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The Higher Education System: Basic Concepts and Implications for Institutional Governance

Fani Yunida Anggraheni
Mathematics Education Study Program, STKIP Modern Ngawi
faniyunida@stkipmodernngawi.ac.id

Iyoh Maspiroh
Elementary School Teacher Education Program, STKIP Babunnajah Pandeglang
iyohmaspiroh@gmail.com

Abstract: *Higher education has a strategic role in educating the nation's life and increasing global competitiveness. As a system, higher education consists of collaborating components such as inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes that must be managed in an integrated and sustainable manner. This study aims to describe the basic concept of higher education as a system and analyze its implications for institutional governance. The method used is systematic literature review (SRL) with a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques were carried out by searching various literatures in various databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and ScienceDirect and analyzed using thematic techniques. The results of the study show that the higher education system encourages the transformation of institutional governance from traditional administrative models to data-based and quality-oriented adaptive governance. The implementation of the system allows institutions to improve the quality of governance through the integration of management information systems, strengthening the culture of quality, and collaboration between stakeholders. This system provides benefits in the form of improving the quality of public services, innovation, and productivity, but there are challenges in this system such as low graduate absorption, limited scientific development and regulatory dynamics. It is concluded that higher education as a system is not only a conceptual framework, but also a practical basis for developing adaptive and quality-oriented institutional governance.*

Keywords: *Higher Education; Education System; Governance; Human Resource.*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is an integral part of the national education system that has a strategic role in improving the nation's intelligence in a sustainable manner. As the highest level of education in the national education system, higher education has a strategic role in producing graduates who are not only academically proficient but able to compete in the global industrial world. Based on UU RI No. 12 Tahun 2012 tentang Pendidikan Tinggi, higher education has the responsibility to educate the nation, advance science and technology, and apply humanities values in sustainable national development. In the context of globalization and the industrial revolution 4.0, higher education is required to be able to innovate both in governance, curriculum, and learning strategies (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Higher education also plays a role as the main forum in producing quality and competitive human resources (HR). In the era of globalization, higher education must be able to face various challenges that arise, both in the academic field, technology, and the demands of the world of work. According to Suharsaputra (2015), the implementation of higher education cannot ignore the changes that occur, so that

universities must be able to adapt and develop the Tridarma of Higher Education more effectively, efficiently, and quality. Anggraheni (2025) adds that the right tridarma is tailored to the needs of society. Therefore, the transformation of higher education is a necessity to improve national competitiveness in global competition.

In the higher education system, lecturers as educators have a crucial role in preparing competent human resources who are ready to face the challenges of the times. According to John (2013), lecturers have several functions in the learning process, including supporting student creativity (teacher as support), asking questions that encourage understanding (teacher as prompt), critical listener and provider of feedback (teacher as critical listener and provider of feedback), simplifying concepts to make them easier to understand (teacher as simplifier), motivator so that students are able to think critically (teacher as motivator), focus on critical questions (teacher as highlighter), and as a learning method that is in accordance with the development of science and technology. Anggraheni (2024) added that the right learning model can improve concept understanding ability. In addition, according to Santoso et al. (2018), universities need to respond appropriately to global policies and dynamics through various strategies, such as cooperation between educational institutions, curriculum alignment with industry needs, increasing graduate competitiveness, increasing student mobility, an integrated higher education system, and affordable and sustainable funding mechanisms. Therefore, in higher education governance, the position and contribution can optimize the sustainable management system.

Conceptually, the systems approach in higher education emphasizes the importance of integration and collaboration between subsystems and institutions. The basic concept of input-process-output-outcame system can be used in evaluating institutional governance. As mandated in UU RI No. 12 Tahun 2012 on Higher Education, higher education has several main functions, namely developing the nation's abilities and character, creating an innovative and competitive academic community, and developing science and technology while still paying attention to humanities values. The purpose of higher education is to develop student potential, produce graduates who master science and technology, produce innovations in the field of science and technology, and realize community service based on scientific research and reasoning. Anggraheni et al. (2022; 2023) added that ability analysis is needed to determine a person's potential. With the various challenges and opportunities that exist, universities in Indonesia must continue to innovate and adapt in order to produce graduates who are ready to compete at the global level, and are able to contribute to sustainable national development.

