

Investigating the Implementation of Governance Through the Adoption of the Universities Law in Saudi Higher Education

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Thesis Abstract

This research investigates the implementation of the new Universities Law in Saudi Arabia and its implications for higher education governance. The primary aim is to develop a comprehensive governance framework tailored to Saudi universities' unique sociocultural, political, and economic context. This study provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding governance dynamics within Saudi higher education by synthesising agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories.

There has previously been an in-depth exploration of adapting governance in Saudi higher education through the new Universities Law; hence, this research examines the two universities that first implemented the new law.

The study explores the governance framework of Saudi higher education, the adaptation processes, and the challenges encountered. A qualitative case study approach allowed participants to describe their experiences. Data collection involved two main methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The key documents analysed were the previous Higher Education and Universities Council Law and the new Universities Law.

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the two universities and the Universities Affairs Council, considered the body supervising universities.

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on higher education governance by demonstrating the novel combination of agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories and revealing the limitations of existing governance frameworks when applied in isolation. This study addresses practical challenges universities face during the transition, providing insights crucial for successfully implementing governance reforms. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this research supports ongoing efforts to improve governance in Saudi higher education, aligning with the broader goals of the Vision 2030 initiative.

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Keywords: Higher Education Governance, Saudi Arabia, Universities Law, Qualitative Study, Agency Theory, Stewardship Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Transparency, Accountability, University Autonomy, Educational Reform.

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List of Contents

THESIS ABSTRACT	II
LIST OF CONTENTS.....	V
LIST OF TABLES.....	VIII
LIST OF FIGURES.....	X
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	3
1.3 THE RESEARCHER’S POSITION AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH	3
1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES.....	4
1.4.1 AIM	4
1.4.2 OBJECTIVES.....	5
1.5 SCOPE.....	5
1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	7
2.2 CONCEPTUALISING GOVERNANCE.....	7
2.2.1 DEFINITION OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE	7
2.2.2 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES	8
2.2.3 DEFINITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE	9
2.2.4 HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES	10
2.2.5 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE VS. HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE	13
2.3 ACTORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE	15
2.4 THEORIES RELATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE.....	18
2.4.1 THEORETICAL BASIS FOR CHOOSING GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION	18
2.4.2 AGENCY THEORY	20
2.4.3 STEWARDSHIP THEORY	21
2.4.4 STAKEHOLDER THEORY	22
2.4.5 INSTITUTIONAL THEORY	23
2.4.6 RESOURCE DEPENDENCE THEORY	24
2.4.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE	25
2.4.8 JUSTIFICATION FOR EXCLUDING RESOURCE DEPENDENCE AND INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES .	27
2.4.8.1 RESOURCE DEPENDENCE THEORY	27
2.4.8.2 INSTITUTIONAL THEORY	28
2.4.9 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION TO THEORIES AND THEIR APPLICATION	28
2.5 GOVERNANCE MODELS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.....	30
2.5.1 THEORETICAL BASIS: CLARK’S TRIANGLE OF COORDINATION	31
2.5.2 OTHER GOVERNANCE MODELS	33
2.6 GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.....	34
2.6.1 COMPARISON OF GOVERNANCE MODELS AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS	38
2.7 GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION	39
2.7.1 GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES	39
2.7.2 GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES.....	40
2.8 HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE	41
2.8.1 THE EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN THE 20TH CENTURY	41
2.8.2 GOVERNANCE AND GLOBALISATION	42
2.9 GOVERNANCE IN THE SAUDI ARABIAN CONTEXT	42
2.10 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE.....	43
2.11 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE.....	46
2.12 RESEARCH GAPS	49
2.12.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	51
2.13 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	51
2.14 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	53

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	54
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	54
3.2 BACKGROUND OF SAUDI ARABIA.....	54
3.2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS	55
3.2.2 OVERVIEW OF SAUDI ARABIA: POLITICAL SYSTEM AND GOVERNANCE.....	56
3.2.3 ECONOMIC CONTEXT	56
3.2.4 CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT.....	57
3.2.5 TRANSFORMATION PLAN: VISION 2030.....	58
3.2.6 THE PURPOSE AND ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES	59
3.3 OVERVIEW OF SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION	60
3.3.1 FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICES	60
3.3.2 HIGHER EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITIES LAW	61
3.4 STRENGTHS OF SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION	62
3.5 SHORTCOMINGS OF SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION	62
3.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	63
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	64
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	64
4.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY	64
4.2.1 CHOSEN RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY	66
4.3. ADOPTION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	67
4.4. ADOPTION OF THE RESEARCH STRATEGY	69
4.4.1 AN INTERPRETIVE CASE STUDY	69
4.4.2 JUSTIFYING THE USE OF CASE STUDY	70
4.5 DATA COLLECTION METHOD	73
4.5.1 DOCUMENTATION	73
4.5.2 INTERVIEWS	74
4.6 SAMPLING	77
4.6.1 DATA REFERENCING	78
4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	78
4.8 DATA ANALYSIS	81
4.8.1 GENERAL STRATEGY FOR ANALYSIS.....	81
4.8.2 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	81
4.8.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS.....	82
4.8.4 STEPS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS.....	82
4.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	85
CHAPTER 5: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION LAWS.....	86
5.1. INTRODUCTION.....	86
5.2. METHOD OF ANALYSIS.....	86
5.3. OVERVIEW OF THE TWO LAWS.....	86
5.3.1. THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITIES COUNCIL LAW (PREVIOUS)	87
5.3.2. THE UNIVERSITIES LAW (NEW).....	88
5.4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	89
5.4.1. ASPECTS OF SIMILARITY	89
5.4.2. ASPECTS OF DIFFERENCE	90
5.5. ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENCES THROUGH GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES.....	94
5.6. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	100
CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS: THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS	102
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	102
6.2 RESPONSE OVERVIEW	102
6.3 METHOD OF ANALYSIS.....	103
6.4 INITIAL CODES	103
6.5 CATEGORIES.....	104
6.5.1 CATEGORIES RELATED TO ' ADAPTING GOVERNANCE '	105
6.5.2 CATEGORIES RELATED TO 'AUTONOMY AND EFFICIENCY'	106
6.5.3 CATEGORIES RELATED TO 'TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY'	107

6.5.4	CATEGORIES RELATED TO ‘PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBILITY’	108
6.5.5	CATEGORISING THE CATEGORY THROUGH SHARED IDEAS.....	109
6.6	THEMES.....	111
6.6.1	THEME 1: ADAPTING GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION	111
6.6.2	THEME 2: ENHANCING AUTONOMY AND EFFICIENCY	114
6.6.3	THEME 3: IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	119
6.6.4	THEME 4: ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION	121
6.7	SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	126
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION		127
7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	127
7.2	SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS	127
7.2.1	THEME 1: ADAPTING GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION	128
7.2.2	THEME 2: ENHANCING AUTONOMY AND EFFICIENCY	128
7.2.3	THEME 3: IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	128
7.2.4	THEME 4: ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION	129
7.3	DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....	129
7.3.1	THEME 1: ADAPTING GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION	130
7.3.2	THEME 2: ENHANCING AUTONOMY AND EFFICIENCY	145
7.3.3	THEME 3: IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	165
7.3.4	THEME 4: ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION	180
7.4	THE PROPOSED GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR SAUDI HIGHER EDUCATION.....	193
7.5	SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	196
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION		198
8.1	INTRODUCTION.....	198
8.2	ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	198
8.3	RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS.....	202
8.3.1	THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS.....	202
8.3.2	PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS	205
8.4	RECOMMENDATIONS	206
8.4.1	RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UAC	206
8.4.2	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITIES	207
8.5	LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	208

List of Tables

Table 1 Comparing corporate governance and higher education governance	15
Table 2 Actors in higher education governance.....	18
Table 3 Strengths and weaknesses of theories	25
Table 4 Governance models summary.....	33
Table 5 Strengths and weaknesses of governance frameworks	37
Table 6 Governance models vs. governance frameworks.....	38
Table 7 Summary of previous studies on higher education governance.....	45
Table 8 Summary of previous studies on governance in Saudi higher education.....	48
Table 9 Advantages and disadvantages of case studies	72
Table 10 Advantages and disadvantages of documentation as a form of data collection	74
Table 11 Example of the initial coding	83
Table 12 Example of initial coding and some expected themes	84
Table 13 Chapters and articles of the previous Higher Education and Universities Council Law	87
Table 14 Chapters and articles of the new Universities Law	88
Table 15 Summary of the differences between the two laws.....	91
Table 16 Descriptive details of participants.....	102
Table 17 Emergent (38) initial codes	104
Table 18 Forming (2) categories related to adapting governance.....	105
Table 19 Forming (3) categories related to autonomy and efficiency	106
Table 20 Forming (2) categories related to transparency and accountability	107
Table 21 Forming (2) categories related to participation and responsibility	108

Table 22 Emergent (4) groups of themes.....	109
Table 23 Themes and their definitions.....	109
Table 24 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 1	111
Table 25 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 2	115
Table 26 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 3	119
Table 27 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 4.....	121

List of Figures

Figure 1 Clark’s Triangle of Coordination (1983).....	31
Figure 2 Conceptual framework	52
Figure 3 Saudi Arabia Map.....	55
Figure 4 Aspects of similarities between the two laws	89
Figure 5 Aspects of differences between the two laws	90
Figure 6 Governance principles	95
Figure 7 The themes, categories, and properties.....	125
Figure 8 Theme 1 Adapting governance implementation.....	130
Figure 9 Theme 2 Enhancing autonomy and efficiency.	145
Figure 10 Theme 3 Improving transparency and accountability	166
Figure 11 Theme 4 Assuming responsibility and participation	180
Figure 12 The developed conceptual framework.....	194
Figure 13 Proposed governance framework for Saudi higher education.....	195

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

People in societies require education as one of their most basic requirements. Individuals can define their community purpose through education, particularly higher education. (Yang et al., 2015). They also should respond to the increased need for solutions to society's most pressing problems (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2016). Globally, the importance of the operational sustainability of higher education institutions is emphasised (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019).

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of higher education institutions, deans of universities, colleges, and senior administrators are best able to evaluate the current situation (Köksal & İlkuçan, 2019). However, the majority of higher education institutions face many challenges, such as traditional structures (Robson & Wihlborg, 2019), processes (Brint, 2019), management education (Figueiró & Raufflet, 2015), and research and practices (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). It is, therefore, important to understand the reality of governance in higher education institutions to ensure the operational stability of universities. A comprehensive understanding of governance in higher education institutions is essential for ensuring the operational stability of universities. This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on higher education governance by proposing a tailored governance framework for Saudi universities, grounded in applying the Saudi Universities Law and informed by the region's unique contextual characteristics. By exploring and integrating relevant governance theories, this research enhances the conceptualisation of governance within the Saudi context, illustrating how these theoretical frameworks can be effectively employed to develop a robust governance structure that meets the specific needs and challenges Saudi higher education institutions face.

Saudi Arabia's higher education system has grown dramatically during the last 50 years, particularly in the previous 20 years. Saudi Arabia has made enormous investments in renovating and constructing new universities. For example, the number of universities has risen considerably from seven public universities in 1995 to 15 in 2005 (Universities Affairs Council, 2024). However, in 2024, there are 66 educational institutions, of which 28 are public universities and 38 private colleges and universities (Universities Affairs Council, 2024). Like other educational systems, Saudi higher education faces its own set of obstacles and needs. According to Alkhazim (2003, p. 1), Saudi Arabian higher education confronts three challenges: "limitation of places, depletion of resources, and quality measures". Alnassar and Dow (2013) indicate that Saudi Arabian university learning and teaching are mostly based on didactic lecturing and indoctrination approaches. Smith and Abouammoh (2013a) outlined five serious challenges that Saudi Arabian higher education must address to achieve and sustain a "world-class" position. One of these challenges is the lack of an appropriate governance model for Saudi universities, which is relevant to this research topic (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013, p. 181).

Adopting governance principles helps policymakers learn about corporate risk management and activate systems oversight. A well-designed governance structure is believed to benefit an organisation's stakeholders and members by holding the institution accountable to the public (Shattock, 2002).

There are three primary guiding principles to attain effective university governance: institutional autonomy should be respected, academic freedom within the law should be protected, and governance arrangements should be open and responsive (Hines, 2000).

Universities' governance control can be external, internal, or both (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007). External governance control refers to the nature and extent of control by players outside the institution. It includes how top administrators are appointed, how the institution is accredited and evaluated, and how it finances its various activities. Internal governance issues relate to power allocation among the president, deans, and faculty members (Kezar, 2004).

Saudi Arabia established a corporate method to diversify its economy and revenues in 2016 under the country's National Transformational Plan 2030 by earmarking taxes as an alternative to oil revenue (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019). Under Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's leadership, Vision 2030 focuses on Saudi Arabia's post-petroleum future, including rationalising resources allotted to higher education institutions (Waterbury, 2019). Universities must consider the foundations of the “2030 Vision” by building non-profit universities that may financially rely on their research, practice, and human resources.

In 2019, the Saudi government issued a new Universities Law (Appendix A). Following the government's general policy, the law gives the higher education sector administrative, financial and academic independence. The Universities Law is set to help manage universities through several councils. This can be seen through the formation of the Universities Affairs Council (UAC) and the Trustees Boards, which are a membership of public and private representatives, to achieve good governance implementation (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2020). The law also allows the establishment of international advisory councils, student councils, and faculty councils to expand the circle of participation and decision-making (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2020).

Like other global higher education systems, the higher education system in Saudi Arabia may face several obstacles (Abouammoh, 2018). Traditional structures and the need to establish a high-quality educational system are pitted against the desire to preserve prevalent religious traditions and social values primarily preserved by the people and the government (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). According to Allmnakrah and Evers (2019), a major reform in the Saudi education system is required for higher education to accomplish the goals specified in Vision 2030. In order to play a major role in attaining the goals specified in Vision 2030, university rectors and senior administrators, members of the university council, faculty deans and undersecretaries must listen to their opinions and assess the requirements for Saudi higher education (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2019; Altbach et al., 2019; Robson & Wihlborg, 2019; Waterbury, 2019). This proposed study supports the assumption that higher education leaders are in the best and most appropriate

position to assess and describe governance in higher education in Saudi Arabia (Köksal & İlkuçan, 2019; Saudi Vision 2030, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study acknowledges that the Saudi Arabian higher education system faces considerable challenges vis-à-vis achieving Saudi Vision 2030 (Hassanien, 2018; Hijazi, Hassan, & Husain, 2019; Saudi Ministry of Education, 2019). The major drivers of these challenges originate from the rapid changes in the social, political, technological, and economic context of contemporary Saudi Arabia. Knowledge-based economy transformation (Alomari, 2019), technological innovations (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2018; Nurunnabi, 2017), economic future (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2019; Moshashai, Leber & Savage, 2018), demographic changes and societal transformation (Hvidt, 2018; Thompson, 2017), curricula and learning environment (Alabdulaziz, 2019; Yusuf, 2017) are some of the forces that higher education researchers, policymakers, and administrators consider being the major drivers of challenges to the status quo. As such, Saudi higher education needs to change significantly to meet those challenges (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2019). Consequently, in conjunction with achieving academic, administrative and financial autonomy as outlined in Saudi Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019), Saudi Arabian leaders at all levels of the higher education ecosystem have begun to consider what needs to be changed and what should remain in order to adapt their institutions to meet the context of Vision 2030. Effective governance is an essential foundation for achieving the 2030 vision. Therefore, this study aims to identify a suitable governance framework for Saudi higher education that considers Saudi society's economic, cultural and political characteristics.

1.3 The Researcher's Position and Importance of the Research

In conducting this research, it is essential to acknowledge the researcher's position within the academic landscape of higher education governance. The researcher brings a background in business administration, holding both bachelor's and master's degrees in the field, and an interest in the governance of higher education, particularly within Saudi universities, stems from over a decade of practical experience in leadership and administrative roles. During his tenure at a Saudi university, he participated in various advisory and academic committees, which informed his understanding of the complexities involved in governance practices. Through this academic background and professional experience, the researcher has observed numerous challenges related to the governance of higher education institutions. This involvement in fieldwork has allowed the researcher to identify and sense the research problem more acutely, highlighting the importance of addressing governance practices in Saudi universities.

This study is grounded in a commitment to advancing the understanding of governance practices in Saudi universities, particularly considering the recent legislative changes introduced by the new Universities Law. The researcher's unique perspective allows for a critical examination of the interplay between theory and

practice in the context of Saudi higher education, ensuring that the findings are relevant and applicable to the current landscape.

- **Theoretical Importance**

This study contributes to the understanding of higher education governance by applying a novel combination of agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories to the context of Saudi Arabia. It reveals the limitations of existing governance frameworks when applied in isolation and addresses the practical challenges that universities face when transitioning to the new Universities Law. By providing empirical insights into the implementation of governance reforms, this research highlights crucial factors for successfully navigating these changes. Furthermore, it bridges the gap between theory and practice, supporting ongoing efforts to enhance governance in Saudi higher education and aligning with the broader goals of the Vision 2030 initiative.

- **Practical Relevance**

The findings of this research are intended to offer valuable insights for policymakers, university leaders, and administrators in Saudi Arabia. The study provides practical recommendations for enhancing governance effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, and institutional performance by identifying the challenges and successes of implementing the new governance framework. This practical focus ensures the research is relevant and applicable to Saudi universities' real-world governance challenges.

- **Contextual Significance**

The ongoing reforms in Saudi higher education, particularly as part of the Vision 2030 initiative, underscore the importance of this research. By addressing the governance implications of these reforms, the study aims to contribute to broader discussions on governance reform in the region, providing insights that can benefit Saudi universities and other higher education institutions facing similar challenges in comparable sociocultural and political contexts.

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

1.4.1 Aim

The primary aim of this research is to critically examine the implementation of the new Universities Law in Saudi Arabia and its implications for higher education governance. This study seeks to contribute to the theoretical discourse on governance processes by analysing how the law influences decision-making, accountability, and stakeholder engagement within Saudi universities. By exploring the practical realities of governance implementation, this research aims to enhance our understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in higher education governance, particularly in a unique sociocultural and political context like Saudi Arabia.

In line with the research aim, the following primary research objectives have been identified:

1.4.2 Objectives

1. To examine the implementation processes of the new Universities Law within Saudi universities and assess its implications for governance practices.
2. To identify and analyse the challenges and barriers Saudi universities encounter in implementing the new Universities Law and evaluate how these challenges inform the understanding of governance theory.
3. To assess the alignment and divergence of governance practices observed in Saudi universities with established governance theories, including agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories.

1.5 Scope

This research focuses on the implementation of the new Universities Law in Saudi Arabia and its implications for higher education governance. The scope encompasses a comprehensive analysis of governance concepts and theories, including agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories related to Saudi universities' unique sociocultural, political, and economic context. The study will specifically examine.

1. Theoretical frameworks: exploring existing governance theories and their relevance to higher education, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding governance dynamics within Saudi universities.
2. Comparative analysis: a detailed comparison between the new Universities Law and the previous Higher Education Law, highlighting the theoretical implications of these legislative changes on governance structures and processes.
3. Case studies: an in-depth investigation of governance practices in two selected Saudi universities implementing the new law, focusing on the challenges and successes encountered during this transition. This will contribute to the theoretical discourse on governance by illustrating real-world applications of governance theories.
4. Stakeholder perspectives: the integration of insights from various stakeholders, including university leaders and members of the Universities Affairs Council (UAC), to enrich the theoretical understanding of governance practices and stakeholder engagement in the Saudi context.
5. Framework development: the formulation of a governance framework tailored to the specific needs of Saudi universities, grounded in theoretical principles and aimed at enhancing governance effectiveness. This framework will serve as a practical guide for future governance reforms and contribute to the broader theoretical discussions on governance in higher education.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a brief background on the research problem, rationale, and motivation for conducting the study in higher education governance, outlining the research aim and objectives.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to university governance and the theoretical basis for governance frameworks. The chapter explores key governance principles and concludes with constructing the conceptual framework guiding the study.

Chapter 3 presents the contextual framework of the study, detailing the development of Saudi higher education, the challenges faced, the evolution of Saudi universities, and the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 on the economic and cultural context.

Chapter 4 summarises the methodology and philosophical principles of the study and covers ethical considerations and approvals obtained for the research.

Chapter 5 conducts a comparative analysis of the previous and new Saudi higher education laws to identify similarities, differences, and their impact on governance.

Chapter 6 performs an in-depth analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis. The chapter outlines the coding process and identifies key themes.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings in the context of the literature and theoretical frameworks and proposes a governance framework for Saudi higher education.

Chapter 8 concludes the research questions, identifies theoretical and practical contributions, offers recommendations to decision-makers in Saudi higher education, and discusses limitations and future research directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study, outlining the research problem, objectives, and scope. Building upon this foundation, this chapter highlights the literature review and the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. The chapter aims to establish a comprehensive theoretical basis for examining governance in Saudi higher education, focusing on the processes and challenges related to adapting and implementing governance.

This chapter begins by defining governance and outlining its fundamental principles and theories, which are essential for effective management and oversight in higher education institutions. This is followed by examining governance in the context of Saudi Arabia, taking into account the unique cultural, religious, and political factors that influence governance practices in Saudi universities.

The chapter also reviews previous studies on governance adaptation in Saudi higher education, identifying gaps in the existing literature and setting the stage for the current research.

The chapter is organised into six sections: the first section is the introduction; the second section defines governance and its principles; the third section explores underpinning theories; the fourth section examines governance in higher education, including models of governance; the fifth section discusses governance in the context of Saudi higher education; the sixth section presents the conceptual framework of the study; and the final section provides a summary of the chapter.

2.2 Conceptualising Governance

In this section, the concept of corporate governance will be defined, governance in the context of higher education will be presented, and a comparison will be made between corporate governance and higher education governance.

2.2.1 Definition of Corporate Governance

Governance was derived from Latin and ancient Greek to indicate control, guidance, and manipulation. Its use broadened through politics after adaptation in the Western world (Keping, 2017). It is now widely used in different contexts, including politically, socially, and economically. This widespread use of the word results from the transfer of exclusive responsibility to society. Scholars have defined governance as a phenomenon developed in various corporate, public sector, and education organisations. In the broadest sense, governance may be defined as how decisions are reached, mandates are implemented, and goals are achieved (Bevir, 2013). Corporate governance, in particular, was developed from the necessity for regulating shareholders' management relations with the other stakeholders to guarantee efficiency, accountability, and transparency of business actions (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997).

Additionally, governance is guiding organisations towards their mission and objectives while maintaining organisational integrity, accountability for resources, and proper communication channels between the major players (Rhodes, 1996). With increased globalisation, the idea of governance has expanded to include a wider population, which implements governance principles that are more fluid and diverse. In this regard, governance principles such as accountability, transparency, fairness, and responsibility are global but conditional on the institution type, including the corporate and higher education sectors (Claessens & Yurtoglu, 2013).

Governance systems are put in place to regulate power, ensure that various stakeholders' interests are well protected, and ensure that ethical issues are observed (Tricker, 2019). The basic tenets of corporate governance that have evolved from the corporate sphere have spread to other sectors, such as higher education since the institutions operate in a competitive and financially constrained environment (Cadbury, 2002; OECD, 2004).

