



## COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION INDONESIA-USA

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### Abstract :

*This article examines the comparative characteristics of higher education administration in Indonesia and the United States from the perspective of public administration. Higher education is increasingly recognized as a critical public service that contributes not only to human capital formation but also to social cohesion, innovation, and democratic governance. Using a qualitative library research method with a descriptive-comparative approach, this study analyzes bureaucratic structures, governance systems, administrative reforms, and their implications for public service delivery in higher education. Indonesia represents a centralized-decentralized hybrid model characterized by strong ministerial authority, regulatory oversight, and national standardization, while the United States reflects a decentralized, federal, and market-oriented governance system with high institutional autonomy. The findings reveal that differences in bureaucratic traditions, political systems, and administrative reform trajectories significantly shape institutional autonomy, accountability mechanisms, managerial practices, and service quality in higher education. The Indonesian system emphasizes the state's responsibility to ensure equity, access, and national cohesion through standardized regulation, whereas the U.S. system prioritizes competition, innovation, and stakeholder-driven governance. However, both systems face challenges related to efficiency, accountability, and social equity. This study contributes to the literature on comparative public administration by offering a comprehensive analysis of how administrative structures and governance models influence higher education management and public service outcomes. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for policymakers and higher education administrators in designing balanced governance frameworks that integrate efficiency, accountability, institutional autonomy, and social equity.*

**Keywords:** public administration, higher education governance, comparative study, Indonesia, United States

### INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a strategic and multidimensional role in national development in the contemporary global context. In the era of globalization, knowledge-based economies, and rapid technological change, universities are no longer perceived merely as academic institutions responsible for teaching and research. Instead, they have evolved into key actors in economic development, innovation systems, social mobility, and democratic consolidation. Higher education institutions serve as engines of human capital formation, research and development, and social transformation. They contribute not only to economic competitiveness but also to the cultivation of critical thinking, ethical awareness, and civic responsibility among citizens.

In many countries, higher education is increasingly recognized as a vital



public service rather than a purely academic or market-driven activity. Governments expect universities to address complex societal challenges, including inequality, unemployment, environmental sustainability, and digital transformation. As a result, the governance and administration of higher education have become central concerns of public policy and public administration. How universities are governed, financed, regulated, and held accountable has direct implications for national development goals and public welfare.

From the perspective of public administration, higher education constitutes an essential component of public service delivery. Universities operate within administrative systems that shape policy formulation, resource allocation, organizational behavior, and accountability mechanisms. Administrative arrangements influence not only institutional performance but also the accessibility, quality, relevance, and equity of higher education services. For instance, centralized governance structures may enhance coordination and equity, while decentralized systems may promote innovation and responsiveness. Therefore, understanding higher education administration requires a comprehensive examination of the broader bureaucratic, political, and governance structures in which institutions are embedded.

Public administration theory provides important insights into how higher education systems function as part of the state apparatus. Classical public administration emphasizes hierarchy, rule compliance, and centralized authority, highlighting the role of the state in ensuring order and accountability. New Public Management (NPM) introduces managerial principles such as efficiency, performance measurement, and competition, reshaping higher education governance toward market-oriented practices. Meanwhile, New Public Service (NPS) and governance-based approaches emphasize democratic values, public interest, and collaboration among state and non-state actors. These theoretical perspectives offer diverse lenses for analyzing higher education administration as a complex public service domain.

Comparative public administration offers a particularly valuable analytical framework for examining how different administrative systems shape public service outcomes. By comparing countries with distinct political systems, bureaucratic traditions, and governance models, scholars can identify patterns, contextual factors, and institutional dynamics that influence administrative effectiveness (Peters, 2010). Comparative analysis allows researchers to move beyond single-country explanations and to understand how historical legacies, political structures, and administrative cultures shape governance choices.

The relevance of comparative analysis in higher education governance has increased significantly due to globalization and internationalization. Universities operate in an increasingly interconnected global environment characterized by student mobility, international rankings, cross-border research collaboration, and policy diffusion. Governments frequently adopt or adapt governance reforms inspired by foreign models, often promoted by international organizations or global policy networks. As a result, comparative studies are

essential for assessing whether governance models can be transferred across contexts or must be adapted to local administrative realities.