Based on the description, the main problem can be formulated, namely how the concept of higher education as a system affects the governance of higher education institutions. The purpose of this study is to describe the basic concept of higher education as a system, analyze the main components in the higher education system on institutional governance and to examine the implications of the higher education system for the development of effective, accountable and sustainable institutional governance. To maintain the focus of the study and the depth of analysis, this research has several limitations. First, the scope of the study is limited to understanding the concept of higher education as a system and its implications for institutional governance, without discussing technical operational aspects such as learning management or curriculum. Second, the unit of analysis is focused on national system policies and institutional management, not covering study programs or individuals. Third, the literature

analyzed is limited to scientific journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and written in Indonesian or English. Fourth, the literature used is openly available (open access).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with the systematic literature review (SRL) method in examining the concept of higher education as a system and its implications for institutional governance. The qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on ideas, concepts and theoretical contexts that develop in scientific literature. Qualitative research results emphasize meaning over generalization (Rangkuti, 2019). The SRL method was chosen to collect, evaluate and synthesize relevant findings from various sources of academic literature in a systematic, transparent and structured manner (Ridley, 2018). This research aims to identify key conceptual themes related to higher education systems, as well as describe practices and challenges in the governance of higher education institutions. The systematic review procedure conducted in this study followed the general stages according to Staffs (2007) which consisted of:

1. Identification of research questions,
2. literature review,
3. Study selection based on inclusion and exclusion,
4. Data extraction,
5. Data analysis and synthesis,

The questions in this study are "*how higher education is understood as a system, what are the components and relationships in the higher education system, what are the implications of a systems approach to the governance of higher education institutions*".

Data collection techniques were carried out through literature searches in various scientific databases such as Researchgate, Sciendirect, Google Scholar, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) using the keywords higher education system, university governance, education governance, and higher education governance. The search was conducted from January 2025 to April 2025. Literature sources collected included journal articles, academic books and policy reports. To ensure the quality and relevance of the literature, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The inclusion criteria of this study are 1) journal articles, academic books, or policy reports indexed in the database, 2) articles used are published in the 2013-2025 time frame, except for academic books partly from the previous year, 3) discussing the topic of higher education system or governance of higher education institutions, 4) publications that are repository in full-text form, and 5) written in Indonesian or English, 5) publications are the results of scientific publications that have gone through the peer-review process. While the exclusion criteria applied are 1) articles discussing primary and secondary education, 2) writing in the form of opinion, popular essays, editorials, or news, 3) articles cannot be accessed in full (only abstracts), 4) publications do not go through a peer-review process or do not have a strong theoretical basis.

From the initial search results, 94 articles were obtained according to the keywords, after the screening process based on the abstract title, 47 articles were selected, then the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied in depth to the content of the article, 35 articles were selected. Data analysis techniques using thematic analysis with stages 1) identification of the

main themes of each literature, 2) manual coding process to find conceptual patterns such as definitions, components, relationships and implications of the higher education system, 3) synthesis of findings from various articles to formulate conceptual understanding, 4) the results of the analysis are summarized to develop a conceptual framework on how higher education as a system can be managed effectively, adaptively, and sustainably. This study recognizes the potential for bias in the process of selecting and interpreting literature, which is influenced by limited access, researcher subjectivity in assessing relevance, and limitations in applying thematic analysis methods that are carried out manually. Therefore, the results of this review should be understood as a representation of findings based on the available literature, systematically selected, but limited in scope and comprehensiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition and Components of Higher Education

The word system itself comes from the Greek "sistema" which means components that are interconnected in an organized manner and constitute a whole. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), the system is an arrangement of devices that are organized and interrelated so as to form a totality. According to Santoso et al. (2018) a system is elements that interact with each other have their respective functions, are related, and are interdependent to achieve one goal.