Wilkinson's (2005) global definition of governance is the most widely accepted global definition of governance. Wilkinson (2005) defined governance as:

"The sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated, and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance and informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest" (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 70).

This definition is widely accepted due to its acknowledgement of governance as a process rather than an activity. It also identifies governance as a continuous interaction rather than a public or private sector implementation.

Based on these descriptions, governance is broader than corporate governance. While there might be restrictions on corporate governance's social application, governance generally has no restrictions. Governance in the same context of the corporate world is also broader, incorporating risk management issues. According to Keping (2018), corporate governance supports sustainability, profitability, and growth, while governance prevents financial crises, ensures good leadership, and prevents poor performance. Governance ensures that business processes function effectively, the internal controls are well established, and the required tools and information for decision-making are available. Corporate governance ensures that authoritative stakeholders are competent, vital activities have oversight, formal roles and responsibilities are identified, succession plans are made to avoid gaps, and a code of ethics is established.

2.2.2 Corporate Governance Principles

Corporate governance has been previously characterised by a few known general principles that are supposed to make a corporation work for the benefit of stakeholders. The principle of accountability

remains one of the most important ones: it makes the board of directors and other managers responsible for their actions and decisions (OECD, 2004). If not, then mismanagement or corruption can quickly arise because there will be little to no oversight (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997), which is closely related to accountability, which is the principle of transparency.

Another important principle is responsibility, which means the moral and legal duties of managers to operate the company for the benefit of shareholders as well as the general public (Cadbury, 2002). CSR is an extension of this principle by expanding the company's responsibilities beyond the creation of profits to cover social, ethical, environmental, and even employment issues (Freeman et al., 2010). Fairness is also critical to corporate governance since all stakeholders, including minorities, are protected in their rights (Claessens & Yurtoglu, 2013). This is achieved through governance mechanisms like equity voting and financial reporting to ensure fairness for everyone.

These principles serve as the foundation of corporate governance; however, they also relate to governance in higher education differently and with different objectives (OECD, 2004; Rhodes, 1996). Higher education institutions are applying these principles as they continue to transmute into competitive and marketised structures to justify their existence, gain funds, and work efficiently (Marginson, 2016).

2.2.3 Definition of Higher Education Governance

Higher education governance is how higher education institutions manage their affairs; this includes decision-making, resource allocation and reporting to stakeholders (de Boer, Enders & Schimank, 2007). While corporate governance focuses on business returns and shareholders' value, higher education governance stresses the mission of education, research and public service (Kaplan, 2004). Higher education institutions governance is a multi-layered process that occurs within an environment of interdependence between stakeholders, such as faculty, administrators, government and students, all of whom perform different tasks (McLendon, 2003).

It is important to note that there are internal and external determinants to higher education governance. Institutionally, universities and colleges are governed through administrative structures, including boards of trustees and academic senates, and leadership structures, such as university presidents or rectors (de Boer & File, 2009). Externally, higher education institutions are answerable to government agencies, financial sponsors, and other social, economic and political requirements from the society at large (Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). Marketisation trends in higher education have seen the introduction of corporate-like governance structures in some settings as institutions struggle for student enrolment, funds and recognition in the global market (Marginson, 2016). It has become clear that while governance and management are related concepts in higher education, they differ. While governance is more focused on the general supervision of an organisation, its leadership, and adherence to external rules, regulations, and policies, management is more involved with operationalising these policies on the ground (Marginson & Considine,

2000). The distinction between governance and managing is important as it helps to prevent conflicts of interest and define accountability.

2.2.4 Higher Education Governance Principles

Higher education governance principles are based on corporate governance principles but are distinct from them due to the unique mission and purpose of the educational institutions. These principles include accountability, transparency, participation, autonomy, efficiency, and responsibility.

- ***Accountability***

Accountability is one of the key attributes of governance, and it is most related to agency theory. This theory focuses on the principles and agents where the agent must be accountable to the principal to avoid the agent pursuing his/her selfish interests (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). In higher learning, accountability ensures that other governance structures work in the best interest of faculty, students, government and other donors. Oversight and accountability reduce the possibility of mismanagement or decisions favouring some individuals within an organisation.

Literature support reveals increased pressure for increased accountability in higher learning institutions, particularly given the scenario in which such institutions are funded by the public and/or where performance indicators are part of the testing regimen (Kezar, 2004; Schillemans, 2016). In the work of Kezar (2004), it is noted that accountability is important to realise the internal and external requirements, goals and objectives, such as academic success and compliance with the legislation. In Saudi Arabia, accountability is gradually associated with Vision 2030, which requires more openness and conformity of organisations' activities with the country's goals.

- ***Transparency***

Another important governance principle is transparency, based on the stewardship theory that regards the governance bodies as stewards of institutional resources and trust (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). It enhances transparency in decision-making so that the stakeholders can evaluate the governance system's efficiency and equity. Transparency creates understanding, which is crucial for the legitimacy of higher education governance, especially in organisations receiving public money and developing partnerships with external actors.

The literature has particularly focused on transparency in the governance of higher learning institutions. Writing in 2009, Ball posited that transparency is much more than providing information; it is the development of processes through which stakeholders can actively scrutinise governance decisions. In the Saudi Vision 2030 case, transparency can be seen as a potent strategy for increasing public confidence in institutions while simultaneously making governance processes recognisable as aligned with national objectives and interests (Stensaker & Harvey, 2010).

Transparency was selected because it would help strengthen accountability and make the governance process more transparent. Without transparency, stakeholders would not have the information required to check on the governance bodies, thus reducing commitment.

- ***Participation***

It is based on the stakeholder theory that requires the integration of numerous stakeholders in the governance processes (Freeman, 1984). In higher education, this principle helps bring in the voices of faculty, students, alumni, government bodies, and industry partners. It ensures that governance decisions strategically reflect the needs and interests of many players in the governance system, enhancing democratic governance and institutional performance.

Several authors have argued that participation improves governance since it involves various individuals in matters that affect them to avoid situations where power is centralised. According to Fung (2006), participation is the most crucial element in a democracy because it guarantees that decisions meet the common people's needs. As in the case of higher education, McCormick (2016) posits that participation enhances governance by ensuring that the institutions' strategies reflect stakeholders' expectations. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 highlights the importance of governance inclusiveness, especially in the wake of universities expanding their stakeholder engagement to foster partnerships with external organisations.

- ***Autonomy***

Autonomy is a core principle of the higher education system that allows institutions to make decisions without much outside interference. This principle is most relevant to the stewardship theory, which posits that when governance structures are given autonomy, they are in the best position to make decisions in the institution's interest (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). Decentralisation allows institutions to provide leadership in the academic field, chart courses in their areas of specialisation and adapt to dynamic educational environments.

The literature emphasises autonomy as a key to promoting academic freedom and institutional change. According to Estermann and Nokkala (2011), institutional autonomy is essential for higher education institutions to respond to new research and teaching demands. However, the principle of autonomy must be accompanied by the principle of accountability so that the freedom to make decisions independently is in the best interest of the stakeholders (Marginson & Considine, 2000). The new Universities Law under Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia grants institutions more managerial independence, with accountability measures for meeting national goals.

- ***Efficiency***

Efficiency is based on the New Public Management (NPM) framework that presupposes private management methods, including rational use of resources, performance indicators, and output

accountability (Ferlie et al., 2008). Efficiency in higher education means using financial, human and material resources effectively to accomplish the institution's goals without sacrificing quality and integrity.

The literature on efficiency in higher education governance has grown rapidly as institutions are experiencing growing financial constraints and performance demands. They argue that efficiency is central to improving institutional outcomes, including research output, student performance, and cost constraints. The principle of efficiency is critical in Saudi higher education because the government has taken an interest in this issue, as well as the creation of the Expenditure Efficiency and Projects Authority to contribute to spending efficiency in government agencies, enhance the quality of projects, assets and facilities, infrastructure planning, programs, initiatives, and operational processes that are funded by the state's general budget, including public universities (Expenditure Efficiency and Projects Authority, 2024).

- ***Responsibility***

Responsibility is taken up from integrity as the primary governance principle, which outlines the ethical and moral functions of the governance bodies for the institutions and stakeholders. Responsibility is based on the stewardship theory that posits that governance bodies are trustees of institutional assets and organisational values (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). In higher learning institutions, accountability guarantees that decisions are made correctly, especially concerning the mission and vision of the institution.

There is evidence that responsibility in governance literature has been focusing on the issue of ethical decisions and accountability. According to Hogan, Donnelly, and O'Rourke (2010), responsibility must be assigned and demonstrated to sustain trust in governance bodies, especially universities.

- ***Interaction Between the Higher Education Governance Principles***

As the principles of accountability, transparency, participation, autonomy, efficiency, and responsibility are principles of governance, they are only useful when applied in synergy. These principles are interrelated and sometimes interactive, which aligns with the nature of governing systems in higher learning institutions.

Accountability and transparency are sister concepts; transparency is how accountability is realised. If this does not occur, accountability mechanisms become useless because the information necessary to assess institutional performance is unavailable to the public. Transparency gives the visibility that enables the governance bodies to be accountable for their decisions and actions. This is even more apparent in areas where the public has to trust institutions and where the public has a monitoring role, such as in publicly funded higher learning institutions (Schillemans, 2016).

Participation further reinforces both accountability and transparency. When people like the faculty, students, and other external partners are involved in governance processes, governance becomes more accountable and transparent (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). It fosters the principle of equity and democracy in decision-making since it will be made in the interest of the various stakeholders, hence minimising possible failures in governance and over-centralisation of powers. Engaging the stakeholders in the decision-making

process also increases the institution's responsibility to the stakeholders, as they have a greater stake in the final decision and can easily demand more accountability (McCormick, 2016).

Accountability and responsibility exist in a balance with autonomy. Although decentralisation enables institutions to be flexible and make choices that are most appropriate for their environment, it must be accompanied by measures that will check on those negative impacts resulting from decentralisation, such as misappropriation of resources and lack of supervision (Marginson & Considine, 2000). Stewardship theory provides a useful lens for understanding this relationship; governance bodies are given the freedom to act as the responsible managers of the institution, but this freedom is checked by the responsibility to the stakeholders (Davis et al., 1997). Accountability guarantees the proper use of authority in a responsible, appropriate, and in keeping with the institution and society's expectations manner (Donaldson & Davis, 1991).

Efficiency interacts with both autonomy and accountability. Institutions must be empowered to manage resources and justify that resources available to institutions are utilised optimally to achieve institutional objectives. Consequently, efficiency in governance leads to increased organisational openness and responsibility, making institutions specify their objectives, activities, and methods of determining resource needs (Ferlie et al., 2008). Efficiency, therefore, depends on stakeholders' involvement, especially in resource allocation and utilisation issues, so that everyone has a say in the best outcomes that could be realised (Estermann & Nokkala, 2011).

Lastly, responsibility serves as the ethical core that underpins all the other principles. In this regard, governance bodies bear responsibility when exercising autonomy. Responsibility curbs the excesses of efficiency and prevents the erosion of accountability or transparency, anchoring the institution's objectives within broader social values (Hogan et al., 2010).

Thus, the higher education governance principles are distinct and closely intertwined. These principles are complementary and need to be aligned, as one principle must support the others to establish a coherent, ethical, and efficient system of higher education governance. This dynamic is important for building institutional capacity in governance and creating synergy between governance frameworks and the national and international requirements.

2.2.5 Corporate Governance vs. Higher Education Governance

When analysed based on general principles of decision-making, accountability, and control, the term governance has diverse connotations in various sectors. In general, governance, as reflected in the corporate context, is associated with pursuing rational organisational performance, preserving shareholder value, and creating mechanisms for controlling unethical behaviour (Tricker, 2019; OECD, 2004). Rather, higher education governance is concerned with the tension between organisational independence and external control as universities must protect academic freedom on the one hand while meeting increasing calls for accountability to government, market and society on the other hand (Shattock, 2006; de Boer et al., 2010).

These different objectives and actors give rise to significant differences in how these industries define and manage governance.

In corporate governance, the main players are typically shareholders, the board of directors, and the executive management, whose objectives are mainly aligned with financial performance and profits (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997). This contrasts with the stakeholders in higher education governance, where faculty, students, academic senates and external bodies, including the accreditation agencies, are key players in decision-making at policy and practice levels (Armijos et al., 2023). While corporate governance focuses on the goal of shareholder value, the role of governance in higher education is to reconcile academic missions of teaching and research with social missions of diversity, knowledge creation, and citizenship (Marginson, 2016).

The concept of governance in the context of higher education institutions has multiple purposes and engulfs a wider range of values than in the business environment. It is generally understood that universities are to perform a tripartite function of creating knowledge through research, imparting knowledge through teaching, serving the public and engaging with society (Shattock, 2006). This broader mandate makes it necessary for higher education institutions to balance internal academic freedom with external accountability demands sometimes externally placed by government and market forces. Such balancing acts give rise to tensions between autonomy and oversight, which are core to the nature of this sector of governance (Klemenčič, 2017).

Mainly, autonomy is the most significant aspect that sets the higher education governance apart from the other sectors. Universities have a relatively high level of autonomy, especially in academic affairs, including course determination, research direction and recruitment of staff (Klemenčič, 2017; de Boer & File, 2009). This autonomy is necessary to keep the integrity and creativity that form the basis of the work of higher education institutions. Nevertheless, this freedom is not absolute. Colleges are often regulated by the state primarily when they receive state grants or are a part of a state educational system. In these cases, universities are subjected to regulatory demands, performance indicators and funding conditions that may restrain their autonomy (Enders et al., 2013; Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). Thus, financial dependency, whether on governmental grants or tuition, introduces certain weaknesses that undermine institutional independence (Altbach, 2009).

This tension between autonomy and accountability is one of the hallmarks of higher education governance, in contrast to corporate governance, in which autonomy is far more closely associated with managerial power and the freedom granted to managers to operate in the pursuit of financial objectives (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997). Autonomy in higher education is also associated with the key academic and institutional freedoms on which the university's position in society is based. However, these freedoms should not be confused with accountability for financial management, learning outcomes, and the impact of research (McLendon, 2003).

Table 1, summarised from the scholarly literature, provides an overview of the major differences and similarities between governance in general, including corporate governance and higher education governance.

Table 1 Comparing corporate governance and higher education governance

Aspect	Corporate governance	Higher education governance	Supporting literature
Purpose	To ensure efficient management, profitability, accountability, and transparency to maximise value (often economic) for stakeholders.	To ensure academic quality, financial sustainability, and accountability while fostering teaching, research, and societal service.	Shattock (2006); Clark (1983)
Primary stakeholders	Shareholders, board of directors, executives, governments, and sometimes the public.	Faculty, students, administrators, academic boards, government bodies, and external stakeholders (e.g., donors, alumni).	Marginson & Considine (2000); Birnbaum (1988)
Decision-making structure	Hierarchical, top-down management model, with a clear separation between owners and managers.	In a collegial model, Shared governance involves various actors (faculty, administrators, and external stakeholders). Decision-making often involves negotiation and consensus.	Birnbaum (1988); Shattock (2006)
Financial control	Financial control is focused on profit maximisation, cost efficiency, and shareholder returns.	Financial control focuses on managing budgets, ensuring sustainability, and meeting public accountability, with funding often coming from governments or tuition fees.	Shattock (2006); Marginson & Considine (2000)
External oversight	Oversight comes from shareholders, regulatory bodies, and sometimes the public. Public companies are highly regulated.	External oversight comes from government ministries, accreditation bodies, and funding agencies, often with public interest mandates.	Clark (1983); Marginson & Considine (2000)

2.3 Actors in Higher Education Governance

Actors' roles in higher education governance are therefore central to the course and viability of institutions. These actors have different roles and powers, which affect the institution's goals, rules, and mission in education. Comparing their functions makes it easier to realise how authority and responsibility are divided in higher education.

The governance players are in the university, university boards, academic senates, government and other external players such as funding agencies and industrial partners (Shattock, 2013). All these actors play their part in managing the institution in its strategic direction and within legal requirements. Using stakeholders in governance shows that people with different interests should be incorporated into the running of an organisation to enhance its credibility (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

- ***Governing Boards***

University governing boards are key governance components responsible for -making on institutional direction, financial management, academic recruitment, and law enforcement. They are responsible for the stewardship of the mission of the university, with an emphasis on both academic objectives and financial sustainability. Although it has always been common for governors, for example, to be external members drawn from government or industry, current governance models emphasise the need for more internal governors (Shattock, 2013). Governing boards play a significant role in exercising crucial supervision on matters concerning university operations and governance including autonomy, freedom, and accountability to the outside world (Fielden, 2007). It has increased due to the influence of globalisation and marketisation where boards are supposed to create and sustain the competitive advantage of the university in the global knowledge economy (Amaral, Meek & Larsen, 2003).

- ***University Presidents***

The president or chancellor is the administrative head of the university and a link between the board and the university's running. Presidents have the general oversight of the university and are charged with the responsibilities of planning, resource mobilisation, and operations outside the university (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). It is believed that representatives of the institution have the primary responsibility of engaging with the outside world, including governments, industries, and global organisations. (Middlehurst, 2013). The position has changed from one that is strictly oriented towards the academic process and management of the university to one that requires the person to be a manager yet maintain high academic values in the process of management.

- ***Faculty***

Teachers, researchers, administrators, and faculty members are strategic players in the governance of higher education institutions. They usually engage in governance through academic senates and similar structures and are involved in decisions regarding curriculum, research and quality assurance (Shattock 2013). The faculty governance system is based on the idea of democracy, and most decisions are made collectively sense it is an academic community (Altbach, 2015). In many contexts, faculty are engaged in governance to defend academic freedom, meaning that institutional interests reflect scholarly values rather than economic rationality (De Boer, Enders & Schimank, 2007). However, the growing demands for effectiveness and responsibility have tilted the scales in many organisations, thus sparking discussions on the decline of faculty's authority in decision-making (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004).

- ***Students***

Students are also increasingly being considered as relevant actors in the governance of higher education institutions. While students were once mere recipients of education, they are now members who serve on governing boards, especially when issues related to their education concern (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Their participation may vary from serving in student organisations to serving in government and other organisational structures. Students are special in that they are passionate about governance issues that affect their education and their ability to attain it, such as quality education, tuition fees and equal opportunity (Bergan, 2011).

- ***Alumni***

Alums play more significant roles in university governance, serving on governing boards and participating in fundraising and other external activities. Engagement is important in sustaining social relations between the institution and the broader society, marketing the university, and improving its financial viability (Johnstone, 2010). They can maintain long-term perspectives of governance. They defend institutional practices while at the same time supporting change and innovation. At times, alums also serve as the tutors who offer existing students with professional connections and chances (Veluvali and Suriseti, 2023).

- ***Government Agencies***

Government agencies, especially those in public universities, play a significant role in the governance of higher education. They regularly make decisions about the funding, quality, and rules governing the universities under which institutions have to function (Fielden, 2007). The Saudi Arabian government has been especially active in the governance of higher education, with most institutions having depended on state funds and regulations. However, the new Universities Law under Vision 2030 has sought to reduce direct government control and encouraged enhanced university autonomy alongside achieving the national goals under Vision 2030 (Vision 2030, 2016). This shift is a very important change in governance that has made institutions seek other funding sources and become more independent.

- ***Industry Partners***

Lately, industry partners have emerged as key players in the management and governance of higher education, especially in research universities. They are important for financing research, generating internships, and guaranteeing that university curricula are aligned with labour market demands (Marginson, 2016). In many countries, including Saudi Arabian, universities are now promoted to partner with industries, to foster innovation and growth. Stakeholders from the industry are usually involved in governing boards or advisory committees to determine the curriculum, research agenda, and institutional direction (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). The following table summarises the role of actors in higher education governance.

Table 2 Actors in higher education governance

Actors	Role	Description	Literature Support
Governing Boards	Governance oversight	Provide strategic direction, oversee institutional performance, and ensure accountability.	- Birnbaum (1988) - Kezar & Eckel (2004)
University Presidents Chancellors	Executive leadership	Implement policies set by the governing board, manage day-to-day operations, and represent the institution.	- Green & Johnson (2014)
Faculty	Academic leadership and participation	Contribute to academic policy development, participate in governance committees, and ensure academic standards.	- Gappa & Leslie (1993) - Karriker & Williams (2009)
Students	Stakeholders in learning and policy	Influence institutional policies, participate in governance through student governments, and provide feedback on academic and campus life.	- Terenzini & Reason (2005) - Astin (1993)
Alumni	External influence and support	Provide financial support, engage in institutional advancement, and influence institutional reputation.	- Morrow (2009)
Government Agencies	Regulatory oversight and funding	Set policies, provide funding, and regulate compliance with educational standards.	- Jongbloed & Vossensteyn (2001) - Altbach & Salmi (2011)
Industry Partners	Collaborative and employment opportunities	Provide internships and research opportunities and align educational programs with industry needs.	- Gibbons et al. (1994) - Bekhradnia (2009)

Consequently, the actors involved in higher education governance hold different values and concerns about the sector. Although they might have different responsibilities and powers, all of them play a critical role in the effectiveness and responsibility of higher education institutions. The relations between these actors, especially in relation to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, will determine the future of higher education governance regarding academic and societal requirements.

2.4 Theories Related to Higher Education Governance

2.4.1 Theoretical Basis for Choosing Governance Principles in Higher Education

The following theoretical framework has been built up of theories chosen because of their applicability to higher education governance principles and the systems of higher education: accountability, transparency, participation, autonomy, efficiency, and responsibility. Each theory relates to governance frameworks reflecting the growth of the management of contemporary universities, which are the subject of internal institutional requirements and external regulations.

The governance principles in higher education accountability, transparency, participation, autonomy, efficiency, and responsibility have been selected based on their relevance and applicability to the theoretical framework established for this study. This framework, grounded in agency, stewardship, and stakeholder

theories, provides a lens through which these principles can be understood and analysed within higher education governance. By aligning the chosen principles with the theoretical framework, the research aims to enhance the understanding of governance processes and their implications for higher education institutions.

Agency theory, which focuses on the principal-agent model, stresses the role of responsibility and openness in governance systems (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). This theory postulates that institutions should put in place ways of making sure that governance bodies or agents work for stakeholders or principals. Accountability helps ensure that activities are evaluated based on objectives laid down. At the same time, transparency assists in monitoring since details of the events and decisions are easily made known (Eisenhardt, 1989). Contemporary literature underlines that transparency is necessary not only for the institutions' legitimacy but also for managing the risks connected with information asymmetry in higher education management (Bushman et al., 2004).

Relative to agency theory, the stewardship theory posits that the governance bodies' self-interest is in the institution's best interest, provided they are granted independence and trust (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). As a concept, it refers to the freedom that institutions have in performing their academic and research mandates without being overburdened by regulation, thus the concept of academic freedom. Stewardship theory is especially important when explaining how universities, if granted an adequate degree of autonomy, can help advance the country's interests, as described in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Organisations entrusted to self-manage are likely to perform better in achieving organisational goals and objectives and in relation to external stakeholders (Davis et al., 1997).