Indonesia and the United States represent two contrasting models of public administration and higher education governance, making them suitable cases for comparative analysis. Indonesia's administrative system has been historically influenced by continental European bureaucratic traditions, particularly those emphasizing hierarchy, formal rules, and centralized authority. The legacy of centralized governance remains evident in the strong role of the central government in regulating education policy, setting national standards, and overseeing institutional performance.

Although Indonesia has implemented decentralization reforms since the late 1990s, central government control continues to play a significant role in strategic sectors such as education. Higher education is constitutionally framed as a state responsibility, reinforcing the government's authority in regulation, funding, and quality assurance. This governance approach reflects a strong commitment to education as a public good and a means of promoting social equity and national integration. However, it also raises questions about institutional autonomy, managerial flexibility, and innovation within higher education institutions.

In contrast, the United States is rooted in the Anglo-Saxon administrative tradition, characterized by federalism, decentralization, checks and balances, and managerial efficiency. Authority over higher education is distributed across federal, state, and institutional levels, resulting in a highly decentralized governance structure. The federal government plays a limited role, focusing primarily on financial aid, research funding, and civil rights compliance, while state governments and independent governing boards exercise substantial influence over public universities.

Public administration in the United States has evolved through several reform movements, including Progressive Administration, New Public Management, and governance-based approaches that emphasize collaboration among government, private sector, and civil society (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). These reform trajectories have shaped higher education governance by promoting institutional autonomy, performance-based management, and market-oriented mechanisms. Universities in the United States operate in a competitive environment, competing for students, funding, and prestige, which encourages innovation and differentiation but also generates inequality.

The contrasting governance models of Indonesia and the United States reflect deeper differences in political systems, administrative cultures, and conceptions of the state's role in public service delivery. Indonesia emphasizes state responsibility, standardization, and equity, while the United States prioritizes autonomy, competition, and stakeholder-driven governance. These differences provide a rich analytical basis for examining how public administration systems shape higher education outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature on higher education governance, many existing studies focus on specific policy instruments such as funding

mechanisms, accreditation systems, quality assurance frameworks, or institutional performance indicators. While these studies offer valuable insights, they often treat higher education institutions as isolated organizational units rather than as integral components of broader public administration systems. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how bureaucratic structures, governance models, and administrative reform trajectories influence higher education as a public service.

Moreover, comparative studies frequently emphasize outcomes such as rankings or efficiency without adequately examining the administrative processes and governance arrangements that produce those outcomes. This creates a gap in the literature regarding the role of public administration in shaping higher education governance and service delivery. Understanding higher education administration from a comparative public administration perspective is therefore essential for bridging this gap and providing a more holistic analysis.

This study seeks to address this limitation by examining higher education administration in Indonesia and the United States through the lens of comparative public administration. Rather than evaluating which system is superior, this study aims to analyze how different bureaucratic traditions, governance systems, and administrative reforms influence institutional autonomy, accountability mechanisms, and public service delivery. By situating higher education within the broader context of public administration, this study highlights the interplay between state authority, institutional governance, and societal expectations.

The objective of this article is to analyze and compare bureaucratic structures, governance systems, administrative reforms, and their implications for public service delivery in higher education. Specifically, the study seeks to answer how administrative contexts shape governance choices, how reform trajectories influence institutional behavior, and how different governance models affect the balance between efficiency, accountability, autonomy, and equity. Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to the literature on comparative public administration and higher education governance.

In practical terms, the findings of this study are expected to provide insights for policymakers and higher education administrators in designing governance frameworks that are context-sensitive and balanced. For countries like Indonesia, lessons from decentralized systems may inform efforts to enhance institutional autonomy and innovation while maintaining public accountability. Conversely, for countries like the United States, insights from more centralized systems may highlight the importance of state responsibility and equity in higher education provision. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of viewing higher education governance not merely as an organizational issue but as a central concern of public administration and public service delivery.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative library research method using a

descriptive-comparative approach to examine higher education administration in Indonesia and the United States from a public administration perspective. Qualitative library research is particularly appropriate because the research objective is not to measure variables statistically, but to understand governance structures, administrative reforms, and public service orientations embedded within different political and bureaucratic contexts. By relying on authoritative textual sources, this method allows for in-depth interpretation of institutional arrangements, policy frameworks, and administrative traditions that shape higher education governance (Peters, 2010; Osborne, 2010).