A system can develop into a series of subsystems that depend on the main system, this is called the system transformation process. In addition to having subsystem derivatives, there is a higher level, namely the supra system. So that it can be exemplified that the system is described as a college, the subsystem is described as a university / institution / polytechnic, then the suprasystem is described as national education. In Purwaningsih et al. (2022) the system has the main characteristics, namely: (1) has a goal, (2) has boundaries, (3) is open, (4) consists of several parts, (5) interconnected or dependent, (6) there is a process of transformation activities, (7) there is a feedback system. As a system, higher education consists of elements that are interconnected, forming a unified whole, and between components will affect overall performance (Nembou, 2018; Despres, 2004). Meanwhile, the education system according to Santoso et al. (2018) is a set of facilities consisting of parts that are interrelated with each other in order to carry out the process of civilizing society to foster the same values that are aspired to. Based on the definition of suprasystem, system and subsystem, it is described as follows:

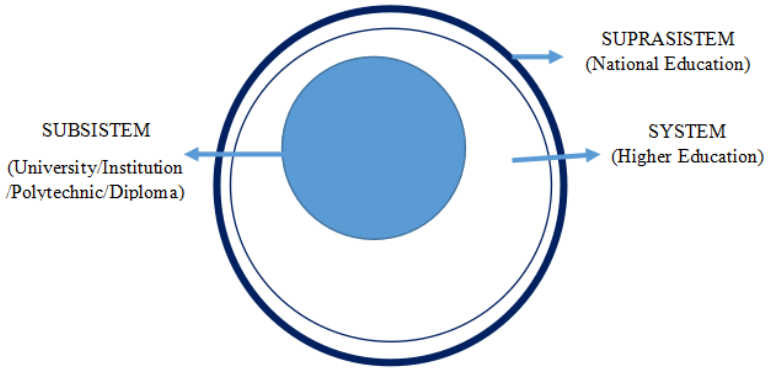

Figure 1: Relationship between Suprasystem, Subsystem and System (Santoso et al., 2018)

According to Dahniar (2021), the higher education system is a system that contains components that are interrelated and interact with each other to achieve educational goals. In an open framework, educational institutions not only influence internal dynamics, but also external factors in government policies, globalization demands, technological developments, and market needs (Altbach et al., 2009). So it can be concluded that the higher education system is the components of education that are interrelated to form a controlled system that has a common goal, namely to improve human resources. The components of the education system according to Purwaningsih et al. (2022) is a process that allows education to occur, namely the existence of educational goals, students, education, parents, teachers / educators, community leaders, and educational content. The components of the education system according to Santoso et al. (2018) have four stages, namely 1) input, 2) process, 3) output, and 4) feedback. Inputs in Koerniantono (2019) things that affect the course of the transformation process. According to Santoso et al. (2018) input is a factor that will affect output. In this case, the inputs include students, educational staff (lecturers, teaching assistants, laboratory assistants etc.), non-educative staff (administrative staff, library staff, laboratory staff etc.), curriculum, facilities (facilities and infrastructure), and other resources.

The process according to Mubin (2020) is everything related to the running of learning, namely teaching and learning activities, assessment, evaluation that runs in the lecture process. Output according to Mubin (2020) is the result obtained in the education process, in the form of graduates, research, and works produced by students and lecturers. In addition, feedback is important in an effort to control system performance adaptively and sustainably. Feedback according to Santoso et al. (2018) in the form of a continuation of the results of assessment and evaluation as part of educational improvement, for example in the form of additional lessons or guidance for students who have scores that have not met, performance assessment questionnaires etc. Feedback is obtained through internal and external evaluations such as accreditation, quality audits, and tracer studies of alumni to kill higher education not only as a potential provider of educational services but also as a strategic entity in national and global development (Marginson, 2016). Based on the description of the components of the higher education system, the relationship between input, process, output and feedback can be described as follows:

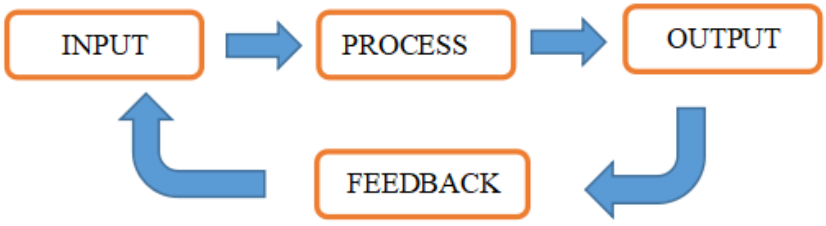

Figure 2: Relationship between input, process, output, and feedback (Santoso et al., 2018)