The integration of stakeholder theory also strengthens the principles of the participation and responsibility of the organisation. This theory holds that institutions must identify and interact with the needs of multiple stakeholders, including the faculty, students, government, industries, and society (Freeman, 1984). The governance of higher education institutions is not a centralised process but one that needs to be shared to accommodate the needs of various stakeholders (Shattock, 2010). Stakeholder theory has also been used frequently in the governance literature to support the democratic and participative approach to decision-making in higher education where all the stakeholders should be involved in governance processes (McCormick, 2016). For instance, Saudi Arabian universities are now developing partnerships with industry and government stakeholders to make the universities' goals responsive to the nation's developmental objectives (Al-Essa, 2020).

New Public Management (NPM) principles of efficiency in the governance of higher education mean utilising resources to achieve institutional objectives. Reflecting on this situation, the role of efficiency has risen in both the academic and managerial contexts, as institutions are tightening their belts due to financial pressures and demands to prove the 'value for money' (Ferlie et al., 2008). Optimisation is not only a financial affair; it is about utilising human and material resources to optimise academics, research, and

students' achievements (Estermann & Nokkala, 2011). Saudi Vision 2030 focuses on how higher education institutions can effectively manage their resources while providing education, research, and innovation internationally (Vision 2030, 2016).

Responsibility is the integrating factor because it brings out the ethical responsibilities of the governance bodies to be responsible in their operations. The literature points out that ethical corporate governance is not only about meeting outside requirements but about creating an ethical environment in the institution itself (Hogan et al., 2010). Responsibility ensures that universities work not only for their benefit but also for the benefit of the whole society and correspondingly for the goals of social responsibility and sustainable development (Stensaker & Harvey, 2010).

These principles comprise a coherent set of governance principles that operate at both the intra-institutional and inter-organisational levels. They all stem from the theoretical literature with a rich body of evidence in today's governance discourses. The following subsections present governance theories, including the chosen ones due to their applicability to Saudi higher education governance principles and systems.

2.4.2 Agency Theory

Agency theory, developed by Jensen and Meckling in 1976, deals with the relationship between the principal and the agent where the authority to make decisions is delegated to the agent by the principal. The theory is based on the premise of agency problem, whereby the agents will always act in their own self-interest rather than that of the principal, hence the need for supervision, incentives and appraisals. In the management of universities, this theory provides an understanding of how the government bodies (principals) decentralise authority to manage universities (agents) and run the institutions effectively. However, the university leadership may not always act in accordance with the state goals and objectives if the latter are opposite to the academic ethos or organisational interests (Lane & Kivistö, 2008). The critical issue, therefore, becomes minimising "agency costs," that is, the principal's costs to ensure that the agent is performing as expected, in the interests of the institution and/or the country at large. These costs can be managed through contractual relations, goals, and legal responsibility structures (Eisenhardt, 1989). Specifically in the context of higher education, where institutions are supposed to provide both economic and social returns, agency theory provides an understanding of the governance mechanisms that try to reconcile the academic freedom of universities and governmental demands.

In the context of the governance of higher education institutions, agency theory has been useful in analysing shifts in accountability and control within universities that tend to rely on public funds and require compliance with government directives. For instance, in public universities, the government is usually the main means, and due to the existence of several national objectives such as enhancing the economic competitiveness or well-being of the society, there are always stringent measures put in place to ensure that the institution is in line with these objectives. These governance challenges surface in the form of performance-based funding mechanisms, in which the university management is rewarded for achieving

set targets that are affiliated with the state's development plan (Kivistö, 2007). However, this leads to a conflict of interests between institutional independence and state sovereignty in which university officials may resist the state's attempts to exert excessive control that could impede the freedom of universities to grow and explore. These tensions are most apparent in contexts where universities are gradually moving toward decentralisation of their financial and operational management, such as in the case of Saudi higher education through implementing the new Universities Law (Universities Law, 2019). Agency theory, therefore, offers an adequate theoretical foundation to analyse the dynamics of power and control between universities and government.

To minimise the agency problem between the government as the principal and university management, the government has recently introduced new mechanisms for performance funding and strategic planning. However, these reforms also have questions regarding accountability and autonomy. Agency theory's emphasis on monitoring, incentives, and accountability is central to understanding how Saudi universities manage the pressure of greater autonomy alongside the need to be responsive to government and social demands. This tension underscores the difficulties of practicing governance reforms in a setting where the state has been central to the governance of higher learning institutions.

2.4.3 Stewardship Theory

Stewardship theory is in opposition to the agency theory and presents a different perspective on the relationship between principals and agents. Unlike the agency perspective that assumes agents are self-interested and need to be monitored, stewardship theory assumes that agents (or stewards) are loyal and commit to the organisation. As such, they are more likely to have a congruent set of goals with that of the principal and are, thus, responsible for managing the institutional resources (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). In the context of higher education, it is assumed that university leaders, faculty, and administrators will always act in the best interest of their institutions and other stakeholders. Therefore, they will not compromise the integrity of the university, society, or the long-term success of the institution for short-term financial or political gains (Davis et al., 1997). The major difference with agency theory is that the focus in stewardship theory is on cooperation, common objectives, and self-interest, as opposed to supervision and surveillance. Stewardship theory is therefore used in governance models that support decentralised decision making where relationships of trust between leaders of organisations and other stakeholders are significant.

In the context of higher education governance, stewardship theory has been applied to the collegial model of governance in which faculty and academic administrators jointly participate in the institution's governance. The theory also postulates that governance structures should be developed to allow individuals most responsive to the university's academic goals to make decisions that are more strategic for the university and its stakeholders in the long run (Tierney, 2012). This is opposed to the more 'managerial' forms of governance that feature strong elements of hierarchy and bureaucratic control and monitoring. Stewardship theory underlines such principles as academic freedom, governance by faculties, and mutual

confidence between university administration and the members of the academic community as the principal components of governance (Shattock, 2013). This perspective especially applies to universities that are committed to their social charter and understand themselves as institutions that serve the public good. In such contexts, the theory offers a coherent account of how governance structures can enhance the realisation of institutional objectives and engender a culture of collective responsibility.

In Saudi higher education, stewardship theory is highly relevant as universities transition to greater autonomy under the new Universities Law. While the agency perspective focuses on oversight and accountability for governance, the stewardship perspective presents another view that acknowledges the loyalty of agency personnel, especially university leaders and faculty who work collaboratively with boards of trustees to implement governance (Universities Law, 2019). It also emphasises that strong working relations between university leadership and faculty are key to successfully implementing governance reforms that are in tune with institutional and national goals. Stewardship theory, therefore, offers a useful lens through which to analyse internal processes for governance in Saudi universities, where the leadership now faces the challenge of enhanced organisational autonomy while simultaneously being expected to exercise stewardship and faithfully discharge responsibilities on behalf of institutions and society.

2.4.4 Stakeholder Theory

Freeman (1984) introduced the stakeholder theory to enrich the concept of governance by considering the multiple stakeholders who participate or are impacted by the organisation's operations. Stakeholders in higher education governance include students, teachers, government, organisations, alumni, employers and the public. According to the theory, these various interests must be managed, and it must be possible to consult all the stakeholders in the decision-making processes (Jongbloed et al., 2008). This approach also differs from more conventional governance structures that merely concentrate on the interface between the government (or the board of trustees) and the university administration. This theory is a theory of inclusiveness, responsibility, and the need to ensure that institutional objectives are consonant with the societal good. The theory is relevant in higher learning since universities are today required to show public responsibility and utility in society, especially where state funding is involved.

This is because the use of stakeholder theory in the governance of higher learning institutions has increased as universities are urged to embrace external stakeholders like the industry, government and the community. This engagement is important in order to make universities relevant to society's needs, for example, in linking curriculum offerings with the needs of the job market or in supporting and participating in the growth of local and regional economies through research and development (Amaral & Magalhães, 2002). Stakeholder theory is especially valuable while discussing the issues of governance that appear when universities serve several stakeholders whose needs are not always aligned. For instance, faculty might value academic freedom and research, while government might value efficiency, financial accountability, and orientation to the national economy (Kezar, 2004). Stakeholder theory, therefore, offers a systematic

way of analysing the multifaceted governance context within which contemporary universities find themselves and through which competing claims must be addressed.

This is especially relevant in the Saudi context as universities are expected to contribute significantly to the achievement of Vision 2030 where higher education institutions have a key role in economic diversification, employment generation and overall social development.

2.4.5 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, which was advanced by DiMaggio and Powell in 1983, provides a conceptual tool for explaining how outside forces influence the institutions such as the university. Coercive, mimetic and normative mechanisms cause isomorphic pressures, which force organisations to emulate other institutions. In higher education governance, institutional theory describes how universities respond to regulatory agencies, accreditation, and international ranking by adopting global governance structures and norms. Coercive isomorphism is the influence posed by, for example, governments or other accrediting agencies where certain governance practices are required (Scott, 2008). Mimetic isomorphism occurs when organisations emulate other organisations. In this case, universities copy the practices of other institutions due to different reasons, such as uncertainty. Normative isomorphism results from professionalising and institutionalising norms in the academic community that define the proper way of universities' organisation and governance (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Institutional theory, therefore, gives insight into how external forces influence governance systems and practices in higher learning institutions.

In the context of higher education, institutional theory has been adopted to make sense of the trend where different countries' governance structures are becoming more similar, especially in reaction to globalisation and the emergence of world rankings. Universities around the world are following a similar trend of governance practices including performance-based funding, strategic planning, and quality assurance mechanisms to meet international standards and gain legitimacy (Peters, 2019). However, according to institutional theory, this convergence has its drawbacks, as it mainly implies adopting procedures that may not fit the local environment. This becomes more so when the models of global governance are directly practised in universities in developing countries or regions of the different cultural, economic and political environments than that of the developed countries. It, therefore, serves as a useful theoretical framework for understanding tensions between global isomorphic pressures and locally appropriate governance.

In the Saudi context, while institutional theory provides some of the reasons why Saudi higher education institutions are compelled to adopt international models of higher education governance, such as accreditation and quality assurance standards, it does not capture the political and cultural factors that shape the governance practices in Saudi universities. While institutional theory portrays the formal structures of governance, it pays less attention to internal governing mechanisms, which can be more relevant to understanding the governance issues that Saudi universities are likely to encounter under Vision 2030 because the institutional environment and national development priorities are more salient here.

2.4.6 Resource Dependence Theory

Resource dependence theory, which was developed by Pfeffer and Salancik in 1978, asserts that organisations depend on outside resources and, in so doing, determine how they are controlled. In higher education, resource dependence theory focuses on funding agencies, including government funding, tuition charges, research grants and private funding. Universities must pay particular attention to the external stakeholders who provide financial support because the providers effectively exercise a certain degree of power over the institutions. According to the theory, the organisations will try to minimise their reliance on any funding source by diversifying their revenues and finding ways of protecting themselves from external influence (Hillman et al., 2009). In higher education, this often involves looking for other revenue streams, for example, from industrial partners, alumni, or international students to decrease dependence on state funding and increase institutional independence.

In higher education governance, resource dependence theory has been employed to describe the increasing hegemony of external actors, especially in conditions where resources are scarce, and universities have to turn to other funding sources. This change has profound implications for governance since universities are now more and more responsible to extra-institutional sources of funds ranging from government, private and corporate benefactors. For instance, universities that receive most of their funding from the government may be pressured into ensuring that most of their activities correspond to the national policy goals and objectives. In contrast, those universities that source most of their income from industries may be inclined to undertake research and innovation that will benefit their industrial partners (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Resource dependence theory, therefore, offers a theoretical lens through which one can explain the influence of financial dynamics on governance arrangements and choices in higher education, especially in systems where universities are supposed to be relatively autonomous.

However, the applicability of resource dependence theory is relatively low in Saudi Arabia because the funding system of the higher education system is different. Traditionally, Saudi universities have been able to source most of their funds from the state with minimal dependence on other revenues (Alkhazim, 2003). Even though Vision 2030 has urged universities to seek funding from sources other than the government and become less reliant on government funding, the government still remains the primary source of financial resources. Therefore, the governance issues in Saudi higher education are less about external resource dependence and more about improving internal governance. Although the theory may not be useful for analysing the current scenario, it can be helpful for analysing how universities in different contexts, particularly those operating under financial stress, manage resource dependency pressures and autonomy and how they respond to them.

The following table compares the theories and explains the strengths and weaknesses of each theory.

Table 3 Strengths and weaknesses of theories

Theory	Key Focus	Core Principles	Strengths	Weaknesses	Literature Support
Agency Theory	Relationships between principals and agents	Contractual agreements, incentives	Highlights accountability and performance	May overlook broader stakeholder interests	Jensen & Meckling (1976); Eisenhardt (1989)
Stewardship Theory	Motivations of individuals in governance	Altruism, trust, and collaboration	Emphasises shared goals and long-term interests	Risks underestimating self-interest motives	Davis et al. (1997); Donaldson & Davis (1991)
Stakeholder Theory	Interests of all stakeholders	Inclusivity, negotiation, and power dynamics	Broadens governance perspective	Can lead to conflicts of interest among stakeholders	Freeman (1984); Phillips (2003)
Resource Dependence Theory	Influence of external resources	Dependency, power dynamics, and collaboration	Acknowledges external factors influencing governance	May downplay internal organisational dynamics	Pfeffer & Salancik (1978); Hillman & Dalziel (2003)
Institutional Theory	Role of institutions and structures	Norms, rules, and cultural contexts	Provides insights into stability and change	May neglect individual agency and dynamism	North (1990); DiMaggio & Powell (1983)

2.4.7 Theoretical Framework for Higher Education Governance

The rationale for selecting Agency, Stewardship, and Stakeholder theories in this research is appropriate because each provides valuable information on the governance issues in Saudi higher education in the context of the Vision 2030 reforms.

In this research, a combination of agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories is employed to create a comprehensive theoretical framework for investigating higher education governance in Saudi Arabia. Each theory offers unique strengths that align with the research objectives, while their weaknesses can be addressed by integrating the other theories.

Agency theory is most suitable in the context of Saudi Arabia's higher education governance because of the conflict of interest between the government bodies that are the principals and the university administrators that are the agents. Since Vision 2030 encourages more institutional independence and responsibility, agency theory elucidates the processes required to ensure that these stakeholders' interests are in harmony. While running universities to meet the national strategic goals, universities are faced with internal goals that create tensions that need to be monitored and controlled through performance management (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Using agency theory, the research will be able to identify how the governance structures eradicate the possibility of conflict and guarantee that universities are still in sync with the government's vision.

Strengths: As in Table 3, agency theory highlights accountability and performance, making it particularly relevant for understanding the relationships between university administrators (agents) and stakeholders (principals). It provides a clear framework for analysing how governance structures can ensure that the interests of all parties are aligned.

Weaknesses: However, agency theory may overlook broader stakeholder interests, focusing primarily on the principal-agent relationship. This limitation can be mitigated by incorporating stakeholder theory, which broadens the governance perspective to include the interests of all stakeholders involved in higher education.

Stewardship theory enriches agency theory by presenting another approach to governance relations. Whereas agency theory posits that people are self-interested and require monitoring, stewardship theory is based on assumptions of interest and monitoring. The theory has relevance in Saudi Arabia particularly because educational administrators tend to embrace the collectivist culture of the society and the notion of collaboration in the management of institutions (Davis et al., 1997). This framework offers an understanding of how governance structures in Saudi higher education can maintain formal authority and increase collaborative, decentralised decision-making necessary to address the expanding roles that universities assume under Vision 2030.

Strengths: Stewardship theory emphasises shared goals and long-term interests, fostering a collaborative environment among governance actors, as shown in Table 5. This perspective is crucial for understanding how university leaders can act in the institution's and its stakeholders' best interests.

Weaknesses: Nonetheless, this theory risks underestimating self-interest motives, which can lead to conflicts of interest. By integrating agency theory, the framework can address these potential conflicts by ensuring accountability mechanisms are in place.

Stakeholder theory provides a broad perspective on governance by involving multiple groups and interests in and outside of the university. The numerous roles of Saudi universities to the students, faculty, government, employers and society in general make the application of stakeholder theory inevitable in the analysis of governance structures (Freeman, 1984). This theory allows the examination of how governance frameworks incorporate stakeholders, such as industries and international partners, as well as how they respond to stakeholder needs while preserving the academic integrity and institutional independence of universities.

Strengths: Stakeholder theory broadens the governance perspective by acknowledging the diverse interests of all stakeholders, including faculty, students, government agencies, and industry partners. It is essential for understanding the complexities of decision-making in higher education governance.

Weaknesses: However, stakeholder theory can lead to conflicts of interest among stakeholders, which may complicate governance processes. Integrating stewardship theory can help mitigate these conflicts by promoting collaboration and shared goals among stakeholders.

By linking these theories, the research creates a coherent theoretical framework that addresses the research objectives and fills in the gaps left by each theory. This integrated approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of higher education governance in Saudi Arabia, ultimately contributing to the theoretical discourse in the field.

2.4.8 Justification for Excluding Resource Dependence Theory and Institutional Theory

While agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories offer valuable insights into the governance processes in Saudi higher education, resource dependence theory and institutional theory were deemed less appropriate for the nature and context of this study. Below are the justifications for their exclusion.

2.4.8.1 Resource Dependence Theory

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) assumes that an organisation depends on outside resources for its survival, and its internal organisational structure adapts to control dependencies and external forces (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). While this theory provides valuable insights for corporate and non-profit governance, there are specific reasons why it may not align well with the nature and context of Saudi higher education governance.

- ***Limited Applicability to Public Higher Education***

In Saudi Arabia, most of the funding of higher learning institutions, especially the universities, is financed by the government. In contrast, RDT is often used for institutions that are more dependent on a variety of external sources of financing, such as private donors, businesses or international grants. Due to the Saudi Arabian centralised funding structure, there is not much reliance on external resources; hence, RDT is less applicable.

- ***Centralised Control and Reduced Autonomy***

Higher learning institutions in Saudi Arabia are highly centralised and are under the close supervision of the government. Government supervision restricts the negotiation of external resources as seen in RDT contexts that require organisations to manage relationships with multiple stakeholders. Therefore, the theory that depicts a system as independent in raising external resources does not fit into a highly centralised system governed by a central authority.

- ***Lack of Competitive Environment***

Resource Dependence Theory is most relevant where organisations are required to compete for resources, as in highly market-oriented systems. Nevertheless, Saudi higher education institutions, especially public

universities, are not as competitive in resource acquisition as their counterparts in the United States or European countries.

2.4.8.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory explains the extent to which organisations adhere to the set standards, regulations, and structures to obtain recognition in a given environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Although this theory has been widely applied in various contexts, including education, its application to Saudi higher education governance may be limited for the following reasons:

- ***Limited Focus on Internal Governance Dynamics***

The institutional theory focuses on the external forces for compliance and obedience to the existing standards. However, your research is based on the internal governance mechanisms, actors, and the issues of implementing governance reforms. It may be possible that institutional theory does not capture the internal decision-making processes and stakeholder interactions that are important in your research.

- ***Top-Down Policy Implementation***

Regarding the Saudi case, governance reforms, including Vision 2030, are centrally driven, do not require input from other actors and do not adhere to international standards. However, the institutionalisation of norms is not entirely occurring, owing to the fast pace of reforms initiated by the government, which makes institutions relatively immune to gradual processes of institutionalisation as seen by institutional theory.

- ***Emphasis on Global Norms Over Local Context***

Institutional theory frequently points to the fact that global standards or international organisations' influence define local processes. Though this could be partially true in the case of Saudi Arabia, the problems of governance in Saudi higher learning institutions are more endemic to the context of the country, that is, cultural, political, and economic. Consequently, while institutional theory emphasises global institutional pressures, it fails to account for the local processes.

In conclusion, the analysis of theories revealed that agency theory, stewardship theory, and stakeholder theory were the most effective frameworks for understanding the governance structures, processes, and challenges within Saudi higher education.

2.4.9 Research Contribution to Theories and their Application

In the following sections, I will explain how this research builds on and enriches the existing theories and applies them to the context of Saudi higher education. While arguing for agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories, this study shows their advantages, disadvantages, and relevance to non-Western systems in relation to the changes in higher education in Saudi Arabia. In addition to examining the

suitability of these theories in a context that has received relatively little attention, the research contributes to the refinement and advancement of existing theories to fill the theoretical void. This will be done by analysing the results using these theories, questioning their assumptions, and coming up with theoretical advancements that can explain the specifics of higher education governance in Saudi Arabia.

- ***Testing Theories in a New Context***

In the context of this research, the generalisability of agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories is examined in the new and unexplored context of Saudi higher education governance. Although these theories have been used in most Western higher education institutions and corporate governance structures, their applicability in centralised government-controlled educational systems such as Saudi Arabia, is still unknown. This research analyses how these theories relate or contrast with the governance structure under Vision 2030 and tests the assumption of agency problems, stakeholder roles, and stewardship responsibilities in an environment where the state dominates university autonomy. More importantly, this research seeks to examine how the tenets of autonomy, accountability, and stakeholder engagement, which are integral in these theories, work under the framework of Saudi Arabia's higher education regulation, which is still unique in its system of governance.

- ***Using Theories to Interpret Results***

The three chosen theories, namely agency, stewardship, and stakeholder will be used as the lenses by which the governance processes and issues in Saudi higher education will be viewed. Agency theory is used to understand the agency relationship between university administrators as agents and the Ministry of Education as principals and how the change towards more autonomy for the universities under the new Universities Law influences this relationship. Stewardship theory is quite different in that it portrays university leaders as stewards who act to further the organisation's objectives rather than their own. This lens is useful in understanding how Saudi university administrators balance government control and university autonomy. Last, Stakeholder theory positions outside players, for example, private sector representatives on boards of trustees, as critical players in governance. By integrating these three theories, the research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how governance reforms are reforming decision-making and power relations in Saudi higher education.

- ***Critiquing and Developing Theories***

This research follows a critical examination of the current theories on governance to question their effectiveness in analysing Saudi higher education governance. For example, Agency theory stems from the premise of an inevitable self-interest agency relationship between principals and agents familiar with decentralised structures. However, the Saudi context shows that universities have been previously under

significant state control; thus, the relationship between stakeholders is not based on self-interest but rather on their loyalty to state orders, which makes it necessary to adjust the theory to the Saudi context. Likewise, leadership self-interest in stewardship theory may not capture the new dynamics that universities encounter under the new university law, including the tension between autonomy and financial viability or revenue generation and diversification. In addition, stakeholder theory, couched in a Western, democratic governance environment, has to be contextualised in Saudi Arabian hierarchical, centralised governance setting in which the state remains a major stakeholder. Such criticisms highlight the need for theoretical adjustments that consider the socio-political and cultural contexts. In this regard, the study seeks to modify the advanced theories that describe the current changes in the governance system of Saudi Arabia, where there is a balance between state authority and institutional independence.

- ***Combining Theories in a Unique Way***

These three theories are not separate and independent but rather work cohesively to offer an understanding of the phenomenon. Agency and stakeholder theories both emphasise accountability, but from different angles: Whereas agency theory aims at managing the relationship between the principal and the agent, stakeholder theory attempts to manage the relationships between the organisation and all stakeholders. In Saudi Arabia, these theories explain governance issues between the government on the one hand and the internal university systems on the other. While agency and stewardship theories have different views on what drives people, Agency theory demands control mechanisms because of self-interest. In contrast, stewardship theory posits that people will act in the institution's best interest when placed in the right environment. Combined, these theories demonstrate how Saudi universities' governance practices can achieve a balance between decentralisation and control. Stewardship and Stakeholder theories are most alike in that they both focus on cooperation and consensus, which correlates with the collective Saudi higher education system that often combines societal obligations with academic missions.

