting minutes of governing bodies.

NEP 2020 implementation plans.

Stakeholder interviews (leaders, faculty, students, regulators).

### **5.4 Data Analysis**

Thematic coding (NVivo) for qualitative data.

Comparative statistical analysis for survey results.

Cross-case synthesis to draw policy-level insights.

## 5.5 Validity and Reliability

**Triangulation** across interviews, documents, and surveys.

**Member checking** to verify interpretations.

**Peer debriefing** with academic experts.

## 6. Expected Contributions

### Theoretical:

Enriching governance theory by showing how hybrid governance forms emerge in mixed systems.

Linking policy implementation literature with governance model analysis.

### Practical:

Clear governance reform recommendations for policymakers.

Best-practice governance framework adaptable to both public and private institutions.

## 7. Findings

The comparative analysis of governance models in public and private higher education institutions reveals several significant insights:

### Structural Differences in Governance Models

Public institutions predominantly follow **collegial or bureaucratic governance**, with decision-making spread across academic councils, senates, and state/national regulatory authorities.

Private institutions operate under **corporate or managerial governance**, with centralized decision-making vested in boards of trustees or promoters, allowing faster but sometimes less consultative policy execution.

### Implementation of NEP 2020 Reforms

Public institutions show **slower adaptation** due to regulatory procedures and multiple approval layers, whereas private institutions demonstrate **quicker responsiveness** but often prioritize market-oriented courses over research and social outreach.

### Autonomy and Accountability Balance

Public universities enjoy constitutional protections for academic autonomy but face **political interference** and bureaucratic rigidity.

Private universities have operational autonomy but lack **uniform accountability mechanisms**, leading to disparities in quality and transparency.

### Quality Assurance Practices

Public institutions rely heavily on NAAC/NBA accreditation cycles and government-mandated IQAC structures, ensuring formal compliance.

Private institutions are more **innovative in internal QA processes** but often treat accreditation as a marketing tool rather than a developmental process.

### **Stakeholder Participation in Governance**

In public universities, faculty representation in decision-making is institutionalized but sometimes symbolic.

In private universities, governance tends to be leadership-driven, with **limited faculty or student participation** in strategic decisions.

### **Resource Mobilization and Financial Governance**

Public institutions depend largely on state and central grants, which are often delayed and earmarked, restricting flexibility.

Private institutions rely on tuition fees and private endowments, allowing greater flexibility but increasing pressure to maximize revenue.

### **Hybrid Governance Trends Emerging**

Some leading institutions in both sectors are **adopting hybrid models**, combining formal participatory structures with agile managerial processes, improving both responsiveness and stakeholder inclusion.

## **8. Conclusion**

Governance is the linchpin that determines how effectively higher education institutions translate policy reforms into tangible outcomes. The comparative analysis of public and private institutions reveals that while each sector operates under distinct governance logics — public institutions with their tradition of shared governance and public accountability, and private institutions with their managerial agility and market orientation - both face the common challenge of aligning governance practices with the transformative vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Effective governance requires a balance between autonomy and accountability, ensuring academic freedom while maintaining rigorous quality assurance mechanisms. Strengthening leadership capacities, fostering stakeholder participation, and streamlining regulatory frameworks can create a governance ecosystem where both sectors thrive. Ultimately, a governance model that is adaptable, transparent, and quality-driven will be instrumental in fostering innovation, equity, and excellence in Indian higher education.

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