The higher education system has various characteristics that are collected based on the following research: 1) Complexity according to Walters & Watters (2017) the higher education system has high complexity because it involves various components such as curriculum, teaching, research, administration and so on, 2) Dynamic according to OECD Indicators (2019) the higher education system always changes due to changes in community needs, technological developments, and changes in education policy, 3) Interconnectivity according to the League

of European Research Universities (2019) the higher education system has high interconnectivity because it involves various stakeholders such as students, lecturers, staff, alumni and the community, 4) Openness according to UNESCO (2019) the higher education system must have high openness, because it must be able to accommodate changes and different needs, 5) Quality according to Schleicher (2009), the higher education system must have high quality, because it must be able to provide quality education and be relevant to the needs of society, 6) Relevance according to the Word Development Report (2017) the higher education system must have high relevance because it must be able to provide education that is relevant to the needs of society and industry, 7) Efficiency

According to Estermann et al. (2018) the higher education system must have high efficiency, because it must be able to use the availability of resources effectively and efficiently, 8) Accountability according to Meeting our Commitments (2017), the higher education system must have high accountability, because it must be able to account for performance and results to stakeholders, 9) Innovation according to Serdyukov (2017), the education system must have high innovation, because it must be able to develop and apply new technologies and methods in education, 10) Collaboration according to Scager et al. (2016), the education system must be able to collaborate because it must be able to work with stakeholders, such as industry, society, government and so on.

So it can be stated that the higher education system has the characteristics of 1) complexity and interconnectivity between educational components, 2) dynamic and innovating following the times, 3) open and able to collaborate with existing resources, 4) having quality, relevant and efficient to meet the needs of society and industry, and 5) having high accountability, namely the results and performance can be accounted for.

Higher Education System Implications for Institutional Governance

Higher education as a system has implications for institutional governance. These implications can be seen from the aspects of IPOO (input, process, output, outcame) systematic education in structured performance, good governance, management information systems, university autonomy, quality culture, and stakeholders.

Table 1: Implications for Institutional Governance

System Aspects	Implications for Institutional Governance	Source
Systemic Education (IPOO)	Enables management based on process and results, not just administrative activities.	David D. Dill (2010); Nurhayati & Nurmala Ahmar (2022)
Good Governance	Promote accountability, transparency and participation in decision-making.	Ray Land (2016); (Nizam (2021)
Management Information System	Support data-driven decision-making and operational efficiency of the institution.	Dirjen Dikti (2017); OECD Indicators (2019)
Higher Education Autonomy	Increase institutional flexibility and innovation in response to local and global needs.	Word Development Report (2017); Lasambouw (2013)
Quality Culture and SPMI	Promote continuous evaluation and improvement in academic and administrative units.	Dirjen Dikti. (2017); Supendi (2016)

Connectivity with Stakeholders	Build cross-sector cooperation networks and create relevant and impactful educational outputs	Mubin (2020); Mulyanto, Rahmat Mulyono (2024)

This system not only encourages the achievement of academic quality, but also demands the integrity of managerial, administrative, and public service performance. The systemic approach encourages the transformation of traditional governance towards adaptive, data-based, and quality-oriented governance. The IPOO approach emphasizes the importance of process and outcome-based management rather than simply administrative activities. It creates a structured framework that can be thoroughly evaluated. The principles of good governance including accountability, transparency and participation enable the involvement of all academic components in decision-making. However, the synthesis of findings shows that good governance is not enough if it is not accompanied by the institution's ability to analyze changes and adjust strategies, so a conceptual innovation in transformative governance is needed. Management information systems are the main foundation for data-driven policy formulation. New insights show that strong data governance not only accelerates efficiency, but also improves accountability in decision-making. Data is not just a control tool, but an asset for institutional strategy. Industrial autonomy is not only interpreted as administrative freedom, but an institutional flexibility to meet the needs of society, global dynamics, and quality integrity. In this case, the evaluation of institutional success does not only rely on external indicators, but also on the ability to create value at the community level of a nation. Quality culture and internal quality assurance are not just control mechanisms, but must be part of the system within the institution. Hence the importance of systemic leadership in encouraging a culture of quality that is able to build networks, align visions, and manage the complexity of the higher education system adaptively and collaboratively. Connectivity with stakeholders is no longer optional, but an essential element of the education system. This requires institutions to not only move to establish cooperation but create co-creation value with industry, society, and alumni. This is where a governance paradigm emerges that views higher education as an open system that interacts dynamically with its environment.