As a result, applying these three theories in the research will uncover how Saudi higher education governance is changing and how it can meet the challenges of stakeholder management, accountability, and collaborative leadership. This theoretical approach is particularly relevant to governance reforms under Vision 2030 in that it addresses the tensions between autonomy, accountability, and inclusion.

2.5 Governance Models in Higher Education

The nature of governance models in higher education provides essential approaches for understanding the dynamics of managing institutions and decision-making systems. These models are conceptual frameworks that help define the roles and responsibilities of different players, including the state, the market, and the academic community (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000). The primary use of such models is to provide an understanding of various forms of governance in higher learning institutions to assess and enhance practices of accountability, decision-making and institutional management in tertiary institutions (Kezar, 2005).

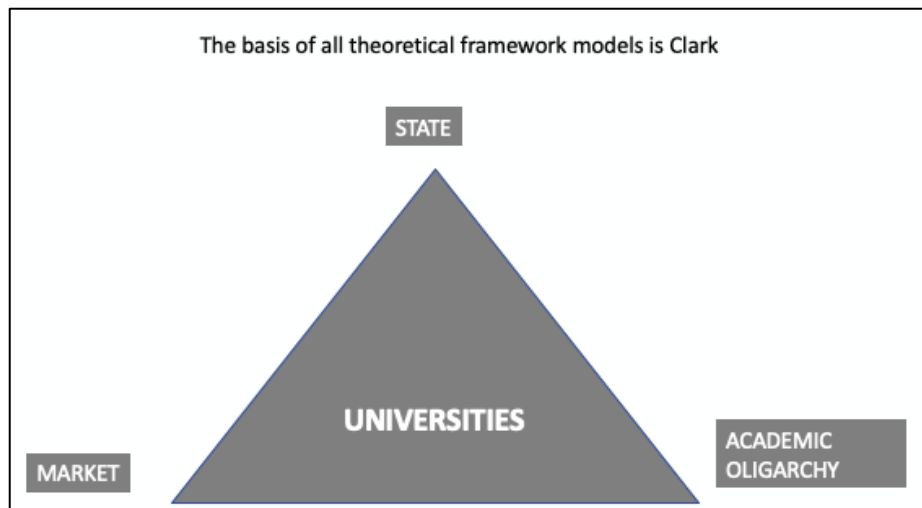
Thus, knowledge of governance models allows institutions to manage difficulties and initiate transformations to improve the governance system.

2.5.1 Theoretical Basis: Clark's Triangle of Coordination

The theoretical approach to explaining governance models in higher learning institutions is typically based on Clark's Triangle of Coordination (1983) (See Figure 1). This model suggests that higher education governance can be understood through the interaction of three main forces: the state, the market, and the academic oligarchy (faculty). Each governance model is shaped by the balance of power between these forces:

- **State:** Symbolises the government authority and intervention.
- **Market:** It entails the rivals, customers, and macro environment that exists outside the organisation.
- **Academic Oligarchy:** This is the concept of governance that is associated with the independence of the faculty.

Figure 1 Clark's Triangle of Coordination (1983)



Clark's model can be used to analyse different governance models with reference to the dominance or integration of these three players. The subsequent sections describe how various governance models relate to the above components.

- ***State-Control Model***

The state-control model shifts the power to the government, with the state acting as the primary decision-maker on the operation of higher education institutions. Originally related to the systems where universities were state-funded organisations, this model defines higher education as the public service that has to fulfil the national economic and social objectives (Dobbins et al., 2011). In this model, the government regulates essential areas like admissions, curriculum and research and development to ensure that universities align with state goals and objectives. This model is commonplace in such nations as France, where universities are closely controlled by the Ministry of Education, and in many Arab nations, such as Saudi Arabia, where higher education is still largely oriented toward governmental objectives.

The state-control model is most apparent in Saudi Arabia, where the state financially supports and controls most public universities. This model captures the centralisation of the governance system in which universities function in conformity with the national development frameworks and are tightly monitored by the Ministry of Education (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013).

- ***Market-Oriented Model***

The market-oriented model incorporates market principles into the governance of higher education. This model makes institutions work like companies with students as consumers, income, and resources and dealing with rivals. The universities that follow this model focus on financial viability, market ventures, and collaborations with the business world and are also assessed on their capacity to produce tuition revenue and private funding (Dobbins et al., 2011).

The United States and the United Kingdom are representative of the market-oriented model, in which universities vie for students, research grants, and international acclaim. In these systems, institutions depend on student fees, extra institutional funds, and collaboration with other companies, leading to competition in quality assurance and market reputation (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). In Saudi Arabia, some of these institutions are partially private and operate under this model, meaning that while the government funds them, they are also encouraged to seek additional funding from the private sector and engage in business ventures.

- ***Academic Self-Rule Model***

The academic self-rule model, also known as the collegial model of governance, has all the governance power residing with the faculty, whereas Universities are mainly governed by academics. Here, institutions are said to adhere to the principles of academic freedom and as such all decisions on what to teach, how to teach, what to research and how to govern the institution are made by the academics in the institution (Kezar, 2005). This model is based on the belief that since academics are knowledgeable in their respective fields, they are well-equipped to lead the institution in delivering education and conducting research.

The academic self-rule model is evident in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, where the academic community has almost exclusive authority in decision-making and universities are not controlled by the government (Dobbins et al., 2011). This is because faculty councils and academic senates are responsible for implementing institutional policies and maintaining academic integrity and freedom of thought. This model encourages decision-making at the local level but may experience difficulties in achieving a proper balance between autonomy and more general governance mechanisms, particularly in environments where government financing remains the major source of funding. The following table summarises the three models and the countries that adopt each model.

Table 4 Governance models summary

Governance Model	Definition/Description	Example Countries	Supporting Literature
State-control model	The state has direct control over the governance of universities, including decision-making, funding, and curriculum. The focus is on aligning higher education with national goals.	France, Germany, KSA	Dobbins et al. (2011); Clark (1983); (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013)
Market-oriented model	Universities operate like private enterprises, focusing on competition, financial independence, and efficiency. Decisions are influenced by market forces and customer (student) demands.	UK, USA	Dobbins et al. (2011); Kezar (2005) ; Clark (1983)
Academic self-rule model	Faculty and academic bodies hold autonomy in decision-making, focusing on academic freedom, peer governance, and internal controls with minimal government oversight.	Italy, Japan	Dobbins et al. (2011); Clark (1983)

2.5.2 Other Governance Models

Besides these three main models, other models of governance have been created to address the variations in the higher education systems across the globe. Trakman (2008) identifies five further models that reflect different configurations of influence among academics, administrators, and external stakeholders: The five models are faculty governance, corporate governance, trustee governance, stakeholder governance, and the mixed model.

- **Faculty Model:** focuses on academic democracy in which many decision-making powers are vested in the faculty where they form the majority. This model is prevalent in research-focused universities where the concept of academic freedom is regarded as important.
- **Corporate Model:** corresponds to the private sector management where the university is governed by a small board of trustees and a chief executive is hired to run the institution. Many institutions use this model, especially those considering efficiency, sound financial management, and strategic direction as key factors.
- **Trustee Model:** Organises governance within the framework of the board of trustees that is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the financial health and public responsibility of the institution responsible for overseeing the institution's financial health and public responsibility. This model is well known in the United States, where the university's board of directors consists of representatives from outside the institution.
- **Stakeholder Model:** It is a continuous process of working with students, staff, industry partners, and government in the university setting. This model makes it possible for more than one voice to be heard in governance processes, thereby fostering a more inclusive decision-making process.

- ***The Mixed Model:*** Combines features of the other governance models and provides institutions with a possibility to choose the most appropriate approach to governance in their case. This flexibility is especially valuable when addressing emerging issues in the context of higher learning institutions.

While these governance models are quite different, they can also be used in synergy or in a modified version to fit the needs of certain institutions and countries. For example, Saudi Arabian universities are gradually moving towards a model that combines state regulation, marketisation, and stakeholders. However, the literature does not yet define the governance model practised in Saudi universities after the application of the new Universities Law. This is one of the gaps that this study aims to fill. This shift is associated with the growing complexity of the governance of higher education and the need for models that would reconcile internal academic freedom and external control.

Finally, the rationale for governance models lies in their guidelines for studying the various approaches to the management of higher education institutions and their interactions with external and internal environments. Although state-control, market-oriented, and academic self-rule models are the major paradigms, new models like corporate and stakeholder governance offer other perspectives to the analysis of governance. Both models provide informative perspectives on the distribution of power and accountability, enabling institutions to address governance issues in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

2.6 Governance Frameworks in Higher Education

A governance framework is a broad and systematic roadmap that defines exact processes, tenets, and procedures of governance within an organisation or a field (Ramsden, 1998). Frameworks are generally more specific and proscriptive than governance models and offer an understanding of the roles, responsibilities, processes, and principles at work within an organisation (Keenan, 2018). In other words, the main objective of governance frameworks is to provide guidance on how governance principles can be implemented in practice, thus optimising their application in the specific organisational environment (Cornforth, 2004). Frameworks, therefore, provide structural support in the governance context, enhance accountability, and support decision-making within institutions.

Similarly, governance frameworks provide for flexibility and adaptability so that the institutions can apply the governance structures required by their respective contexts (Teichler, 2008). This flexibility is important in higher learning institutions as they have to shift their strategies in response to the dynamic regulatory environment, the community and the stakeholders. In addition, frameworks contain elements originating from other governance models to allow institutions to have access to a wide range of governance improvement options (Kezar, 2005).

The governance of higher learning institutions is informed by several frameworks that seek to map the relationship between the various stakeholders, institutional independence and state interference. A closer look at these frameworks will show how they have advanced the field and failed to meet the emerging governance challenges of higher education, especially in countries such as Saudi Arabia.

- ***The Clark Framework***

Clark's (1983) triangle framework serves as a foundational model in higher education governance, positing that the university is influenced by three dimensions: state power, academic oligarchy and market forces. This model shows the relationship between these elements, where the change in one dimension will impact the others. However, its rigidity could be a major weakness; the model distorts the aspects of governance by presenting these dimensions as fixed rather than fluid. The application of this framework may not fully address the complex nature of governance in universities that are experiencing a new set of complex pressures in a globalised environment, especially in regions where state power and market forces are dynamic (Bergquist, 1993). In addition, the model does not highlight how stakeholders can be involved, which is very important in today's governance discourse.

- ***The Van Vught Framework***

Building on Clark's work, Van Vught (1995) defines governance as knowledge interactions in decentralisation, innovation and power relations. Although this view acknowledges that the governance process is intricate, it often fails to consider the dynamics of power relations among the stakeholders. For example, decentralisation may unintentionally privilege some institutional players over others and exclude important actors needed for comprehensive governance (De Boer et al., 2007). Moreover, the use of actions and interactions in the framework may mask the underlying structures that define and control the choices available to decision-makers, including organisational and systemic barriers common in complex higher education systems.

- ***The Braun Framework***

Braun and Merrien (1999) capture two forms of governance: universities' cultural and economic paradigms. Although this framework captures the essence of the changes in the governance of higher education, the categorisation into two seems to simplify the reality. It is also possible to identify the institutions that are hybrids of the two paradigms and cannot be placed in one category or the other. Therefore, the framework's focus on belief systems may reduce its relevance since it does not explain how other factors, including funding and policy shifts, can dramatically influence governance practices.

- ***The Governance Equalizer Framework***

The governance equalizer framework developed by de Boer et al. (2007) has five adjustable parameters: state organisation, stakeholder guidance, academic freedom, managerial freedom and competition for resources. This framework offers a rich way to governance, but it may lead to fragmentation when each

dimension is analysed separately. This split may make it difficult to get a clear picture of how competitive the nature of the framework is. Collaboration is also a concern since collaboration is critical in institutions to promote innovation and meet the needs of society.

- ***The ABC Framework***

The ABC framework (Carnegie et al., 2010) focuses on combining academic, business and corporate governance. Although this approach gives a general picture of governance, it raises the danger of combining different governance elements with their own problems. For instance, focusing on business goals may compromise academic freedom and integrity and create tensions in the governance agenda (Dobbins & Knill, 2014).

- ***The Dobbins Framework***

Dobbins and Knill's (2014) framework assess different sub-sectors of governance with the help of variables like organisational design, state regulatory strategies, and relations with external actors. This framework is useful for untangling governance problems but can be accused of dissecting governance aspects in a way that may lead to the loss of sight of how they collectively affect institutional performance.

- ***The Capano Framework***

Capano (2011) has suggested that government involvement in higher education management has reduced and, therefore, should be further reduced. Although this approach is useful for many of today's debates, it may oversimplify the government's ongoing role in determining the policies and financing of higher education and, thus, the degree of institutional freedom. Through the autonomy and control dichotomy, the framework could fail to capture the subtle ways institutions manage state requirements and market conditions.

- ***Shared Governance Framework***

The shared governance framework focuses on cooperation in leadership responsibilities of the academic and administrative entities (Porter, 1992). Though this model fosters participatory decision-making, it may not work effectively in practice because of the power relations that may limit participation. This model is based on the principles of open communication and respect, but in many cases, the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of organisations can suppress these values, which can cause disappointment among employees and other stakeholders (Kaplan, 2006).

- ***The Kaplan Framework***

Kaplan (2006) in studying the relationship between the political and economic factors in the governance of higher education, identified the forces that have bearing on institutions. Nevertheless, this framework has some potential to produce a deterministic view of the institutions, which implies that institutions do not

have much control over their governance systems. This way, the framework may fail to capture the creative ways and strategies institutions use to manage the complex governance environment.

The following table compares governance frameworks and explains the strengths and weaknesses of each framework.

Table 5 Strengths and weaknesses of governance frameworks

Framework	Key Aspects	Strengths	Weaknesses	Relevant literature
Clark	State power, academic oligarchy, market forces	Established a foundational model for understanding governance	Overly simplistic; may not capture complex interactions	Clark (1983)
Van Vught	Knowledge as a building block, decentralisation, innovative forces, distribution of power	Recognises dynamic interactions among governance actors	Lack of clarity on how to implement decentralisation	Van Vught (1995)
Braun	Cultural vs. economic perspectives on universities	Highlights the dual role of universities in society	Dichotomy may overlook the hybrid roles of institutions	Braun & Merrien (1999)
Governance Equalizers	State organisation, stakeholder guidance, academic autonomy, managerial self-governance, competition	Allows for independent adjustments of dimensions	Complexity in balancing multiple dimensions	de Boer et al. (2007)
ABC	Academic governance, business governance, corporate governance	Integrates diverse governance perspectives	Potential conflicts between academic and corporate goals	Carnegie et al. (2010)
Dobbins	Organisational structure, state regulatory approach, stakeholder relationships	Comprehensive analysis of governance sub-sectors	May lack a focus on holistic governance integration	Dobbins & Knill (2014)
Capano	Procedural vs. autonomy patterns, indirect government influence	Emphasises the importance of decentralisation	Can lead to ambiguity in governance roles and responsibilities	Capano (2011)
Shared	Collaboration between academic and administrative bodies	Encourages participation and transparency	Potential for conflicts in decision-making	Porter (1992)
Kaplan	Political and economic influences on higher education governance	Addresses external factors impacting governance	May underestimate internal dynamics within institutions	Kaplan (2006)

As for Saudi higher education, the new Universities Law is the primary legal instrument that regulates the application of governance in universities. Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding how this new law improves the levels of effective governance in these institutions. Filling this gap, the present research seeks to design an appropriate governance framework for Saudi higher education to correspond to the new university law. This framework will encompass key concepts of higher education governance and shall be underpinned by a strong theoretical literature review of current theories, models and frameworks of governance. Thus, the research will offer a complex picture of governance that will not only be relevant to the context of Saudi Arabia but also will discuss the matter from the perspective of the development of the global understanding of higher education governance.

2.6.1 Comparison of Governance Models and Governance Frameworks

Governance models and governance frameworks are the two most important concepts in the analysis of higher education governance, as they have different but related objectives. Governance models are defined as organisations' particular ways or systems to coordinate and control their activities, make decisions, and report on their performance. These models often set out how governance should be done within certain contexts (Huisman & De Boer, 2015). On the other hand, governance frameworks provide more general theoretical structures that can include different models and their interactions. Frameworks provide comprehensive overviews of governance's principles, components, and dynamics, serving as foundations for analysing and improving governance practices (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Scott, 2001).

Having frameworks as foundations is important because the choice of a governance model is typically made based on the contextual factors identified in the governance framework. For instance, a particular governance model could be most suitable within a framework that focuses on the involvement of stakeholders, while another model may be most suitable within a framework that focuses on academic freedom (Santiago et al., 2015). The following table compares governance models and governance frameworks and explains their differences.

Table 6 Governance models vs. governance frameworks

Aspect	Governance models	Governance frameworks
Definition	Specific approaches or structures for decision-making	Broad conceptual structures encompassing various governance models
Objectives	Guide decision-making, manage resources, ensure accountability	Provide a comprehensive overview of governance principles and dynamics
Nature	Normative and prescriptive	Descriptive and analytical
Components	Often focuses on specific roles, processes, and structures	Includes principles, actors, contexts, and interactions
Use Cases	Implemented institutions or contexts	Used to analyse, compare, and improve governance practices across institutions

Flexibility	Generally, less flexible, as they prescribe specific actions	More adaptable, allowing for integration of various models
Literature Support	Huisman & De Boer (2015)	Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson (2000); Scott (2001); Santiago et al. (2015)

2.7 Governance Implementation

This section presents the processes and challenges of implementing governance in higher education.

2.7.1 Governance Implementation Processes

The application of governance structures in higher learning institutions is a delicate affair that seeks to balance three critical factors: institutional independence, responsibility, and engagement. Scholars worldwide show that governance reforms seek to establish structures that provide institutional adaptability and regulation (Shattock, 2006; Marginson & Considine, 2000). This tension is evident in several activities often linked to governance improvements, such as accountability systems, decentralisation of decision making and consultation.

- ***Accountability Mechanisms***

One of the most important values in the governance reform process in higher education is the identification of accountability structures. Internationally, higher education systems have adopted a new model of accountability based on performance indicators such as research productivity, students' achievements, and efficient use of resources (Huisman, 2009). For instance, in the United Kingdom, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) shows how in promoting institutional accountability, the former ensures that institutions meet the national goals and maintain academic freedom (Hazelkorn, 2015).

- ***Decentralisation of Decision-Making***

Another important process is decision-making decentralisation. The global evidence suggests that governance decentralisation from the state to individual institutions enables the universities to capture the local and international market's demands (Shattock, 2013). In Europe, especially through the Bologna process, universities received flexibility regarding the curriculum and financial management, hence increasing institutional change (De Boer, Enders & Schimank, 2007). However, decentralisation also entails good frameworks for exercising decentralism whilst still having a national overall body.

- ***Stakeholder Engagement***

Involving stakeholders such as faculty, students, and industry partners in governance processes is a vital step towards developing systems that are responsive to the needs of all stakeholders. As highlighted in the global literature, particularly Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory, the practice of decision-making must include stakeholders to be legitimate and accountable. For instance, Kezar and Eckel (2004) observed that

many public universities in the United States have adopted shared governance structures in which faculty members and other parties can participate in organisational decisions.

- ***Institutional Autonomy and Leadership***

The last key process is the institutional autonomy and empowering leadership process. Internationally, the independence of institutions is considered crucial to encourage innovation and increase efficiency. As noted by Clark (1998), universities are most effective when they can manage their academic and fiscal destinies but only considering national imperatives. This is clearly illustrated by Teichler (2011) who notes that in countries like Finland and the Netherlands, enhanced autonomy has had a great positive impact on educational performance.

2.7.2 Governance Implementation Challenges

The governance reforms are essential for modernising the higher education institutions, but they mostly encounter several difficulties. Cross-country studies reveal that challenges like resistance to change, the tension between decentralisation and centralisation, and the conflict of interest of multiple stakeholders are some of the hurdles. They must be managed strategically so that governance reforms deliver what is intended.

- ***Resistance to Change***

In implementing governance reforms, one of the most frequently observed problems is the existence of resistance to change. Marginson and Considine (2000) opine that universities are, by and large, conservative organisations; therefore, changes in governance are likely to meet stiff resistance from both the academic staff and the university leadership. For instance, in systems such as Japan's, efforts to bring about governance reforms have been hampered by bureaucracy and culture that is quite averse to decentralisation (Yonezawa, 2002).

- ***Balancing Autonomy with Accountability***

The other essential consideration is the conflict between decentralisation and responsibility. The problem worldwide is to afford universities the degrees of freedom necessary for them to experiment with and simultaneously guarantee their compliance with national and international standards. This balance is particularly difficult to achieve in systems where institutions have historically been under tight state control, for example in France and Germany (Neave & Van Vught, 1991).

- ***Managing Stakeholder Interests***

Another challenge that governance reforms must deal with is the issue of reconciling stakeholder plurality. Freeman (1984) stakeholder theory focuses on managing the conflicting needs of the students, faculty, and other outside parties. In systems such as the U.S., where universities are granted significant levels of

autonomy, balancing stakeholder interests is a complex process of mediating between the demands of academic freedom, financial viability and public responsibility (Kezar and Eckel, 2004).

- ***Centralised Control***

The last major issue is that of centralised control. In many countries, including those in Eastern Europe, moving from centrally controlled systems of higher education to more decentralised and, therefore, more autonomous systems have been long and arduous (Slantcheva & Levy, 2007). The continuity of centralised patterns does not allow for implementing new governance models that allow for more agility in the learning process.

2.8 History of Higher Education Governance

Historically, there have been tremendous changes in the management and governance of universities and other higher education institutions. Firstly, the collegiate model dominated the higher education governance, and according to it, academic staff, especially professors, had the most significant decision-making power. This collegial governance structure, developed in the Middle Ages, was based on academic freedom and self-organisation, and it was a result of the universities' organisational independence as organisations focused on education and learning (Clark 1983; Berdahl 1991).

Subsequently, the structure of higher education governance shifted and developed in response to the political, social and economic environments. The development of the nation-state in the 18th and 19th centuries began the process of expanded state involvement in universities. This change led to universities being more bureaucratised, with their governance structures reflecting the government's bureaucratic model. Universities became important development instruments for nations, and this was when formal structures of university governance, accountability, performance and state control were instituted (Neave & Maassen, 2007). This development was most pronounced in European nations where universities were incorporated into state structures and charged with serving public utility and as agents of economic regeneration.

2.8.1 The Expansion of Higher Education Governance in the 20th Century

The 20th century was a stage of rapid development of higher education governance as the universities expanded their size and functions. The changes in higher education systems due to massification and the emergence of new types of research universities have made the governance systems more complex. Shattock (2010) opined that the governance process of universities was complicated as many external players such as governments, businesses and the public got involved in decision-making processes of universities. During this period, various forms of governance like the corporate governance and performance-based governance among them were developed to enhance accountability and effectiveness in the running of universities.