The descriptive-comparative approach is used to systematically compare two national cases with contrasting administrative systems. Indonesia and the United States were selected due to their distinct political structures, bureaucratic traditions, and higher education governance models. Indonesia represents a centralized–decentralized hybrid system characterized by strong ministerial oversight, whereas the United States reflects a decentralized, federal, and market-oriented governance model. Comparative analysis enables the identification of similarities, differences, and contextual factors that influence administrative effectiveness and public service delivery in higher education, emphasizing that governance outcomes are shaped by institutional and political environments rather than universal administrative principles (Peters, 2010).

Data collection was conducted through an extensive review of secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed international journals, policy reports, and official government documents related to higher education administration in both countries. Academic literature was drawn from recognized publishers and journals in public administration, public policy, and higher education studies to ensure scholarly rigor. Policy documents and official reports were obtained from government ministries, accreditation agencies, and international organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank to provide empirical and contextual grounding (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2017).

The theoretical foundation of this study is informed by multiple public administration paradigms. Classical public administration theory provides insights into hierarchical structures, rule-based governance, and bureaucratic accountability (Weber, 1978). New Public Management (NPM) theory offers an analytical lens for understanding managerial reforms, performance measurement, institutional autonomy, and market-oriented governance (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). New Public Service (NPS) perspectives emphasize democratic values, public interest, and citizen-centered service delivery (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). In addition, governance-based approaches highlight the role of networks, stakeholders, and non-state actors in public service provision (Osborne, 2010). Integrating these perspectives allows for a comprehensive analysis of higher education administration as a complex public service system.

The data analysis process involved several systematic stages. First, relevant literature and documents were identified through keyword searches and thematic screening related to higher education governance, public

administration reform, and comparative public administration. Sources were evaluated based on relevance, credibility, and contribution to the research objectives. Second, the selected literature was categorized according to key analytical dimensions, including bureaucratic structure, governance systems, administrative reform, and implications for public service delivery, facilitating structured comparison and thematic coherence (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

Third, the higher education systems of Indonesia and the United States were analyzed separately through within-case analysis. This stage focused on understanding each country's institutional characteristics, historical development, governance arrangements, and reform trajectories. Particular attention was given to government authority, institutional autonomy, accountability mechanisms, and administrative values embedded within each system, ensuring that each case was interpreted within its own political and administrative context (Altbach et al., 2009).

Fourth, a cross-case comparative analysis was conducted to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns between the two systems. The comparative interpretation emphasized how bureaucratic traditions, governance models, and administrative reforms shape higher education management and public service outcomes. Rather than ranking one system as superior, the analysis highlights contextual strengths, limitations, and trade-offs inherent in each model, consistent with the analytical orientation of comparative public administration (Peters, 2010).

To enhance analytical rigor, triangulation was applied by cross-referencing academic literature with policy documents and official reports. This approach helps reduce interpretive bias and strengthens the validity of the findings. Although the study does not employ primary empirical data such as interviews or surveys, reliance on authoritative and peer-reviewed sources ensures the reliability and credibility of the analysis (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

Finally, this methodological approach enables a nuanced understanding of how administrative contexts shape higher education governance and public service delivery. By combining qualitative library research with a descriptive-comparative framework, this study provides a theoretically grounded and context-sensitive analysis that contributes to the literature on comparative public administration and higher education governance.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **System of Governance**

The governance system of higher education reflects broader public administration traditions and state-society relations. In Indonesia, higher education governance is predominantly hierarchical and bureaucratic, characterized by strong vertical accountability to central government authorities. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology plays a dominant role in policy formulation, regulatory control, funding allocation, and quality assurance mechanisms. Decision-making processes are largely centralized, with national policies and regulations guiding institutional practices across public

universities. This top-down governance structure positions higher education institutions primarily as policy implementers rather than autonomous policy actors, reflecting classical bureaucratic traditions that emphasize hierarchy and rule compliance (Weber, 1978; Peters, 2010).