Benefits and Challenges of Higher Education System on Institutional Governance

The implementation of the higher education system provides several benefits for institutional governance. Higher education allows for more structured and measurable management through input, process, output and outcome mapping. With this system, institutions can design policies and strategies so that management and decision-making are more objective and directed (Dirjen Dikti., 2017). The education system allows integration between work units, thus triggering continuity between academics, administration, finance, and students. Higher education as a driver of accountability because the entire process can be monitored thoroughly both internally and externally (Kadir, 2013)

Other benefits of the higher education system according to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2015) are improving the quality of life, increasing abilities and productivity, increasing public awareness and participation, improving the quality of public services, increasing the ability to innovate. The existence of a higher education system contributes to facilitating community development that can have an impact on improving the quality of resources, encouraging the improvement of human resources to be able to run the wheels of the economy

(EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2015; 2017), can increase equality in society, because it can provide equal opportunities for everyone to get quality education (OECD Indicators, 2019) increase community innovation through adjusting curriculum, teaching or learning methods (League of European Research Universities, 2019), can be a place for people to get the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills to be developed according to life skills and those needed in society and industry (UNESCO, 2019), can be used as a forum for community participation in the decision-making process and resource management (Word Development Report, 2017; Anggraheni & Kismiantini, 2022). The higher education system can also strengthen a culture of quality through internal and external quality mechanisms (Wardhani & Suhdi, 2020) which can accelerate adaptation to digital transformation in institutional governance, the application of academic and financial management information systems to support efficiency (Agustyaningrum & Himmi, 2022). Of course, the existence of a structured and quality higher education system will provide many benefits for both individuals and society in general. However, the synthesis of findings also shows that the system will only run optimally if it is run with the ability of institutions that want to continue learning, adapting, and building cross-sector synergies.

In addition to the many benefits obtained, of course, challenges will arise in organizing a higher education system that is structural and systemic in nature, including the mismatch between the curriculum and the world of work, stagnation in the development of science and technology, weak research ecosystems, regulatory dynamics, and limitations in global competitiveness. Sukoco, Badri Munir, Akhmaloka (2023) added that the challenges of the higher education system are 1) the low absorption of graduates in the world, many university graduates are unable to be absorbed in the world of work due to the incompatibility of the curriculum with the industrial world, 2) the lack of development of science and technology talents due to limited career support and professionalism in the field of science, 3) the lack of effectiveness and quality of utilization of research funds due to budget constraints, 4) regulations that often change due to political factors (Lasambouw, 2013), 5) unable to compete at the global level (Marginson, 2016). These findings indicate the importance of reformulating higher education policy with a system design approach that prioritizes sustainability, social justice, and cross-sector innovation. In other words, higher education as a system is not only about how the institution is organized, but how the institution is able to become an agent of change that not only produces knowledge, but also engineers the future of the nation through smart, adaptive and transformative governance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description that has been presented, it can be concluded that higher education as a system means that all components of input, process, output, and feedback interact with each other to achieve common goals. The higher education system is complex, interconnected, open to collaboration, and adaptive to the times. The characteristics of higher education do not only act as an academic institution, but as a strategic system that influences the direction of human resource development and social innovation. The implications of the higher education system are seen in various aspects of governance, including good governance (accountability transparency, effectiveness, and participation), strengthening cultural quality,

institutional autonomy, and utilization of integrated management information systems. This system encourages changes in traditional administrative governance towards data-based governance and quality that not only requires structure and regulation but also reflects in all parts of the institution.

The implementation of the higher education system provides benefits, namely improving the quality of life, increasing capabilities and productivity, increasing public awareness and participation, improving the quality of public services, increasing the ability to innovate. However, there are challenges in the higher education system, namely the challenge of low absorption of graduates in the world, the lack of development of science and technology talents, the lack of effectiveness and quality of utilization of research funds, and regulations that often change due to political factors. As a new insight, the success of system-based higher education governance is highly dependent on the synergy between work units, active involvement of internal and external stakeholders, and consistent implementation of quality assurance. Therefore, higher education needs encouragement to become a relective, innovative and sustainable system.

As a further research development, it is suggested that the focus should be on exploring the real implementation of the system approach in institutional governance in various contexts of public and private universities. Comparative research between institutions, mapping the effectiveness of management systems, and analyzing stakeholders in decision making can be an important focus in enriching the study of sustainable higher education governance.

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