From the 1960s onwards, numerous universities worldwide experienced radical changes in their governance systems. For example, in the United States, the corporatisation of the governance of higher education started to emerge, and universities began to borrow management techniques from the corporate world. This corporatisation shifted the focus to external and managerial accountability and financial viability while going against the collegial governance system (Berdahl, 1991). In the same way, in Europe, the New Public Management (NPM) movement influenced universities to adopt entrepreneurial, efficiency and stakeholder accountability approaches, which has also brought changes to governance structures (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

2.8.2 Governance and Globalisation

During the late 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, new transformations in the management of higher education institutions were influenced by the tendencies of globalisation, international competition, and marketisation. Universities are now important actors in the global knowledge economy, which has led to the growth of focus on governance structures that are more internationalised, performative and innovative (De Boer, Enders and Schimank, 2007). Ranking schemes, accreditation frameworks, and transnational linkages are now indispensable features of the globalised university system, which has added another layer of complexity to traditional governance structures.

In addition, the more recent changes in the governance of higher education have been directed towards the contribution of universities to national systems of innovation and economic growth. In many countries, including Saudi Arabia, the state has transitioned from the direct management of universities to a strategic actor that defines performance benchmarks and funding schedules in accordance with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Dobbins et al., 2011). Against this backdrop, the governance of higher education has grown more marketised as universities are prompted to vie for resources, collaborations, and enrolments, thus promoting the idea of a market.

Thus, the evolution of the system of higher education governance reflects historical trends in society, as well as political and economic developments.

2.9 Governance in the Saudi Arabian Context

Saudi Arabia has undergone certain changes in the management of its higher education in line with its economic and social changes. The Kingdom embarked on formal education in 1926 when its King Abdulaziz set up a directorate of education in the western region to oversee government and private schools. At that time, there were only 20 public schools in the country (Rugh, 2002). Since then, the number of educational institutions has grown exponentially, with more than 24,000 public schools today; they are still divided by gender following the Quranic provisions (General Authority for Statistics, 2023).

Understanding the significance of tertiary education for national development, the Saudi government sent students overseas in 1927, when 14 students were sent to Egypt. This was the beginning of Saudi tradition

of international education, which has seen the government fund thousands of students to study abroad. However, the government realised the importance of having higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia soon. In response, the first higher education institution was established in 1950 in Makkah, and the second higher education university was established in 1957 as King Saud University in Riyadh (Rugh, 2002).

Traditionally, Saudi higher education has been highly centralised, and all the institutions were directly administered by the Ministry of Education. The Higher Education and Universities Council Law, which was promulgated by a royal decree in 1993, offered legal structures for the regulation of universities, which allowed the Ministry of Education enormous influence in the internal affairs of institutions such as budget, programs offered, and faculty recruitment (Rugh, 2002). This centralisation was aimed at achieving the process of homogenisation of education in the country and requiring higher education to be following the goals set for the nation.

A major restructuring was done in 1975 when the Ministry of Higher Education was formed out of the ministry of education to oversee the universities. It was also involved in managing the fast growth of the higher education sector. University presidents were appointed by the royal decree and this meant that the government had a direct control over the policy on higher learning. However, in 2015, the Ministry of Higher Education was abolished, and its responsibilities were to be reverted to the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Vision 2030 was launched in 2016 as the new agenda of Saudi Arabia's higher education governance, focusing on the diversification of the revenue sources rather than depending on oil, and the privatisation of the public universities (Vision2030, 2022). This vision brought decentralisation, which was meant to give universities more financial and administrative autonomy. The government planned to spend about 185 Saudi riyal billion (49.3 billion USD) on education in 2022, which was 19.4% of the total budget (Ministry of Finance, 2021). These reforms include the new Universities Law passed in 2019 and was first implemented on an experimental basis in the two largest public universities. These institutions were empowered by the law to innovate on their sources of income and partially operate outside the docket of the Ministry of Education (Vision2030, 2022).

The new Universities Law is a departure from the Higher Education and Universities Council Law because it allows universities to form boards of trustees, which may comprise individuals from the private sector to enhance contact between academe and commerce. The intended rationale behind this action is to improve the capacity of universities to adjust to market needs and national development priorities. The law is part of measures to change public universities from organisations that rely solely on government grants to educational organisations with multiple sources of financing (Vision2030, 2022).

2.10 Previous Studies on Higher Education Governance

Higher education governance research has expanded over the decades, with several key studies defining university management and governance. Early foundational studies, such as Clark's (1983) "The Higher

Education System: In the paper entitled “Academic Organisation in Cross-National Perspective,” the “triangle of coordination” was presented as the state-market-academic communities’ interaction in constructing the patterns of governance. Through his work, Clark provided a starting point for addressing the degree of control that has to be exerted over universities and the degree of academic freedom that has to be allowed; however, this work has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to the phenomenon of globalisation and the increasing role of private actors in the regulation of higher education.

From this, Shattock (1999) highlighted the imperative to professionalise governance structures to increase accountability and institutional independence, particularly within the growing market culture in developed countries. Nevertheless, Shattock’s emphasis on Western settings weakens the understanding of governance processes in culturally and politically different settings. Likewise, Kezar and Eckel (2004) examined the transition to shared and distributed forms of governance and supported the integration of non-academic participants, including students and external partners, into governance structures. Although this approach extends the concept of governance beyond hierarchy, there are disadvantages that weaken responsibility and decision-making processes.

Middlehurst (2013) built on this literature further by looking at the internationalisation of higher education governance and the impacts of global league tables. Her work shows how internationalisation alters governance structures, but this has been criticised for not providing evidence of the actual effects of such changes on the day-to-day management of universities. Like Hénard and Mitterle (2010), who acknowledged governance as a key lever for improving quality across all higher education sectors, their work fails to elaborate on the issues that institutions encounter when trying to implement them.

The diminishing emphasis on fundamental tenets such as openness, integrity, effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability has consistently been a concern in governance research. Pavel and Țicău (2014) highlight the diminishing emphasis on core human values in higher education governance. Pilbeam (2009) raises critical questions about institutional objectives, while Van Vught and Westerheijden (2012) emphasise the importance of openness in governance systems.

Quality-related concerns are explored by Ramirez (2013), whereas Mortimer and Sathre (2007) examine the issue of accountability. Both authors assert that despite efforts to uphold quality and ensure accountability, challenges persist due to the increasing trend toward marketisation.

The neoliberal and managerialist approach to higher education management as highlighted by Austin and Jones (2015) increases the demand for suitable governance mechanisms. They contend that the expansion of higher education and its transformation into a market good brings in market practices, which need proper regulation to maintain institutional and educational standards. Stoker (1998:2018) defines governance as the establishment of structures for coordinated and orderly management of social affairs, which is consistent with how Sultana (2012) defined governance as the management of social affairs in a manner that fosters the achievement of shared visions and visions.

Although there has been significant interest in higher education governance in the academic literature, it is still quite marginal within the overall educational literature. Previous studies have mainly concentrated on engagement, leadership, internationalisation, and marketisation (for instance, Buckley, 2018; Gonaim, 2016; Beine et al., 2014; Budd, 2017). While the scholarly audits, as identified by prior work, have not had governance as a focal point until more recent years, there is an evident lack of intellectual contribution to this domain. McDaniel (1996), Stoker (1998), Shattock (2006; 2010; 2013), Kennedy (2003), and Maton (2005) have played a significant role in calling for enhanced research engagement with higher education governance especially due to structural shifts within the higher education sector.

Table 7 Summary of previous studies on higher education governance

Author(s)	Focus	Key Findings	Criticism
Clark (1983)	Governance frameworks and models	Emphasised balance between state, market, and academia in governance models	Did not account for globalisation and the role of private actors
Shattock (2006)	Professionalisation and Marketisation in Governance	Advocated for enhanced accountability and autonomy in developed economies' HE governance	Focused primarily on Western contexts, ignoring non-Western environments
Stoker (1998:2018)	Governance as Ordered Rule and Collective Action	Conceptualised governance as creating conditions for ordered rules and collective action	Broad conceptualisation without specific application
Kezar & Eckel (2004)	Shared and Distributed Governance	Promoted inclusion of non-academic stakeholders in decision-making processes	Criticised for potentially diluting accountability and slowing decision-making processes
Mortimer & Sathre (2007)	Accountability in HE Governance	Focused on the ongoing challenges to maintain accountability in HE governance	Similar limitations as other studies focusing on Western contexts
Pilbeam (2009)	Institutional Goals in HE Governance	Questioned the nature of institutional goals within governance frameworks	Did not provide concrete solutions
Pavel & Țicău (2014)	Fundamental Human Values in Governance	Highlighted the erosion of fundamental human values within HE governance	Similar to Clark, focused on theoretical aspects
Hénard & Mitterle (2010)	Governance as a Tool for Quality Enhancement	Recognised governance as essential for improving quality across HE	Did not fully address implementation challenges
Van Vught & Westerheijden (2012)	Transparency in Governance Practices	Emphasised the importance of transparency in HE governance practices	Focused on Western models
Ramirez (2013)	Quality Assurance in HE Governance	Highlighted struggles to maintain quality amidst market-driven pressures	Limited empirical data

Austin & Jones (2015)	Marketisation and Commodification in HE Governance	Argued that massification and commodification require robust governance systems to ensure integrity and quality	Did not explore non-market-oriented governance models
Sultana (2012)	Strategic Governance in HE	Defined governance as strategic steering towards shared goals and aspirations	Primarily theoretical without empirical validation
Middlehurst (2013)	Internationalisation and Global Rankings in Governance	Explored how internationalisation reshapes governance structures	Lacked empirical evidence on practical impacts of internationalisation on daily management
Hendrickson et al. (2013)	Complexity of HE Governance	Highlighted the need for robust governance systems to manage fragmented decision-making processes in universities	General analysis; lacks specific context application

In conclusion, the present study aims to fill the gap in the literature and contribute to the understanding of the practical application and context specificity of the chosen governance models in higher education. Most of them focus on Western settings, which makes generalising the results to various cultural and political contexts challenging. Also, the change in governance models to market-oriented governance brings to question the dilution of academic freedom and the true educational experience, as highlighted by Budd (2017). These gaps suggest that there is much more work to progress understanding of the governance of higher education and to identify models that are fit for purposes in a range of contexts.

2.11 Previous Studies on Saudi Higher Education Governance

The political and economic development of Saudi Arabia has been closely linked to governance in higher education, especially with the coming of Vision 2030 and the new Universities Law. Saudi Arabian universities have for many years been operating under traditional models of academic governance that have not encouraged institutional autonomy. Al-Eisa and Smith (2013) note that these traditional models might not be effective in managing the current issues of Saudi universities. They argue that current higher education institution reforms may profoundly alter university governance, but the current governance structures may not address the dynamic requirements of Saudi Arabian higher education institutions sufficiently.

In their article published in 2021, Lebeau and Alruwaili focus on the issue of modernisation agendas in newly developed Saudi universities. The authors provide evidence that the local social and cultural context strongly impacts organisational competence and institutional roles, which precludes adopting a standardised governance model for the heterogeneous Saudi higher education system. They take a micro-level situationist view to determine context factors influencing university performance, thus emphasising the need for context-sensitive governance solutions rather than best practice templates.

Alkhazim (2003) identifies three primary challenges facing higher education in Saudi Arabia: restricted capacity, resource exhaustion, and poor-quality assurance methods. Though steps like the creation of private colleges, development of new post-secondary diploma programs, and higher education funds have been taken to sort out these problems, Alkhazim points out that there is a lack of actual organisational and financial revolution. This shortcoming undermines the efficiency of the reforms and the stability of the improvements in the higher education sector.

In Alsharif (2019), the author evaluates the level of Saudi universities' implementation of the principles of governance according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Analysing the results of the study, the level of compliance with governance practices is rather moderate, and the problems encountered in implementing these principles are highly estimated. While 99% of the education experts consider all the proposed governance principles appropriate, the consensus on the need for change is hindered by various practice challenges.

Al-Khathlan (2020) looks at the financial management of Saudi universities with a focus on the need for Saudi universities to seek other funding sources to attain institutional financial self-sufficiency that is in line with the goals and objectives of Saudi Vision 2030. Based on the survey of 90 administrative officials, academic leaders and financial management employees, the study reveals the dependence on the state budget and outlines the strategies for developing financial independence. However, the study also reveals that the process of transitioning to financial independence is not without obstacles such as bureaucracies and poor financial management systems.

Al-Youbi and Zahed (2021) analyse the financial management strategies of Saudi universities against the backdrop of the new Universities Law and Saudi Vision 2030. They noted that universities have received funding from government budgets; however, they have been able to develop endowments and earn revenue from study programs, diplomas, courses, and services. The study recognises the benefits of these reforms for financial autonomy but also reports on problems like inconsistent implementation and lack of accountability, which may undermine the effectiveness of new governance structures.

Abdelnabi and El-Awady (2020) analyse the impact of the decision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to open branches of foreign universities. They suggest that the changes have yielded positive results, such as changing the qualitative direction of Saudi universities, increasing the efficiency of the education system, and building up financial resources. However, they also found negative consequences, such as students' inclination to attend foreign universities rather than local institutions, which are detrimental to the development of higher education institutions in the country. The study advises the following strategic budgets to address such challenges and enhance Saudi Vision 2030: investing more in innovation and creativity, scientific research, and fostering strategic partnerships between educational and vocational institutions.

Alsayyari et al. (2019) investigate financial management in Saudi universities. According to them, the decreased financial support from the Ministry of Education requires reconsidering current activities and organisational changes in the relevant departments. They found that current financial management practices do not follow better standard practices and proposed that implementing proper financial management rules could improve the accountability and sustainability of educational structures.

Mokhles (2016) examines the steps in cutting down the cost of governmental higher education in Saudi Arabia. The study reveals a lack of efficient measures for cost reduction and insufficient programs that establish connections between scientific research and the demand in the labour market. Mokhles condemns the practices of the traditional strategies of dealing with the problems of financial crisis, such as restricted admissions, hikes in tuition fees, and renting of facilities.

Other Saudi-based research also underlines the necessity of empirical research into the changes in governance reforms. Kentab (2018) studied the governance situation at King Saud University and concluded that despite the adoption of corporate governance systems, the management of governance calls for the use of proper techniques and the involvement of stakeholders to improve job satisfaction and institutional performance. Albeshir (2022) compared the previous Saudi Higher Education Law and the new university law and suggested that more research should be done on the latter to assess its effect on governance efficiency. Asel (2020) emphasised the need for more research published in English, using more than one research instrument, and stated the research should specifically address the practical aspect of governance for achieving Saudi Vision 2030.

Table 8 Summary of previous studies on governance in Saudi higher education

Author(s)	Focus	Key Findings	Criticism
Al-Eisa and Smith (2013)	Traditional vs. Reform Governance Models in Saudi HE	Traditional models may be inadequate; recent reforms have significant potential impacts	Lacked empirical data on reform implementation
Alkhazim (2003)	Challenges in Saudi HE Governance	Identified limited enrollment, resource depletion, and quality measures as main challenges; criticised lack of restructuring	Overemphasis on policy measures without addressing organisational restructuring
Al-Khathlan (2020)	Financial Autonomy and Diversification in Saudi HE	Emphasised the need for financial independence through diverse funding sources	Transition to financial autonomy faces bureaucratic and management challenges
Alsharif (2019)	Governance Practices in Saudi HE Based on OECD Principles	Governance practices are moderately aligned with OECD principles; high challenges in implementation	Limited practical insights on overcoming governance challenges
Al-Youbi and	Financial Strategies under Saudi Universities Law	Universities benefit from government budgets and new revenue streams; challenges in implementation	Uneven implementation and unclear accountability mechanisms

Zahed (2021)			
Abdelnabi and El-Awady (2020)	Impact of Foreign University Branches in Saudi HE	Positive shifts in quality and efficiency; negative student orientation towards local universities	Potential undermining of local HEIs due to preference for foreign institutions
Alsayyari et al. (2019)	Financial Management Practices in Saudi Universities	Identified non-compliance with best practices; recommended restructuring financial management	Lack of adherence to proper financial management practices
Mokhles (2016)	Cost Reduction and Labor Market Alignment in HE	Highlighted ineffective cost-reduction strategies and inadequate linking of research to labour market	Reliance on traditional methods without addressing structural financial and alignment issues
Lebeau & Alruwaili (2021)	Modernisation Challenges in Saudi HE Governance	Highlighted difficulties in applying uniform governance models due to local social and cultural factors	One-size-fits-all governance models are ineffective; there is a need for context-specific approaches
Kentab (2018)	Corporate Governance at King Saud University	Implementation of corporate governance requires strategic approaches and stakeholder participation for effectiveness	Limited to a single institution; lacks broader applicability
Albeshir (2022)	Comparative Study of Saudi Higher Education Laws	Recommended empirical studies on the impact of the new university law on governance effectiveness	Focused on policy comparison without empirical evaluation
Asel (2020)	Governance Studies for Saudi Vision 2030	Emphasised the need for English-language studies using multiple instruments to assess governance's role in achieving Vision 2030	Identified the need for more comprehensive and diverse research approaches

Altogether, these works suggest that while much headway has been made in reforming the governance of higher education in Saudi Arabia, there are still significant theoretical and empirical research deficiencies in realising these reforms and their contextual circumstances. The lack of empirical studies outweighs the fact that most of the papers are policy analyses, which hinders the determination of the actual effects of governance changes on Saudi higher education institutions autonomy, quality of education and overall efficiency.

2.12 Research Gaps

The following major gaps can be identified in the analysis of the previous studies on higher education governance in both the global and Saudi contexts. First, as global literature focuses on the shift towards the autonomous governance model, local studies are scarce concerning the application and modification of the model in non-Western societies, including Saudi Arabia. The use of governance models in the Saudi context where centralisation has been the dominant feature, needs further research to explain how universities manage their newfound autonomy.

Second, applying agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories in higher education governance is still limited, especially in Saudi Arabia. Applying these theories by analysing the roles and interactions of various actors in governance activities provides direction for future research. In particular, agency theory can contribute to analysing conflicts of interest between the principals of the government or the university board and the agent's university management. Stewardship theory can be considered in direct opposition to agency theory, as it posits that university leaders are stewards of the institution. Last, stakeholder theory provides a more general approach to understanding how internal and external stakeholders, including the faculty, students, and the government, can affect the governance processes.

Moreover, despite the new Universities Law's potential to enhance institutional adaptability and financial independence, there is little evidence of the effects of the change on governance and learning processes. Many of the identified contributions employ policy analysis and do not include extensive assessments of how these reforms influence universities' practical functioning, relationships with stakeholders, and accountability systems.

Also, the previous research is primarily concerned with dimensions of governance, mainly the financial, the stakeholders, and the effects of the external environment, including globalisation and marketisation. However, there is a need to have studies combining these elements to gain a proper understanding of governance in Saudi higher learning institutions. The difficulties in advancing modernisation agendas, as seen by Lebeau and Alruwaili (2021), and the attempts to achieve financial autonomy, as seen by Al-Khathlan (2020), and Al-Youbi and Zahed (2021) show that there are more fragmented strategies in the current governance reforms which need a more harmonised and place-based approach.

Furthermore, no sufficient comparative studies compare the governance models within Saudi universities. Such comparative analyses could reveal the best practices and contribute to creating governance structures that would fit the cultural, economic, and political context of Saudi Arabia. To this end, the study by Albeshir (2022) indicates this need by calling for more empirical research on the effects of the new Universities Law.

Last, the changes contained in Vision 2030 and the new Universities Law have brought important governance reforms in Saudi Arabia, yet it is unclear what the impact of such changes will be in the long run. Subsequent research should explore the effects of these reforms on major areas of concern, including financial viability, autonomy, and involvement. In this way, scholars can help fill the gaps as mentioned earlier, in knowledge about the governance of higher education in Saudi Arabia and offer recommendations that may prove useful in the future.

2.12.1 Research Questions

Based on the identified gaps, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the new Universities Law differ from the previous Saudi Higher Education Law, and what are the implications of these differences for governance?

RQ2: What are the procedures and processes involved in implementing governance under the Universities Law?

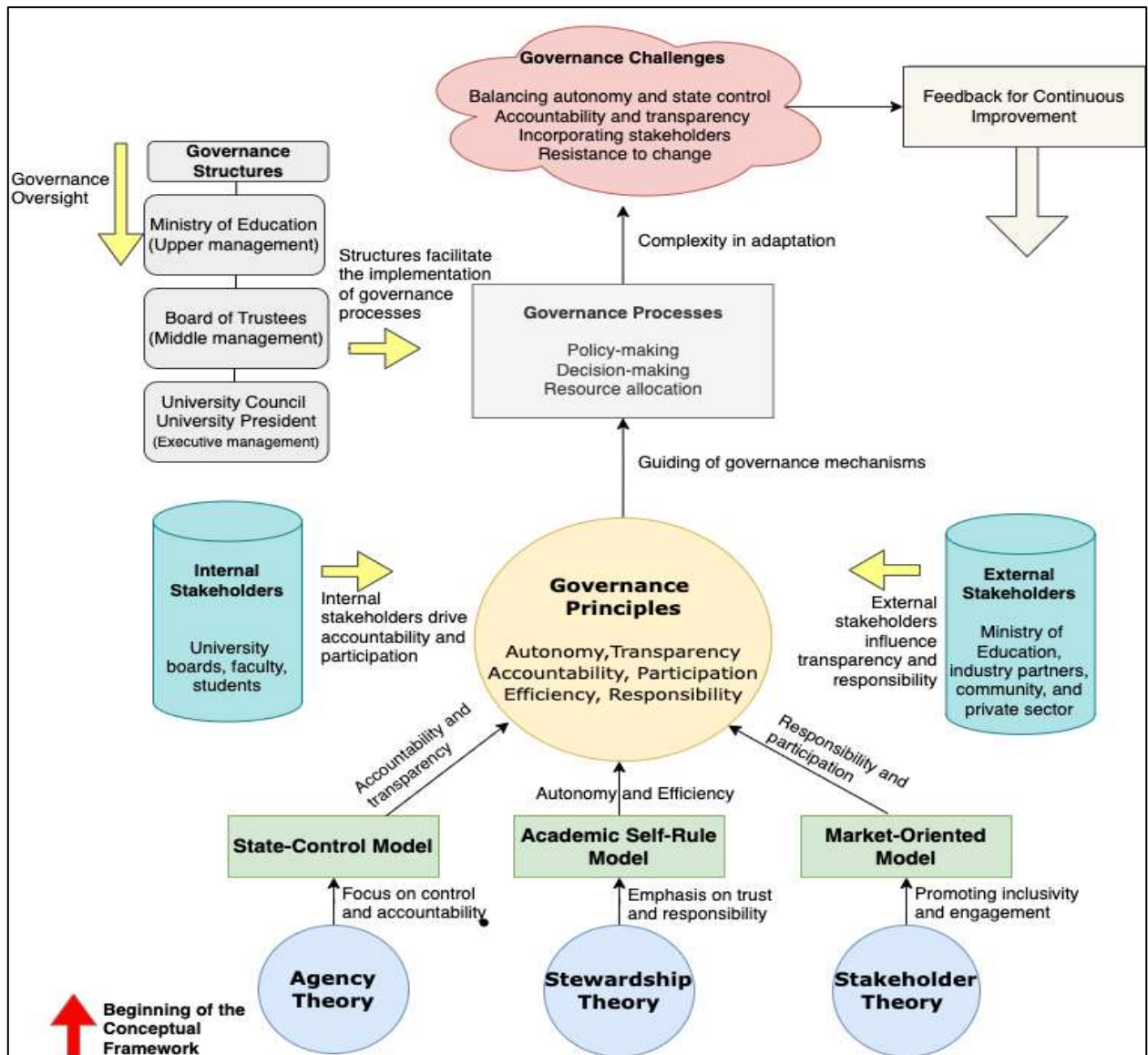
RQ3: What are the difficulties and challenges that Saudi higher education faces during the implementation of governance?