Standardization is a defining feature of the Indonesian governance model. National standards for curriculum, accreditation, lecturer qualifications, and institutional performance are enforced through centralized regulatory instruments and national accreditation agencies. From a public administration perspective, this approach aligns with the state's responsibility to guarantee education as a public good and to ensure equitable access across regions (UNESCO, 2015). In a geographically and socioeconomically diverse country, centralized governance is often justified as a mechanism to prevent regional disparities and promote national cohesion (Altbach et al., 2009).

However, while this governance model strengthens equity and accountability, it also generates administrative constraints. Extensive reliance on standardized regulations may limit institutional flexibility, reduce responsiveness to local needs, and discourage innovation. Universities may prioritize procedural compliance over strategic development, illustrating the tension between traditional bureaucratic control and contemporary governance demands in knowledge-based societies (Beerkens, 2008; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Although decentralization reforms and legal-entity status have expanded autonomy for selected universities, such autonomy remains bounded by strong regulatory oversight, limiting its transformative potential.

In contrast, higher education governance in the United States is shaped by federalism and a long-standing tradition of decentralization. Authority is dispersed across federal, state, and institutional levels, with the federal government exercising limited direct control over universities. Its role is largely confined to student financial aid, research funding, and civil rights regulation, while states and governing boards play a central role in institutional oversight (Kettl, 2015). This structure emphasizes horizontal accountability rather than vertical bureaucratic control, consistent with Anglo-Saxon administrative traditions (Peters, 2010).

Boards of trustees or regents function as key governance actors in U.S. higher education institutions, overseeing strategic direction, financial management, and executive leadership. Accreditation bodies, operating independently from government, serve as critical mechanisms of quality assurance and public accountability. Accreditation in this context represents a governance tool based on peer review and professional norms rather than direct state regulation, aligning with governance-oriented public administration theories that emphasize networks and stakeholder participation (Osborne, 2010; Gornitzka & Maassen, 2014).

Market mechanisms also significantly influence governance in U.S. higher education. Competition for students, research funding, and institutional prestige shapes strategic priorities and organizational behavior. From a New Public Management perspective, this model promotes efficiency, performance

measurement, and customer orientation (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Universities operate in quasi-markets where autonomy and competition are expected to drive innovation. Nevertheless, this market-oriented governance model also raises concerns regarding commercialization, mission drift, and unequal access, challenging the conception of higher education as a public good (Altbach, 2011).

Comparatively, Indonesia and the United States represent contrasting governance logics. Indonesia prioritizes state control, standardization, and vertical accountability to advance equity and national objectives, whereas the United States emphasizes institutional autonomy, horizontal accountability, and market responsiveness to foster innovation and competitiveness. Both systems involve trade-offs: excessive centralization may suppress innovation, while excessive decentralization may weaken the state's capacity to ensure social equity and public accountability. From a comparative public administration perspective, effective higher education governance requires a balance between control and autonomy, as well as between public interest and market dynamics (Peters, 2010; Osborne, 2010).

#### Administrative Reforms in Higher Education

Administrative reform has become a central agenda in contemporary public administration, particularly in higher education systems facing increasing pressures for efficiency, accountability, and global competitiveness. In Indonesia, higher education reforms have been strongly influenced by New Public Management principles. Since the early 2000s, reforms such as performance-based budgeting, outcome-oriented evaluation, and increased institutional autonomy have been introduced to modernize public universities and improve administrative efficiency (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

Performance-based budgeting represents a significant shift in Indonesian higher education administration. Public funding is increasingly linked to performance indicators, including research output, graduation rates, and accreditation outcomes. This reform reflects an effort to enhance accountability and efficiency in public resource management. However, implementation remains uneven due to bureaucratic rigidity, overlapping regulations, and limited managerial capacity. In practice, performance indicators sometimes function more as symbolic compliance mechanisms than as effective tools for organizational learning and improvement, limiting their impact on service quality (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

Institutional autonomy constitutes another key reform initiative. Selected public universities have been granted legal-entity status, allowing greater discretion in financial management, human resource policies, and academic program development. From a public administration perspective, this reform seeks to shift universities from rule-bound bureaucratic units toward more managerial and entrepreneurial organizations (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Nonetheless, autonomy remains constrained by extensive regulatory requirements and government oversight, resulting in significant variation in reform outcomes across institutions.