RQ4: How can the implementation of governance in Saudi higher education be improved?

2.13 Conceptual Framework

In this section, the conceptual basis of the governance of Saudi higher education is outlined in terms of the theoretical framework, governance theories, models, principles, processes and challenges. Agency Theory, Stewardship Theory, and Stakeholder Theory serve as the theoretical framework for the analysis of governance models (See Figure 2).

Figure 2 Conceptual framework



These theories, represented in distinct circles at the base of the framework, highlight different aspects of governance: agency theory is about control and accountability between the principal and the agent; stewardship theory is about trust, commitment and leadership roles; and stakeholder theory is about the involvement of many players in decision making. Arrows emerge from each theory to the three governance models: state-control, academic self-rule, and market-oriented, to show their theoretical orientation. The relationship between these theories highlights their similarities and differences, including analysis of leadership and accountability, as well as similarities and differences in their application to governance models.

The governance models contribute to the six pillars of higher education governance: autonomy, transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency, and responsibility. These six principles are in a large circle and receive arrows from the models pointing out the specificity of each model. Faculty and staff are

located on the left side of the framework, while government agencies and industry partners are on the right side. Two arrows depart from both stakeholder groups to the governance principles, implying their involvement in determining these principles.

On the left side of the framework, governance structures are depicted vertically at three levels: executive level (Ministry of Education), administrative level (Board of Trustees) and operational level (University Council/President). An arrow descending through the structure indicates the flow of command and decision-making from top to bottom of the governance system.

Besides the governance structures, the governance processes are illustrated in one rectangle to show how principles are operationalised, including decision-making processes, resources management and stakeholders' management. The arrows directed from the governance structures towards the processes indicate the relationship between organisational structures and the operation of governance.

The framework proceeds to the next layer, the challenges cloud, which features issues affecting Saudi higher education governance, including resistance to change and the tension between institutional autonomy and state authority. The challenges in implementing the governance processes are shown by arrows linking the process to the challenges. Feedback loops from the challenges are created and indicated with arrows to show that governance reforms and adjustments are cyclical and based on the practical challenges that are met during the implementation phase.

Therefore, this conceptual framework captures the nature of theories, models, principles, processes, and challenges of governance in Saudi higher education and provides a coherent structure that can be further developed to respond to the dynamic context of Saudi higher education governance.

2.14 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter provides a theoretical framework for corporate governance in Saudi Arabia's Higher learning institutes. It introduces the concept of governance and the relationship between corporate governance and the higher education institutions of Saudi Arabia. The research goes further to underline principles and indicators of governance. The research then proceeds to provide the theoretical approach to corporate governance, identifying how the theories could be used to build a perception of governance in Saudi higher education. The research then related governance to the Saudi Arabian Institutional organisational structure. It describes the role of culture and religion, which are crucial to Saudi Arabia's governance structure. Overall, the theoretical framework provided crucial insights into Saudi higher learning institutions' governance nature, the expected changes, and the best approach to ensure the institutions are world-class.

Chapter 3: Context of the Study

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the theoretical framework, laying the foundation for understanding the governance of Saudi higher education through various theories, models, and principles. Building upon this foundation, the current chapter delves into the contextual framework of the study, focusing on Saudi Arabia. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which the research is situated, which is crucial for analysing governance in Saudi higher education.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section offers a background of Saudi Arabia, providing essential insights into the country's socio-economic and cultural context. The second section presents an overview of higher education in Saudi Arabia, tracing its historical development and current state. The third section categorises the country's different types of higher education institutions, highlighting their unique characteristics and roles. The fourth section identifies the strengths of Saudi higher education, showcasing the achievements and advancements made over the years. The fifth section addresses the shortcomings of Saudi higher education, discussing the challenges and areas that require improvement. Finally, the chapter summary encapsulates the key points discussed, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters.

3.2 Background of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is in the southwestern part of Asia and occupies approximately 2,15 million km². It is the fifth-largest country in Asia and the second largest in the Arab world (Vassiliev, 2013). Riyadh is the capital city of the Kingdom and is the country with an estimated population of 7.7 million in 2023 (General Authority for Statistics, 2023). The geographical position of Riyadh at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa adds to the city's importance in relation to the region and the world.

Saudi Arabia shares borders with several countries: On its western side, it is surrounded by the Red Sea; in the east by the United Arab Emirates and Qatar; in the north by Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait; and the south by Yemen and Oman (General Authority for Statistics, 2023). The coastlines are about 1,760 kilometers along the Red Sea and about 560 along the Arabian Gulf, which provide important links to global sea lanes (Saudi Geological Survey, 2023).

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country within the Arabian Gulf. Several universities in the kingdom rely on its natural resources like oil. The country's economic development directly affects its education sector (Hilal, 2013). Though the country relies heavily on revenue from its oil reserves, it is similar to China in its economy diversification, which requires a high level of knowledge and skills (Zha, 2011).

Figure 3 Saudi Arabia Map.



Recently, the Kingdom's economy has drastically changed, and the government has resorted to establishing a new strategy to enhance the economy's productivity (Hamdan, 2013; Hilal, 2013). Therefore, the new vision has posed challenges to the country's higher education expectations. Since 2016, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, has adopted new strategies and vision for the country's development to transform it into one of the world's most advanced nations in terms of education and economy by 2030.

3.2.1 Demographics

According to the General Authority for Statistics, Saudi Arabia's population in 2023 was about 35,840,578, and the non-Saudi population was about 13,401,675. The Kingdom has seen a constant increase in population. However, the growth rate has been slowing down in recent years. The total population in the year 2019 was 34, 112, 045, an increase of 1.75% from 2018 (General Authority for Statistics, 2023).

The non-Saudi male population, compared to the female population, which is 68.53% and 31.47% respectively. Saudi nationals show a relatively balanced gender distribution, with the male population at approximately 51% and the females at approximately 49%. Foreigners in the Kingdom are offered temporary visas during their stay in the country, and they can renew their visas, but they cannot be granted citizenship (Peck, 2017).

Regarding age structure, there are 30.2% of the population below the age of 15, 66.6% between the ages of 15 and 64, and only 3.2% of the population aged 65 and over (General Authority for Statistics, 2023). The sex ratio is approximately 1.21 males for every female, but this ratio varies by age group. At birth, it is 1.05 male for every female, and for the population aged between 15-64 years, it is 1.03 male for every female.

3.2.2 Overview of Saudi Arabia: Political System and Governance

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state that follows the provisions of the Islamic Shari'ah outlined in the General Principles. The Kingdom has only one legal religion: Islam; its constitution is based on the Quran. The Basic Law of Governance states that the system of governance is monarchical, and the King holds supreme power (Art 5 of the Royal Order A/91). Power is hereditary and is vested in the successors of the Founder, King Abdulaziz Al Saud, to maintain family succession. This is outlined in articles 56, 58, and 60 of the Royal Order A/91: The Kingdom is always led by a King.

The Saudi Arabian Basic Law in Article 38 thus provides that punishments and penalties in Saudi Arabia are according to Islamic Shariah law.

The structure of the Saudi state is based on three primary authorities, as defined in Article 44: The three arms of government that have been affected are the judiciary, the executive, and the regulatory. The judiciary is separate and autonomous; there is no one over the head of the judge in the discharge of his/her judicial functions (Aba-Namay, 1993). However, every legal decision is subordinate to the general guidelines of Islamic Shariah, which is a system of legal norms and interpretations. The King is vested with the highest authority in administering justice, either personally or by representatives.

The King is also the head of government responsible for implementing Islam Shariah in administering the nation's affairs (Aba-Namay, 1993). He is accompanied by the Council of Ministers, which helps implement the policies and administration of the Kingdom. The King selects the Vice Presidents of the Council of Ministers (Aba-Namay, 1993), and the Council can be dissolved and reconstituted by the King whenever he wishes. If the King is not physically available, there will be an announcement of a Royal Order to continue with the operation of the government.

3.2.3 Economic Context

Currently, the economy of Saudi Arabia is highly dependent on crude oil, and it has a very important position within The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The Kingdom is among the largest exporters of oil and bears the largest proven oil reserves in the world (Cole, 2015). Besides, Saudi Arabia is among the top five countries with the largest proven natural gas reserves and the ninth-largest producer of natural gas (Salam and Khan, 2018).

As a way of diversifying the kingdom's economy so that it does not solely rely on oil, the government of Saudi Arabia has put forward Vision 2030 as a long-term development plan. Vision 2030 is built upon three key pillars: A lively community, an innovative economy, and an aspiring country, all of which are aimed

at using the nation's resources and people to realise sustainable development (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The Kingdom is keen on economic diversification, which is in line with Vision 2030's strategy (Jouini, 2018). This diversification effort focuses on four main areas: building a stimulating environment for generating value-added job opportunities, developing a favourable climate for business, saving for future development, and utilising its strategic location (Vision 2030, 2022).

- ***Rewarding Opportunities:*** Saudi Arabia aims to leverage its youthful demographic, recognising its youth as a key national asset. By fostering a culture of ambition and personal development, the Kingdom seeks to create meaningful employment opportunities for its citizens while also attracting talented individuals from around the world. It is among the strategies towards building an effective economy that fosters individual and national dreams (Vision 2030, 2022).
- ***Open for Business:*** Saudi Arabia is committed to improving its business climate through liberalising markets, improving economic cities and promoting competitiveness in energy markets. These efforts aim to raise efficiency and place Saudi amongst the leading economies globally, as espoused by Vision 2030.
- ***Investing for the Future:*** Saudi Arabia is now aiming to develop a long-term sustainable economy and has started privatising many government services. This change is expected to foster innovation, productivity and diversification in sectors outside the oil industry to help achieve the Kingdom's Vision 2030 (Vision 2030, 2022).
- ***Leveraging its Unique Position:*** standing at the centre of Asia, Europe, and Africa, Saudi Arabia seeks to enhance its global power through partnerships. The export of Saudi products and services would increase the Kingdom's presence in the global market and reduce its overreliance on oil (Vision 2030, 2022).

Through these efforts, Saudi Arabia is preparing to be among the most competitive economies in the global economy and to attain sustainable growth in line with the vision of Vision 2030.

3.2.4 Cultural and Religious Context

Saudi Arabia's culture is Bedouin-derived, it is an ancient trading centre and it is an Islamic state (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). The country has a strong Islamic influence, and many of the customs in the country are Arab influenced. Saudi Arabian culture has changed with time while embracing modernity and keeping cultural norms, welcoming nature, and dressing codes intact (Aldossary et al., 2008).

Saudi Arabia has its official language as Arabic, but English is becoming common, especially among the formally educated Saudi citizen. The socio-economic development in Saudi Arabia is following Islamic values and principles, which are inculcated in the Saudi Arabian culture due to the strong religious affiliation (Helms, 2020). Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, and all Saudi nationals are Muslims;

therefore, the Quran and Hadith are the two dominant religious texts that regulate Saudi's social fabric (Aldossary et al., 2008).

Saudi Arabia occupies a special place in the Muslim world because of the two holy cities of Islam, Makkah and Medina. Makkah, the city of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, is the spiritual nucleus of the Hajj, an annual journey that attracts over three million Muslims from all parts of the globe (Almasri et al., 2019).

Islam is a part of many aspects of life, ranging from social etiquette and manners to diet, mobility, and speech. Health, illness and death are considered as the will of Allah (God) by the Muslims (Akhtar et al., 2017). For instance, as Al-Shahri (2002) has pointed out, Islamic understanding of disease does not regard it as a punitive measure but an occasion for atonement.

Nonetheless, Islam is the foundation of the Saudi Arabian culture. However, other factors, including education, economic status and the environment, also influence the Saudi culture (Al-Shahri, 2002; Harbi et al., 2017).

3.2.5 Transformation Plan: Vision 2030

Saudi Vision 2030 reflects the dream of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to make Saudi Arabia a model of excellence globally in every field (Vision 2030, 2022). Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud supports the vision, and it is based on three fundamental pillars.

The first focuses on Saudi Arabia's centrality as the core of the Arab and Islamic region. The Two Holy Mosques, which include the Kaaba in Makkah, play a very important role to over one billion Muslims who bow in the direction of this mosque.

The second one is Saudi Arabia's commitment to become an investment powerhouse of the world. The Kingdom holds massive investment opportunities and is looking to diversify its economy and wean itself off oil for revenue sources; the Kingdom can ensure its sustainable future.

The third pillar builds on the geographical advantage of Saudi Arabia and aims to market the country as a gateway to Asia, Europe, and Africa. The Kingdom is strategically located in the middle of global trading routes, thus enhancing its position as a global trade hub (Vision 2030, 2022). Alongside these pillars, Vision 2030 is driven by three key themes: a lively community, a prosperous economy, and an aspiring.

The first theme, A Vibrant Society, is crucial to creating a thriving economy. It contemplates a safe and productive life for Saudi citizens with sound communities and social and health care systems. This also emphasises national pride, culture and individuality (Vision 2030, 2022).

The second theme is A Thriving Economy, which seeks to create opportunities for people by creating an education system that meets market needs. This theme is about developing more financial outlets for enterprises, especially for the owners and SMEs, as well as the development of the economy. One of the objectives is to bring the output of higher education institutions in line with the demand in the labour market.

The government also aims to put at least five Saudi universities on the list of the top 200 universities in the world by 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The third theme, An Ambitious Nation, aims at accountability, efficiency and transparency within the system of the government. The government aims to foster an environment in which the public sector, private organisations and not-for-profit organisations can address issues and explore opportunities. This theme calls for the responsibility of the individual and the society to steer the Kingdom's development (Vision 2030, 2022).

Therefore, these pillars and themes, therefore, help Vision 2030 to set out goals and responsibilities that capture Saudi Arabia's hunger for progress and power in the world.

3.2.6 The Purpose and Role of Universities

The roles of universities are not only limited to economic and functional; they are also part of the society's cultural and intellectual progress. In the past, previous ideas on what universities are for have been informed by key texts and government documents. The Idea of a University written by John Henry Newman in 1852 focused on the development of reasonableness and knowledge as an end with theology being at the core of the concept of university. This view is relevant to Saudi society's focus on religion and culture to provide a means of linking Saudi culture to the contemporary concepts of modern higher education governance.

Similarly, the Robbins Report (1963) identified four primary purposes of higher education: education in skills, developing the general faculties of human understanding, increasing the sum of knowledge, and disseminating information concerning the duties of man and citizen. These purposes were given further elaboration in the Dearing Report (1997) where attention was again drawn to the need for a university system in the face of globalisation while at the same time acknowledging the need to encourage a policy of equality and opportunity.

The Saudi higher education system under the Universities Law is well poised to adopt these broader purposes. Although Vision 2030 is mainly focused on the sectors of economic diversification and human resource development, it also envisages universities as centers of social and intellectual transformation. Thus, the fact of alignment with the global tendencies indicates that Saudi universities can become key actors in the improvement of the global society by promoting critical thinking, cultural dialogue, and ethical leadership.

As Lee and Markham (2023) rightly pointed out in *The Serendipity of Hope*, the peripheral vision of universities is a measure of generating otherness and additional value to society. This concept is especially important for Saudi universities that, on the one hand, have economic missions, and on the other hand, are to foster free thinking, creativity, and ethical purposes. An understanding of the relationship between these dimensions can assist Saudi universities to become universities that are not only Saudi Arabian in spirit and

character but also Saudi Arabian as part of an international community thus enhancing Saudi Arabia and its contribution to the international community.

3.3 Overview of Saudi Higher Education

In the past, education in Saudi Arabia was given by Kuttabs, small Islamic schools associated with mosques. These schools focused on educating the students on the Quran, religious texts, writing and numeracy (Alghafis, 1992; Alhebsi et al., 2015). Since the formation of the Kingdom in 1932 by King Abdulaziz, the Directorate of Education was formed to supervise all educational affairs, it became the Ministry of Education in 1954 (Rugh, 2002).

Higher education institutions began with the College of Shariah in Makkah in 1949, the second College of Education in 1952, the College of Shariah in Riyadh in 1953 and the College of Arabian Language in Riyadh in 1954. Such institutions were directed towards the production of qualified teachers for general education (Rugh, 2002). As the number of graduates increased, the requirement for a more structured higher education system was realised, and modern universities were created.

King Saud University was established by royal decree in 1957 as the first university in Saudi Arabia, with only nine staff members and 21 students (Saleh, 1986). Moreover, as the number of students grew, there was a need to open more universities to accommodate the growing demand. Some universities established during this period include the Islamic University in 1961, the King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals in 1963, the King Abdulaziz University in 1967, and Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud University in 1974.

The Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1975 due to the increase in the university system. Between 1975 and 1999, three more universities were founded: King Faisal University in 1975, Umm Al-Qura University in 1981, and King Khalid University in 1999. Between 2003 and 2014, 21 more universities were created, and at present, Saudi Arabia has 66 educational institutions, out of which 28 are public universities and 38 private colleges and universities (Ministry of Education, 2022).

3.3.1 Finance and Management of Higher Education Services

In Saudi Arabia, the government is the major source of finance for higher education. However, in the recent past, private funding has risen considerably in offering both financial support and huge endowment initiatives to public universities (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). Some of these contributions are based on religious charity practices that some scholars have posited as a progression given the context of Saudi higher learning (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013).

Saudi Arabian universities are gradually moving away from dependency on government subsidies as they acquire most of their research funds on their own. Therefore, the importance of governance reforms to help universities exercise better control over financial resources has been gaining increasing attention (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013).

However, it is argued that the quality of education delivery in Saudi higher education has not been up to par despite the Saudi government's numerous financial investments (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013). The conventional approach of imparting knowledge, in which teachers or trainers present their lessons to students in a class, continues to be popular (Darandari & Murphy, 2013). Smith and Abouammoh (2013) attributes deficiencies in education delivery to several factors: low training of teachers and academic staff, lack of motivation to improve the educational process, and poor development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Moreover, the assessment techniques used in assessment processes, especially tests and examinations, cannot effectively indicate the quality of education or teaching practices in higher learning institutions.

The government has occasionally focused on adopting Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Saudi higher learning institutions. However, there is a significant disparity between the availability and use of ICT tools and the Internet in the classroom. There is no adequate ICT support for sustainable e-learning models; teachers are not trained enough to incorporate ICT in their higher education institutions (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013).

To these challenges, most Saudi universities have embarked on professional development processes to enhance the quality of education. However, concerns are still felt regarding staff selection, performance assessment, and the management of professional development programmes.

3.3.2 Higher Education and Universities Law

Saudi universities have been regulated and managed under the Higher Education and Universities Law issued in 1993. This law comprises numerous articles and regulations that govern the operations of university councils and committees, covering academic, administrative, and financial aspects. All universities in Saudi Arabia were subject to the same regulations under this law (Albeshir, 2022).

In 2019, a new Universities Law was introduced as part of the broader goals outlined in Saudi Vision 2030. This new law aims to grant universities greater autonomy, allowing them to establish financial, administrative, and academic regulations. Initially, this law was implemented in a pilot phase involving only two universities, which are also the research subjects (Albeshir, 2022). The original 1993 Higher Education and Universities Law remains in effect for the other universities that have not yet transitioned to the new legal framework.

The new Universities Law is designed to support the key pillars of Vision 2030 by promoting independence and flexibility within higher education institutions. It introduces significant changes intended to enhance Saudi universities' operational efficiency and global competitiveness. The specific differences between the 1993 law and the 2019 law, as well as their implications, will be thoroughly examined in Chapter 5.

The British Council (2024) published a report which shows that Saudi authorities view these reforms as crucial developments for Saudi Arabia's higher education sector. According to the British Council's analysis

of the law, it will strengthen institutional autonomy to enhance innovation and educational standards, a view supported by the UK and other countries (British Council, 2024).

The British Council also highlights the critical relationship between autonomy and accountability, emphasising that Saudi universities must ensure that their newly acquired independence does not compromise public accountability. This includes maintaining high standards in education quality and academic management (British Council, 2024). This issue is not unique to Saudi Arabia but is part of a broader, ongoing global discourse on the decentralisation of university governance an enduring debate in higher education policy that has persisted for centuries (Newman, 1852; Robbins, 1963; Dearing, 1997).

3.4 Strengths of Saudi Higher Education

Saudi Arabia has witnessed remarkable progress in the developmental process of higher education systems over the past few decades, which has resulted in the development of certain strengths. The main advantage is the government's support for financing and development. The government of Saudi Arabia has greatly funded higher education with an annual budget of more than \$27 billion, creating many universities and programs (Ministry of Education, 2022). It has also supported the construction of high-quality infrastructure and equipments and increased access to higher education to a wider public (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013).

Secondly, the diversification of academic programs is another strength that needs to be pointed out. Saudi universities today provide many disciplines, including engineering, health sciences, business, and technology, which indicates the country's desire to train a qualified staff per the economic objectives set in Vision 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2019). The emergence of specialised institutions, like the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), reflects the focus on research and innovation, as well as on academic performance and international cooperation (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013).

In addition, Saudi higher education has also improved on the issue of gender parity in education. Women's enrollment in higher education has risen to about 57 % of the total university students (Ministry of Education, 2022). This change also benefits women and improves the quality of higher education in the country as it brings diversity to the educational process (Rugh, 2002).

3.5 Shortcomings of Saudi Higher Education

Despite its strengths, several weaknesses continue to exist in the Saudi higher education system, which affects its efficiency and competitiveness in the global market. The quality of education delivery has been deemed poor due to the continued use of conventional instructional practices. Most universities mainly use lectures, and this hamper thinking, imagination, and student activity (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Scholars have criticized this traditional approach to learning as being irrelevant to the current job market, thus creating a disconnect between education and employment (Darandari & Murphy, 2013).

Moreover, most Saudi universities have limited international visibility and relatively low research productivity. Although some institutions, including King Saud University and King Abdulaziz University

have made it to the list of the world's best universities, most universities fail to make similar achievements due to inadequate research grants and sponsorship (Brankovic et al., 2018).

In addition, the issue of governance and administration presents major hurdles. The absence of decision-making autonomy for universities and bureaucracy could slow down decision-making involving curriculum, faculty hiring, and resource management (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). As the Saudi higher education system develops further, these governance problems will have to be tackled to improve institutional performance and promote a positive climate for learning.

3.6 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the contextual framework of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A brief discussion about the country's history is provided at the beginning of the chapter. Additionally, the nation's demographic composition and economic, cultural, religious, and socio-political activities taking place in the country are fully discussed in the chapter. The research then provides an overview of higher education in Saudi Arabia, discussing various types of higher education institutions in the country. Historically, the Islamic cultural norms and traditions in the country allowed only the male gender to go to schools. However, this has greatly changed over time to find girls enrolling in various universities across the country. Education is seen as a vital tool in propelling the country economically and politically.

Many universities in the country are run and managed by the Ministry of Education. However, several universities in the country are still owned and run by individuals, commonly referred to as private universities. Private colleges, research, educational and applied universities, and vocational colleges are discussed in detail in this chapter. The research finally discusses the strengths and shortcomings of higher education in the country to better understand the education sector.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the contextual framework of the study was presented, and this chapter focuses on the research methodology and philosophy adopted for the study. The methodology chapter is critical as it outlines the systematic approach taken to addressing the research questions and objectives.

This chapter is structured into nine sections. The first section, research philosophy, discusses the underlying philosophical assumptions that guide the research approach. The second section, the adoption of qualitative research methodology, explains the rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology and its suitability for this study. The third section, adopting the research strategy, details the specific strategy employed to conduct the research.

The fourth section, the data collection method, describes the techniques and tools used to gather data from the selected universities. The fifth section, sampling, outlines the sampling techniques and criteria used to select participants and institutions for the study. The sixth section, ethical considerations, addresses the ethical principles and guidelines followed to ensure the integrity and ethical conduct of the research.

The seventh section, data analysis, explains the methods and processes used to analyse the collected data, including comparative and thematic analysis. The eighth section summarises the chapter, encapsulating the key methodological steps and considerations discussed.

4.2 Research Philosophy

This section provides an overview of the relevant research paradigms typically employed in empirical studies, with a comparative review conducted to facilitate the selection of the most suitable paradigm for this study. The interpretive school of thought is chosen as the preferred paradigm for examining the implementation of governance at the two selected universities. This choice is justified by its emphasis on understanding tacit knowledge, which is a key aspect of qualitative research, as highlighted by Denscombe (2017).

Initially, two paradigms were considered due to the subjective nature of the research: the critical and interpretive paradigms (Kohlbacher, 2006; Ryan, 2018). A detailed criterion outlined at the end of this section guided the selection process, favouring the interpretivist paradigm over the critical one. This decision was influenced by the interpretivist paradigm's alignment with the study's aim to delve deeply into individual perceptions and organisational culture within the universities.

- ***Positivist School***

The Positivist paradigm is founded on hypothetical-deductive methods, typically employed in contexts where hypotheses are quantitatively stated in advance. According to Kohlbacher (2006), this paradigm

acknowledges a measurable functional relationship between explanatory and causal factors. In the positivist approach, research must involve a dependent variable that measures the outcomes of a study; these outcomes are observed and measured but not manipulated. As Farghaly (2018) notes, the variables manipulated are the independent variables, such as the implementation of control groups to assess their impact on study outcomes.

Moreover, under the positivist approach, the researcher maintains minimal interaction with research subjects to mitigate the effects of bias on the results, preserving the objectivity of the data collection process (Denscombe, 2017; Kohlbacher, 2006). This paradigm does not engage with participants' perspectives on knowledge discovery or manipulation, thus ensuring a clear separation between the participant and the researcher. The objective stance of the Positivist paradigm protects the data's integrity from any potential biases.

- ***Critical Social School***

The critical social paradigm, also known as the transformative paradigm, is based on relativism and is among the least utilised paradigms in research, often overshadowed by more established paradigms (Denscombe, 2017). This paradigm originates from critical theory, which aims to liberate individuals from dominance and oppression, aspiring towards a societal equilibrium where true democracy can flourish. According to Kohlbacher (2006), critical theory should diagnose societal wrongs, propose solutions, and offer guidelines for critique and transformation.

Although the critical paradigm incorporates elements of both the interpretivist and positivist schools, viewing explanations of societal wrongs as hypotheses akin to the positivist approach and adopting a subjective methodology like the interpretivist approach for normative, critical, and transformative purposes (Dean, 2018), its usefulness varies with the objectives of the study.

This study employs a more specific method suited to the research needs of investigating the adaptation of the Universities Law in the Saudi universities to achieve higher autonomy. The decision not to directly address social critique in this research is a pragmatic decision of this context and the desire to build a foundation for further research.

Therefore, this study is not aimed at denying the role of critical perspectives in Saudi higher education governance but rather is in response to an emergent research question about the new governance frameworks. Further studies could extend this work to examine other more critical aspects of governance, human rights, and academic freedom as Saudi universities and governance systems develop.

- ***Interpretivist School***

Under the interpretivist paradigm, knowledge is viewed as subjective and deeply influenced by cultural and contextual factors. This approach recognises the subjective processes through which knowledge is constructed (Ryan, 2018). At a philosophical level, the interpretivist school is distinguished from positivism

by its belief in the social construction of reality, emphasising that our understanding of the world is shaped through social interactions (Denscombe, 2017).

Interpretivism asserts that data must be closely linked to its context to facilitate knowledge creation, discovery, and construction. This approach employs multiple research tools to thoroughly understand the research subject, which is central to its methodology. It acknowledges the significant role humans play in the social and cultural spheres, aspects that cannot be overlooked in research by merely adhering to naturalistic methodologies.

Therefore, research under the interpretivist paradigm delves into the motives and meanings behind people's behaviours and interactions, viewing culture and society as integrated systems of beliefs, ideas, and symbols. These elements are studied holistically, not in isolation, which justifies the adoption of qualitative methodologies within the interpretivist framework. The interpretivist school was selected as the most appropriate research paradigm for this study.

4.2.1 Chosen Research Philosophy

- ***Interpretivist School***

This research is designed to develop a governance framework suitable for Saudi universities, considering the specific social, cultural, political, and economic contexts of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the study aims to provide an enhanced understanding of governance, exploring various theories related to governance (Althwaini, Darboe, Alshahrani, & Alharbi, 2021). It examines how these theories can be effectively applied to shape a governance framework tailored to Saudi higher education institutions unique needs.

- ***Reasons Behind this Choice***

The case study method has gained widespread popularity across various academic fields, including management, law, and policy, due to its effectiveness in examining complex phenomena in real-life contexts (Crowe et al., 2011; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). Recognising the value of a case study is crucial before its adoption (Denscombe, 2017; Kohlbacher, 2006; Ryan, 2018). In this research, the case study was selected for its ability to facilitate a detailed, in-depth exploration of the complex governance issues within Saudi universities (Crowe et al., 2011).

- Interpretive approach application: the interpretive approach was employed to empirically study the cultural, political, and economic factors influencing governance implementation. This method is sensitive to the complexities introduced by organisational, managerial, technical, social, and environmental issues in a real-life setting.
- Focus on the higher education sector: as the unit of analysis, the higher education sector represents a complex public social system influenced by diverse stakeholders. The interpretive approach is

particularly adept at unravelling the intricacies of the governance system and understanding the implementation processes within this context.

- Understanding governance implementation: the research aims to comprehend the procedures, processes, key issues, and challenges associated with governance adoption at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University and King Abdulaziz University. It seeks to thoroughly understand the implementation practices, the meanings stakeholders attach to them, and the management changes undertaken to adopt specific governance models.
- Rejection of the critical approach: a critical study approach was considered inappropriate as neither the research framework nor the participating universities are positioned to challenge the broader societal context as required by critical theory. Instead, the case study method provides a means to conduct an in-depth exploration within the existing structural constraints and offers a comprehensive view of governance implementation in its actual context.

4.3. Adoption of Qualitative Research Methodology

A qualitative approach has been chosen for this research to explore participants' practices and experiences within the context of Saudi higher education. Given that participants' personal experiences are inherently qualitative, this approach allows for a nuanced exploration of their perspectives (Klenke et al., 2016). Moreover, the study aims to understand the dynamics of the governance implementation process as experienced and perceived by individuals.

Individual perspectives, which significantly shape respondents' experiences and attitudes, are subjective and narrative. This aligns well with qualitative methodologies designed to capture the rich, detailed narratives that quantitative methods may overlook (Mohajan, 2018). The choice of a qualitative approach is further justified by the relative novelty of the research area—governance adaptation and implementation processes in this educational context. Since there is a scarcity of empirical data on this phenomenon, qualitative methods provide the flexibility to explore and generate rich, in-depth insights essential for developing a comprehensive understanding (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

- ***Strengths of Qualitative Research***

Universities are multifaceted institutions with numerous stakeholders, making capturing diverse and heterogeneous opinions critical (Ruslin et al., 2022). One of the primary advantages of qualitative research is its ability to gather these varied perspectives, which can facilitate the creation of common ground among different participant groups (Klenke et al., 2016; Ruslin et al., 2022). Unlike quantitative methods such as surveys, qualitative interviews can yield more nuanced data, which is particularly useful in capturing perceptions, beliefs, and leadership styles that are challenging to quantify (Farghaly, 2018).

Additionally, qualitative research allows participants to articulate causal connections during interviews, an aspect difficult to explore through other methodologies (Althwaini et al., 2021; Fleming & Zegwaard,

2018). For example, if several leaders attribute the adoption of a certain leadership style to specific reasons, these insights can identify causal relationships, influencing the adoption of these styles across the institution or even in other institutions.

Furthermore, qualitative research typically requires fewer resources than quantitative methods, making it more cost-effective (Althwaini et al., 2021; Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). This approach does not depend heavily on the size of the participant pool for validity, which is particularly beneficial in contexts like Saudi Arabia, where there may be a shortage of skilled human resources familiar with local culture and society to conduct extensive quantitative evaluations. By focusing on a carefully selected group of participants, qualitative research ensures high data quality while potentially lowering overall research costs (Mohajan, 2018).

- ***Weaknesses of Qualitative Research***

While gathering direct information from participants using qualitative methods offers depth, managing large volumes of textual data can be cumbersome and less efficient than quantitative methods. The transcription, translation, coding, and interpretation processes required to transform text into analysable forms make qualitative analysis challenging when dealing with extensive text (Althwaini et al., 2021). For example, a qualitative study focusing on specific sections of university laws concerning governance is more manageable than an extensive study encompassing all related laws in Saudi universities (Baskarada, 2014).

Another significant limitation is the difficulty in achieving a population-representative sample. Qualitative studies typically involve a smaller participant pool, making statistical generalisation challenging, especially in cases representing large populations (Farghaly, 2018). For instance, it is impractical to measure how perceptions vary across an entire population using qualitative methods, as these methodologies are not designed to demonstrate variance within large groups (Mohajan, 2018).

Lastly, the potential for researcher bias is a notable concern in qualitative research. The presence of a researcher can influence participant responses, as personal interaction during data collection may affect how participants respond, contrasting with the anonymity typically provided in quantitative studies (Althwaini et al., 2021). This interaction may lead participants to alter their responses due to the researcher's influence, introducing an element of bias less pronounced in quantitative methodologies.

- ***Decision on the Adoption of Qualitative Research Methods***

Qualitative research and quantitative research both involve common steps such as data collection, analysis, and interpretation. However, they differ in their approach to theory. While quantitative research tests predefined hypotheses, qualitative research focuses on building new theories or enriching existing ones throughout the research process (Mohajan, 2018). Particularly during the data interpretation phase, this approach involves generating new concepts and focusing on constructing theoretical interpretations of these concepts, making it highly suitable for this study.

Qualitative research enhances the potential to develop empirically supported concepts that provide a deep exploration of leadership phenomena within university governance (Choy, 2014). This in-depth exploration can increase the governance structures' relevance and bolster institutional staff's interest (Ruslin et al., 2022). By facilitating a comprehensive examination of how universities function as social systems and how various processes interact within them, qualitative research is uniquely positioned to capture essential data that might be elusive with other methodologies.

Given the complex dynamics between university leadership and staff, qualitative methods can uncover critical insights into governance operations in Saudi universities, which have undergone significant changes, such as increased autonomy. Despite these changes, traditional governance models often persist (Alqahtani & Ayentimi, 2021). A qualitative approach can reveal resistance to change and challenge prevailing assumptions about governance practices.

Moreover, this approach allows for examining internal psychological processes among leaders and stakeholders, uncovering motives, values, and reasons for behavioural adaptation (Mohajan, 2018). By deconstructing these internal processes, qualitative research can identify commonalities in motives and expose the factors influencing governance in Saudi higher education.

Finally, while a mixed-methods approach was considered during the planning phase, the study ultimately adopted a qualitative methodology to achieve its objectives. This decision was informed by the necessity to obtain specific information from a purposive sample of stakeholders who are closely involved in the implementation of the new Universities Law. The use of qualitative research helped capture details of experiences and difficulties which could not have been achieved using quantitative procedures.

4.4. Adoption of the Research Strategy

4.4.1 An Interpretive Case Study

Case study research is a widely utilised approach for exploratory studies across various social science disciplines such as organisational studies, sociology, anthropology, organisational psychology, political science, and public administration (Pearson, Albon, & Hubball, 2015). This research method is particularly adept at investigating complex phenomena within specific real-world contexts, which is why it has been selected for this study, which focuses on governance adaptation and implementation processes within two public universities in Saudi Arabia.

The adaptability and implementation of governance are influenced not only by university-specific factors but also by national infrastructure levels, policies and the new Saudi Universities Law. To effectively explore these influences, various research methods, including interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observation, will be utilised (Rowley, 2002). An interpretive case study approach, falling under the qualitative research category, is thus chosen due to its capacity to deeply understand these specific dynamics.

Case studies uniquely combine narrative and phenomenological research elements, focusing on how specific individuals or groups perceive occurrences rather than on generalised research (Robert K. Yin, 2014). This approach enables the nuanced gathering of knowledge, which can be applied to other contexts and cases. Case studies also allow for more in-depth interviews and richer data collection than other qualitative methods (Atkinson, 2002; Choy, 2014; Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

For a case study to be effective, three major conditions must be met: the research should focus on processes rather than outcomes; the participants, context, and environment should remain unmanipulated; and the study should concentrate on current events (Choy, 2014). The examination of the two selected universities, both of which are implementing new Saudi policies, fully meets these criteria, making the case study approach particularly suitable.

In addition, while case studies can involve single or multiple cases with multiple levels of analysis, this study employs a single case study design, given that the contexts of the two universities are similar (Baskarada, 2014; Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Although primarily exploration, the research could also facilitate hypothesis generation, aligning well with the nature of case studies that focus on hypothesis generation rather than hypothesis testing (Potter, von Hellens, & Nielsen, 2010).

4.4.2 Justifying the Use of Case Study

- ***Single vs Multiple Case Studies***

Case studies can be differentiated by their design as single or multiple case studies, with the definition of a 'case' being pivotal. Contrary to common understanding, the subjects of a study do not define a case; instead, it is the context of the study that does so (Kohlbacher, 2006). A single case study can encompass multiple subjects, whereas multiple case studies may focus on different aspects of a single subject.

Multiple case studies are designed to identify similarities and differences across cases, each requiring its own detailed analysis. This approach allows for cross-case comparisons, providing robust and reliable insights (Choy, 2014). Researchers often favour multiple case studies for their rigour and the comparative depth they offer, as the replication of findings across multiple cases tends to enhance the reliability of the evidence.

In contrast, single case studies can incorporate multiple subunits of analysis within a single framework, referred to as embedded case studies. According to Yin (2009), an embedded case study includes several distinct data analyses within the same overall case framework, allowing for detailed analysis within each subunit while maintaining the overall study's strength and reliability (Frechtling & Sharp, 1997). For example, separate analyses could be conducted for each of the two universities involved in this study, treating them as embedded units within a single case study framework.

While multiple case studies spread research resources across cases, potentially diluting the depth of exploration in each case (Glette & Wiig, 2022), the embedded single case study approach chosen for this

research takes advantage of the strengths of both approaches. It allows for in-depth analysis within a single contextual framework, reducing the need for multiple distinct cases and focusing instead on deriving profound insights from embedded units.

This approach efficiently balances the depth of single-case analysis with the comparative benefits of a multiple-case setup, providing a comprehensive understanding of the governance themes in Saudi higher education.

- ***Challenges in Conducting a Case Study***

The major challenge in case study research is the lack of control over the cases due to developments, themes, and concepts arising as the study is conducted (Yin, 2014). While case studies are advantageous since they reveal information that would not be discovered through other means, they also pose a challenge where conducting interviews and the research could change during the study. Changes to the interviews and the research process could also arise due to the dynamic nature of the research site and its autonomy from the researcher (Marrelli, 2007).

Another challenge affecting case studies is the participants' motivations, personalities, opinions, and perceptions. Participants' personalities during interviews might affect the quality of information gathered (Yin, 2014). As it might be difficult for introverts to volunteer information, they may keep information to themselves, and on the other hand, extroverts might present information that is not needed. Furthermore, participants' motivation may influence the study in a way, for instance, a fear of negative portrayal. For example, negative reports on Saudi university governance may be attributed to administrators in Saudi universities and they may post over-optimistic images of their universities to defend their reputation. This concern was expected and there were several measures employed to counter it.

First, participants were given the assurance that their response will remain anonymous, thus no strong reservations were made about providing their true opinion. Second, interviews involved the use of follow-up questions to gain further details about the views being expressed. Third, the comparison of interview data with the policy documents and reports which were reviewed and analysed assisted in confirmation of the validity of the obtained responses. Last, during the analysis stage, the responses were reviewed for bias or inconsistencies in the responses. As with most qualitative research, there is always the potential to receive skewed results by receiving only positive responses; however, these strategies improved the dependability and richness of the findings (Choy, 2014). Analysis in case study research is often undeveloped, with a lack of guidelines and abundant information on how to carry it out. Any form of analysis that follows case study research needs to be well documented and described with an acknowledgement of the limitations and assumptions (Choy, 2014). The two approaches adopted are categorised as within-case and across-case analysis, regardless of the method implemented. The within-case analysis investigates the case's details and themes, suitable for single-case approaches. The across-case analysis compares the differences and similarities between the cases, making it suitable for multiple-case approaches (Pearson et al., 2015).

Additionally, case study research includes large volumes of data from multiple sources, which can be challenging to analyse.

In this study, an embedded single-case approach was utilised. This means that while there was a focus on a single overarching case (the governance of higher education in Saudi Arabia), there were multiple sub-units of analysis within this case (the two selected universities: Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University and King Abdulaziz University). Therefore, the analysis involved both within-case and across-case elements.

The within-case analysis allowed for an in-depth examination of each university's governance practices and challenges, uncovering detailed insights specific to each institution, while the across-case analysis compared these insights to identify common themes, differences, and patterns between the two universities. This dual approach was essential to comprehensively understand the governance implementation process in the Saudi higher education context. Additionally, case study research includes large volumes of data from multiple sources, which can be challenging to analyse. Given the nature of the collected data in this embedded single case study, the adopted analysis method involved a systematic approach to organising, coding, and thematically analysing the data. This ensured that the unique aspects of each sub-unit and the overarching themes across the case were thoroughly examined and integrated into the findings.

The final challenge in case study research is the susceptibility to bias. The in-depth nature of case studies puts researchers at the core of their study subjects. Researchers might form predetermined perceptions, leading to bias while gathering data (Yin, 2014). The methods adopted in other studies to prevent bias are also efficient in case study research. To avoid bias, the researcher utilised their preliminary findings to gather feedback from professionals and colleagues for alternative perceptions on the conduct of the research.

- ***Strengths and Weaknesses of Using a Case Study***

The case study approach gets most of its strength from the micro level at which it studies data. However, such an in-depth study also has some weaknesses, as stipulated in Table 9 below (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018; Pearson et al., 2015; Yin, 2014).

Table 9 Advantages and disadvantages of case studies

Strengths	Weaknesses
Data examination allows for the deduction of the relationship between context and phenomena.	Case studies might lack rigour.
Case studies can be conducted using both qualitative and quantitative data	Case studies use a relatively smaller number of participants or cases, reducing the ability to generalise information gathered
Case studies capture complexities that cannot be captured using other research approaches	Case studies require a lot of effort and expertise to conduct due to their in-depth nature

Case studies are relatively less costly to conduct	Case studies result in large volumes of data that lead to a complex analysis that takes relatively longer to conduct
Data can be collected through various means	There is a high risk of bias from a researcher
The results from a case study are easy to understand for a non-technical audience.	Participants might respond based on personal motivations and opinions, hence affecting the study's results
There is the freedom to collect multiple forms of information.	Some participants might be used to brief statistical answers, hence the difficulty in collecting accurate data on phenomena
Case studies can also be used to formulate hypotheses and formulation areas for further research	Some audiences might shy away from in-depth analysis

4.5 Data Collection Method

As mentioned earlier, two universities were selected as case studies: Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University and King Abdulaziz University. These universities were chosen because they are the only ones that have adopted the new Universities Law. They are considered among the largest universities in Saudi Arabia and were selected by the UAC to implement the new law (Althwaini et al., 2021). Another reason for their selection by the Saudi government is their infrastructure, facilities, research centres, university hospitals, and other capabilities, which made them ready to implement governance.

Various data collection methods were implemented in these two universities and at the UAC, including interviews, direct observations, and document analysis (Denscombe, 2017). The data collected from the institutions constituted direct evidence of how governance was carried out within the universities. This section, therefore, provides a detailed analysis of the methods used.

4.5.1 Documentation

Documentation was one of the crucial data collection methods for this case study review. The major reasons for collecting documentation were to gather background information on a subject, determine if the selected case aligned with the study, identify the required data collection tools, and guide participant selection (Kohlbacher, 2006). The research was documented by assessing available documents on the institutions, such as brochures, regulations, strategies, plans, newspaper clippings, schedules, presentations, and reports (Kohlbacher, 2006). It was crucial to ensure that the information used in the study was obtained with informed consent. Additionally, the researcher ensured the confidentiality of the sensitive documentation collected.

Documentation involved four crucial steps (Kohlbacher, 2006). The first step involved compiling a list of all relevant documentation for the study. This list was based on evaluation questions compiled before gathering documentation to maintain a strict scope of data collection (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020). The second step involved evaluating the documents and understanding their context. The evaluation process

included interviews with the authors of the documents. These brief interviews provided usable information for document analysis and the formulation of relevant insights (Busetto et al., 2020).

The third step involved the authentication of the documents gathered. Comparing documents was one form of authentication, ensuring each document was consistent. Other forms of authentication involved clarification with the document authors and assessing the documents against other data sources. The final step was the documentation summary. This summarisation step ensured that all the questions guiding the evaluation were answered.

In addition, two main documents were collected for this research: the previous Higher Education and Universities Law, which was implemented in all Saudi universities, and the new Universities Law, which was applied to the two universities under study. These two documents formed the bulk of the document collection process and helped generate some guiding questions for the interviews.

Despite being a credible source of information, documentation also had some shortcomings, as stipulated in Table 10 below (Kohlbacher, 2006).

Table 10 Advantages and disadvantages of documentation as a form of data collection

Advantages	Disadvantages
A cheaper source of information	It might contain out-of-date or inapplicable information
Provides background information for other data collection strategies	Information might be inaccurate or incomplete
Unobtrusive in nature	The collection process might be time consuming
It might bring unidentified themes and issues to light	The information might be biased

4.5.2 Interviews

Interviews incorporated directed conversations and constituted the most crucial part of the data collection step. One of the major challenges of case studies was the effective conduct of an interview (Yin, 2014). An interview required the interviewer to focus fully on interviewing while utilising a different means of recording rather than recording and interviewing simultaneously. To avoid effects such as bias, misunderstood or misrepresented issues, they need to be clarified immediately (Atkinson, 2002). Additionally, the interview avoided interjections and leading questions to prevent bias that could steer responses in a certain direction.