Administrative reform in Indonesia generally follows an incremental and policy-driven trajectory. Reforms are introduced through government regulations rather than internal organizational initiatives, reflecting a cautious approach shaped by bureaucratic culture and accountability concerns. While incremental reform reduces the risk of administrative instability, it may also limit innovation and delay structural transformation in higher education governance (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

In contrast, the United States has experienced multiple waves of administrative reform in public administration, including Progressive Administration, New Public Management, and New Public Service. Higher education institutions have widely adopted strategic management, performance measurement, and entrepreneurial practices to enhance competitiveness and financial sustainability (Kettl, 2015). Universities actively pursue alternative revenue sources, research commercialization, and international partnerships, reflecting a results-oriented governance approach.

Administrative reforms in U.S. higher education are typically driven by market pressures, stakeholder expectations, and institutional leadership rather than centralized government mandates. This bottom-up reform dynamic enables institutions to tailor reforms to local contexts and strategic goals, consistent with governance-based public administration theories (Osborne, 2010). However, market-driven reforms also intensify competition and inequality, favoring well-resourced institutions while marginalizing less competitive ones (Altbach, 2011; Salmi, 2009).

Moreover, the strong emphasis on entrepreneurialism and performance metrics raises normative concerns regarding the public service mission of higher education. From a New Public Service perspective, higher education should prioritize serving the public interest rather than solely pursuing efficiency or market success (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Consequently, U.S. administrative reforms, while promoting innovation and flexibility, require robust accountability mechanisms to preserve academic values and social equity.

#### Implications for Public Service Delivery

Governance and administrative arrangements have direct implications for public service delivery in higher education. In Indonesia, higher education is constitutionally framed as a public service and a state responsibility. Accordingly, service delivery prioritizes accessibility, national integration, and standardized quality assurance. Centralized governance enables the government to allocate resources to underserved regions and disadvantaged groups, supporting equity and national development objectives (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2017).

However, standardized service delivery may constrain institutional responsiveness and innovation. Complex administrative procedures and regulatory compliance requirements can slow curriculum development, limit international collaboration, and reduce organizational adaptability. From a public administration perspective, this illustrates the trade-off between equity-

oriented governance and efficiency-oriented service delivery (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

In the United States, public service delivery in higher education is shaped by decentralized governance and high levels of institutional autonomy. Universities offer diverse and innovative programs tailored to market and societal demands, enhancing consumer choice and academic differentiation (Altbach, 2011). Yet, reliance on market mechanisms contributes to rising tuition costs and unequal access, raising concerns about affordability and social inclusion (OECD, 2008).

Comparatively, both systems demonstrate that public service delivery in higher education is deeply shaped by governance choices. Indonesia emphasizes equity and state responsibility, while the United States emphasizes autonomy and efficiency. From a comparative public administration perspective, hybrid governance models that combine state oversight, managerial flexibility, and stakeholder participation may offer a sustainable pathway for balancing efficiency, accountability, and social equity in higher education (Osborne, 2010; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

## **CONCLUSION**

This comparative study demonstrates that higher education administration in Indonesia and the United States is shaped by distinct bureaucratic traditions, governance systems, and administrative reform trajectories. These differences significantly influence institutional autonomy, accountability mechanisms, managerial practices, and public service outcomes. Indonesia's centralized-hybrid model emphasizes equity and standardization, while the U.S. decentralized model prioritizes autonomy, competition, and innovation. A balanced governance approach that integrates efficiency, accountability, institutional autonomy, and social equity is essential for improving higher education administration. Future research may incorporate empirical data, institutional-level analysis, or comparisons with additional countries.

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