The semi-structured interviews were adopted in this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a guide that directed the interviewer through the interview. The guide comprised open-ended questions whose main purpose was to ensure the interview remained within the desired context. A semi-structured interview allowed the interviewer to add questions as they proceeded.

- ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

Most qualitative research adopts interview approaches with some form of structure, such as semi-structured, in-depth, and lightly structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, also known as focused interviews, assist researchers in better comprehension of respondent perspectives. The researcher inquired further through semi-structured interviews to understand the responses (Ruslin et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews also allowed researchers to inquire about emerging issues, refocusing on the interview's direction. Semi-structured interviews were adopted in this research because they could hold their direction while being conducted and not lose their flexibility and adaptability (Denscombe, 2017; Ruslin et al., 2022).

- ***Interview Procedures***

The first step in the interview process was planning, which required several research skills. Determining the right questions to ask, how to ask them, and how to handle the responses from interviewees was crucial (Kohlbacher, 2006). Formulating an interview schedule was essential to ensure proper preparation. Schedules served as naturally worded guides for the interviews. Sticking to an interview schedule ensured the interviewer did not lead the respondent.

Initially, the interview questions were written in English and reviewed by the supervision team, who provided feedback. The final interview transcript was then drafted (see Appendix B). The researcher translated the interview questions into Arabic. To ensure accuracy, two native speakers of both English and Arabic evaluated the translation to confirm that both texts conveyed the same meaning. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, the interviewees' native language.

The interview process was as follows: The researcher contacted the UAC and the two participating universities to arrange interviews with key individuals, including those responsible for implementing the university law, leaders, academics, trustees, and senior administrators. This coordination was facilitated through email correspondence, telephone calls, and field visits. The researcher subsequently informed the interviewees of the scheduled interview time and date.

The interview process began with orientation, which incorporated the exchange of contact information, an introduction to the topic of study and the entire interview process, guidelines on non-attribution, and the protection of personal data (Potter et al., 2010). Due to some respondents being tense, it was necessary to encourage them by using positive words, emphasising the implications of their participation in the development of higher education and ensuring that their identities would be hidden. This approach made the participants less tense and increased their ability to actively participate in the interview (Klenke et al., 2016).

The next step after orientation was information gathering, where the interviewer utilised a questionnaire to guide them through the interview while recording the responses (Klenke et al., 2016). During the information gathering, the interviewer needed to focus on the objectives of the interview. The interview did

not stray far from the topic to ensure that all the issues raised were addressed. An audio recording of the interview was taken after obtaining the consent of the participants to allow the researcher to focus on the interview and ask questions.

The final step in an interview was closure, where the interviewer summarised the issues and themes that arose during the interview and clarified the accuracy of the information gathered (Klenke et al., 2016). During the closure, the interviewer offered the way forward, which might entail possible future contact or access to the study results.

- ***Interview Protocol***

The interview protocol guided how to conduct an interview. The protocol dictated how the interview should begin, how to orient the interviewees and introduce the interviewer, how to introduce the interview topic, how to collect consent, the interview questions, and how to conclude the interview (Frechtling & Sharp, 1997). Two approaches were implemented to refine the interview protocols based on recommendations from scholars. The first approach included four phases (Castillo-Montoya, 2016):

- Aligning the interview questions with the research questions
- Constructing inquiry-based conversation
- Collecting feedback on the protocol
- Piloting the protocol

Through this four-phase approach, the protocol was fine-tuned to ensure it acknowledged both the research questions and the participants' sensitivity. The first phase ensured that the interview aligned with the purpose of the study. In the second phase, the questions asked in the interview sought specific information related to the study's major aim. The third phase ensured that participants could understand the questions within the interview, thus enhancing reliability. In the final phase, piloting the protocol allowed for a test run of the interview, enabling the researcher to ensure the interview's efficiency by testing aspects such as time, consent, and recording (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

The second approach focused on developing the questions (Bearman, 2019). The first step involved identifying the broad questions that guided the study and starting the interview with them. These broader questions were easier to answer and acted as warm-up questions before progressing to more complex and specific questions. The second step involved developing descriptions for the broader questions, which was crucial for ensuring respondents understood the study context. The final step ensured that the questions could be modified to relate to the respondents' experiences (Bearman, 2019). The questions directly related to the respondents were asked in the middle of the interview once the respondents were comfortable and could answer personal questions. The final questions were broad but acted as confirmation of the initial responses. These final questions were also easier to answer as the interview concluded.

- ***Interview Transcription***

Transcription involves transforming video or audio recordings into text. In interviews, transcription can also be conducted live by two researchers: one interviews while the other records it (Rowley, 2002). In this study, the researcher personally converted the audio interviews into text. Manual transcription is a time-consuming and labour-intensive process. However, technological advancements have led to the development of various transcription programmes that process audio or video input to produce text (Kohlbacher, 2006). Consequently, the researcher utilised these technological tools to convert audio recordings into text.

All interviews were transcribed in Arabic, the language in which the interviews were conducted. Transcribing directly into Arabic was essential to preserve the important meanings and local cultural context, thereby ensuring the reliability of the analytical process. Adherence to formatting guidelines is also crucial for transcribed texts (Kohlbacher, 2006). For instance, initials or pseudonyms are used to denote the speech of the respondent and the interviewer. The transcription must also capture non-verbal communication elements, such as laughter and yawning, as omitting these can reduce the quality of the information collected. Additionally, user privacy must be maintained, and all identifying information about respondents must be deleted during transcription (Rowley, 2002).

4.6 Sampling

Accurate data collection is crucial in any research, as inaccuracies can compromise the study's results, leading to incorrect conclusions and wasted time (Best and Khan, 2009). Purposive sampling is a technique used to select participants who meet predetermined criteria, thus differing from random selection, which aims to ensure a diverse and unbiased participant group (Oates, 2006).

To achieve the objectives of the current study, it was essential to understand the transformation processes universities underwent to adopt the new university law and implement governance. The study investigated the criteria adopted by decision-makers in choosing a governance model and the factors influencing their implementation decisions. It was also important to examine the procedures followed within the universities to implement governance and how it was enacted using the new Universities Law. This perspective was gathered from both the Ministry of Education, through the UAC, which legislates the new Universities Law, and the two universities under study, including their leaders, academics, trustees, and senior administrators. In Chapter 6, the results of the thematic analysis are presented in a table detailing the sample of participants.

This study comprised 15 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders who are directly involved in the implementation of the new Universities Law. This purposive sampling technique was adopted to capture people who have special and practical experience in the governance structures. It is understood that the number of participants may be considered rather small compared to the surveys of quantitative nature like

Kentab (2018) with 200 participants. However, the qualitative approach prioritised the depth of the information and produced rather rich and detailed description of the actual implementation of the governance processes.

4.6.1 Data Referencing

The identities of participants, locations, and other mentioned individuals and departments in institutions were replaced by coded identities that adhered to a specified coding system (Heaton, 2022). Pseudonyms are a form of data referencing used to ensure confidentiality in the research. Pseudonyms efficiently ensure confidentiality as they are incorporated into the content analysis as uniquely identified values, so pseudonyms were used instead of complete anonymity, making them more useful (Glette & Wiig, 2022).

- ***Reliability and Validity of the Interview Protocol***

Reliability and generalisation are the two major criteria for assessing research instruments and studies. Since this study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, these criteria were not applicable (Ruslin et al., 2022). Qualitative research aims to interpret phenomena rather than generalise findings. The uniqueness of the observed phenomena in their context is impossible to replicate; hence, it is not logical to evaluate a study of such phenomena based on their ability to appear numerously in a population (Kohlbacher, 2006). However, the validity of the methods applied was a crucial tool for assessment. The more the study findings aligned with reality, the more valid and authentic it was. The instruments used for conducting the study, specifically the interview protocol, were therefore improved by their dependability on expected phenomena, transferability, credibility, and confirmability (Ruslin et al., 2022).

The triangulation approach was adopted in this research to ensure the use of multiple methods and measures to evaluate the empirical phenomenon of governance in Saudi Arabia's top two universities. This approach was adopted to develop a more effective method for analysing social phenomena (Ruslin et al., 2022). Different methods towards the same end allowed for the study's validity, where similar deductions from different approaches indicated accuracy. Utilising a single methodology would lead to unique strengths and weaknesses, but a combined approach lowered the effect of each unique method's weakness (Ruslin et al., 2022).

The consistency of the results observed through different modes of data collection was, therefore, the major metric for measuring validity.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

- ***Ethical Considerations as a Significant Factor***

Research within educational institutions presents numerous ethical challenges that must not be overlooked. Any research employing methodologies involving participants must adhere to a set of guidelines to ensure privacy protection and the prevention of harm (Alqahtani & Ayentimi, 2021). In case studies utilising

interviews as part of their data collection methods, it is imperative to abide by these guidelines. Before initiating research studies in institutions, it is essential to understand the sensitivity of the relationship between instructors and students, particularly concerning governance issues (Alqahtani & Ayentimi, 2021). The study should be conducted under fixed institutional schedules to avoid disrupting normal institutional activities (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2010).

Given the dynamic nature of case studies, they should undergo a unique dynamic review process. Case studies are not easily predictable as they can evolve in multiple ways during their execution (Mohajan, 2018). Adjustments to data collection methods, participant numbers, study duration, and scope may be necessary throughout the study. Therefore, it is crucial to provide estimates that cover broad areas in anticipation of possible future changes, considering the dynamic nature of case studies (Marrelli, 2007). This dynamic nature also poses an ethical challenge in recruiting and retaining participants. Original participants need to be continuously briefed on changes in the study, while new participants need to be informed about the study's history.

Regarding data collection, some approaches adopted in case studies may be considered intrusive (Marrelli, 2007). In universities, certain information might be classified as intellectual property. Consequently, the inquiry process must avoid areas that might lead to the disclosure of sensitive information. Various data collection methodologies in this research, such as semi-structured interviews, direct observation, documentation, and unplanned observation, could be intrusive if mishandled. Despite the advantages of in-depth data collection, ethical issues arising from collecting intrusive or sensitive data could lead to the loss of consent (Marrelli, 2007). Therefore, ethical considerations must account for the evolving nature of information during the study.

- ***Describing Ethical Considerations in Conducting this Study***

Multiple regulatory bodies have guidelines and regulations on publishing ethically produced studies. In the context of studies carried out in educational institutions, the code of conduct for all hired staff prevents them from participating in any research without informed consent and approval from the institutions' governing bodies (Busetto et al., 2020). Therefore, several ethical considerations were implemented to ensure an ethically acceptable study design (Althwaini et al., 2021; Kohlbacher, 2006; Marrelli, 2007).

The present research was conducted under the ethical procedures of Aston University, which were adhered to prior to the commencement of data collection. Given that the research involved human interactions, specifically through participant interviews, the following documents were produced or obtained:

- 1- Ethical approval from Aston University (see Appendix C).
- 2- A document outlining the objectives of the project was presented to participants before they were asked any research-related questions (see Appendix D).
- 3- An informed consent letter, signed by both the participants and the researcher, indicating acknowledgement and agreement. (see Appendix E).

Respecting participants' rights, particularly their privacy, is paramount. Significant issues such as confidentiality, secrecy, and data protection were carefully considered. To reassure participants about the confidentiality of their data and responses, it was mentioned in both the interview guide and the informed consent letter that all data would be anonymised, kept completely private, and used solely for research purposes. Addressing these issues was essential to encourage participants to express their feelings and thoughts freely.

Furthermore, there were specific ethical considerations and regulatory requirements within Saudi higher education. As the researcher is an employee of a Saudi university, the ethical guidelines of Saudi universities were applicable. The Ethics Committee in Saudi universities mandates that researchers complete the bioethics ethics course offered by the National Committee for Bioethics at King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology. The researcher has completed this course, passed the test, and obtained the corresponding certificate (see Appendix F). Consequently, the researcher received ethical approval from both universities to conduct interviews with participants (see Appendix H) and (see Appendix J).

- ***Informed Consent***

Informed consent is a fundamental ethical consideration in all research involving participants. It ensures that participants are fully informed about the topics discussed in the semi-structured interviews, the use of collected data in the research, and the potential consequences of their participation (Klenke et al., 2016). Participants in this study were required to provide signed consent before participating and to re-consent if any changes occurred during the study. They were also informed of their right to access information about the study and to withdraw at any time. Informed consent guaranteed participants' anonymity and provided avenues for lodging complaints. Each participant received a brief information sheet, written in simple language for clarity, which served as a contract between the researcher and the participant (Denscombe, 2017).

The letter detailed the research's significance and objectives, requested participants' cooperation, and explicitly stated that participation was voluntary, and withdrawal could occur at any time. Additional relevant information was also included in the informed consent letter.

- ***Data Acquisition and Retention***

The nature of the case study approach leads to formulating a hypothesis that might require further study. Therefore, the study's results should be retained for further analysis and review (Dean, 2018). The duration of retention of this information and the nature of its dissemination is an ethical issue that should be handled before the data is collected. The data retained should observe anonymity for future scientific reviews and collaborations to retain the participants' confidentiality.

- ***Confidentiality and Risk of Harm***

Any form of identifying information on participants was kept anonymous and confidential. In the current digital age, uniquely identifying information beyond names is considered sensitive (Houghton et al., 2010). For instance, mentioning unique roles in an institution, such as department deans, could automatically identify a participant. Anonymity was crucial as it lowered the possibility of harm to participants resulting from the research. Since the study adopted semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection mode, complete anonymity was impossible to implement (Dean, 2018). However, confidentiality was maintained by keeping the participants' identities secret.

The potential for harm to the participants and institution was also crucial in the study. Any forms of risk identified before or during the research were immediately communicated to the affected parties (Houghton et al., 2010). The party at risk had the right to choose to bear the risk and proceed with the study or terminate their participation. It was, however, the researcher's responsibility to minimise risk. One potential risk in this case includes the exposure of intellectual property in the form of competitive strategies for the institutions against other institutions in the same industry locally and internationally.

4.8 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is a crucial phase that follows data collection. The primary goal of analysing qualitative data is to transform raw data into meaningful information that addresses the research questions and objectives. This process involves identifying patterns, themes, and insights from the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Data analysis in qualitative research is iterative and interpretative, requiring researchers to engage deeply with the data to draw conclusions that are well-supported by evidence (Creswell, 2013). By systematically analysing the data, researchers can develop a clear and coherent narrative that advances understanding in the field.

4.8.1 General Strategy for Analysis

The data for this study was collected through documents and interviews. Each data type was analysed using a method suitable for achieving the research objectives. A comparative analysis method was employed for the documents, specifically the previous Higher Education and Universities Law and the new Universities Law (Ragin, 2014). This approach aimed at identifying the similarities and differences between the two laws to understand their implications on governance. For the interviews, thematic analysis was used to extract the main themes and study results. This method is particularly effective for organising and interpreting qualitative data to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Combining these analytical methods ensured a comprehensive analysis of the data, aligning with the study's aims (Yin, 2011).

4.8.2 Comparative Analysis

The goal of the comparative analysis was to systematically identify and understand the changes in Saudi higher education laws and their implications for governance. This method involved comparing the old and

new legislation to highlight continuities and differences. Comparative analysis is valuable for providing comprehensive insights into policy shifts and governance structures (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). The steps of this analysis include:

- Identifying the key elements of each law.
- Comparing these elements to determine similarities and differences.
- Analysing the impact of these differences on governance principles.
- Formulating insights based on the comparative findings.

This method allowed for a thorough understanding of the legislative changes and their broader impact on higher education institutions.

4.8.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected from interviews. This study employed both deductive and inductive approaches. In deductive thematic analysis, the study's conceptual framework guided the extraction of main themes, while inductive analysis enabled themes to emerge directly from the data. This dual approach enhanced the comprehensiveness and depth of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis is well-suited for identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data, making it a robust method for interpreting complex data sets (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

4.8.4 Steps of Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis involves six essential steps that researchers must follow to address their research questions effectively:

- Familiarising with the data: engaging thoroughly with the data through repeated reading.
- Generating initial codes: identifying significant features of the data that are relevant to the research questions.
- Searching for themes: grouping codes into potential themes that capture patterns within the data.
- Reviewing themes: ensuring that themes accurately represent the data and are relevant to the research questions.
- Defining and naming themes: providing clear and concise labels for themes that encapsulate their essence.
- Producing the report: weaving the themes into a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions and contributes to the overall analysis.

The thematic analysis ensured a systematic and thorough examination of the interview data by following these steps, contributing significantly to the research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 1: get to know the data

Familiarity with the data was essential at the beginning of all six steps—the first step involved transcribing the data collected and reviewing all transcriptions multiple times. The audio interviews were transcribed into transcripts, and the records were replayed to ensure the transcripts were correct and matched the audio recordings. While listening, notes were taken on the data. Transcripts were read multiple times until I could identify the person by imagining their voice while reading the text.

Step 2: initial coding

Following familiarity with the data, initial codes representing major subthemes that stood out were developed. Participants' responses were contextualised in this stage, and common themes were identified. The initial codes for the data were independently written and analysed for each interview. An initial coding worked example was presented to the supervisors to ensure the integrity and correctness of this coding. Table 11 below demonstrates an example of the initial coding process. The left column shows basic statements of the raw data, and (I-1) means that the statement was provided from interview number (1). The right column shows initial codes.

Table 11 Example of the initial coding

Basic statements - raw data	Initial codes
The criteria were applied to universities to measure their readiness to transfer to the new law financially, administratively, and academically	Standards for universities readiness
The failure of law implementation up to this point is due to a lack of understanding of governance	Understanding governance
Restructuring universities aims to raise the readiness of universities to implement the new law	Restructuring universities
Establishing the boards of trustees in the two universities because the law aims to give universities more autonomy	Board of Trustees establishment
The Board of Trustees formed committees because it believed that these committees would help it in the process of university governance	Audit and governance committees
There is a university that has conflicts between the board of trustees and the university	Conflicts of interest
To have an international advisory council for the university in which external stakeholders participate	Expanding stakeholder participation
I believe that moving some powers between the three councils: the University Council, the Board of Trustees, and the UAC is necessary for governance	Overlapping responsibilities

Step 3: search for the main themes and categories

Searching for themes involved grouping sub-themes (initial codes) into major relevant deductions to identify major themes. I planned to start at this step after completing the initial coding. I intended to turn the coding into topics related to my research questions, though I might come across some codes not related to the research questions which I will keep for future studies. Table 12 below is an example of grouping sub-themes (initial codes) into major relevant themes. The left column shows examples of the initial codes, and the right column shows major themes.

Table 12 Example of initial coding and some expected themes

Initial codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Standards for universities readiness• Understanding governance	Adapting governance implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restructuring universities• Board of Trustees establishment	Enhancing autonomy and efficiency
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audit and governance committees• Conflicts of interest	Improving transparency and accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expanding stakeholder participation• Overlapping responsibilities	Assuming responsibility and participation

Step 4: Review the themes

Reviewing the themes involved polishing them from the previous step and cross-checking them against the initial code extracts. This step was important to ensure the quality of the initial codes and themes and that they were related to achieving the research objectives. I might have needed to transfer some codes to other themes. This stage was sensitive, requiring the researcher to read the codes and themes in depth to systematically link and categorise the data.

Step 5: naming the themes

After the themes were reviewed, each theme was defined to capture its essence. I identified the exact themes, which were linked to form the overall story about the data. At this point, a unified picture of the study began to emerge.

Step 6: writing the report

Following theme identification, the researcher constructed a woven story based on strong extracts from the findings. It was essential for the reader to be able to identify the strengths of the presented information as well as the accuracy of its conclusions. The report writing step started from the first step. Notes and memos written during the process were used as the nucleus for writing the report. The purpose of this report was to present a story about the data based on the analysis and discussions that answered the research question.

4.9 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter provided guidelines to ensure the results in the next chapter are confirmable and valid. It justified the selected methodologies, data collection, and analysis methods. Multiple data collection forms were required since the research utilised a triangulation approach towards the qualitative case study. The triangulation approach, in turn, led to the results' validity. In interpretivist paradigms, data reliability is not practical to measure; instead, validity is used to measure the effectiveness of the study. The chapter also justified the selection of a single case over the multiple case study approach. A single case study assisted with the retention of a single context for studying both universities. Semi-structured interviews and observation were the main data collection methods for implementing the single case study.

Additionally, documentation was crucial in obtaining background information that was critical in guiding other data collection forms. Finally, qualitative content analysis was implemented on the gathered data to ensure context retention for all the textual data gathered. Due to the data analysis method adopted, the data presentation in the next chapter, through tabulation and visualisation, is seamless. Furthermore, the deductions made from the presented data align with the study's aim and objectives.

Chapter 5: Comparative Analysis of Saudi Higher Education Laws

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the study methodology was explained in detail, including the data collection and analysis method. This chapter deals with a comparative analysis of the previous Higher Education and Universities Council Law and the new Universities Law, which serves as the legal framework for the two universities under study. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences between the two laws and their relationship to governance principles, thereby enriching the analysis and interpretation of data in the subsequent chapter.

The structure of this chapter comprises six sections. Firstly, an introduction provides an overview of the chapter's content. The second section outlines the method of analysis. Following this, the third section offers an overview of the two laws. Subsequently, the fourth section presents the findings of the comparative analysis. The fifth section focuses on analysing differences through governance principles, while the sixth section provides a concise summary of the chapter.

5.2. Method of Analysis

This chapter uses a comparative analysis method to study the differences and similarities between the previous Higher Education and Universities Council Law and the new Universities Law. Comparative analysis is a technique for qualitative comparison analysis to identify similarities and differences between cases (Ragin, 2014). Comparative analysis allows for a systematic comparison between the two laws, identifying continuous aspects and aspects of major changes and differences. In addition, this analysis is guided by the conceptual framework explained in Chapter 3. The conceptual framework is based on governance principles such as autonomy, transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency and responsibility. These governance principles serve as lenses through which differences and their impacts are examined. By applying this dual approach, the analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of legislative changes and their alignment with governance standards in the context of higher education.

5.3. Overview of the Two Laws

The Universities Law, enacted by a royal decree from the Saudi Prime Minister in 2019, stands as a pivotal legal document to regulate higher education affairs while fostering advancements in scientific, research, and societal realms at local, regional, and international levels. This legislation marks a significant transformation in Saudi higher education towards achieving governance, and the law aims to achieve autonomy for universities in the administrative, financial and academic aspects (Universities Affairs Council, 2024).

Implementing the Universities Law commenced with a phased approach, initially targeting a maximum of three universities. Consequently, during the initial phase, the Universities Law was enacted in King Abdulaziz University and Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University. This law represents a departure from

the Higher Education and Universities Council Law of 1993, which remains in effect for universities that have not transitioned to the Universities Law.

In the next section, both laws and the chapters and articles they contain will be explained.

5.3.1. The Higher Education and Universities Council Law (Previous)

The Higher Education and Universities Council Law was issued in 1993, which aims to regulate the work of universities and was applied to all Saudi universities (Universities Affairs Council, 2024). The law contains 60 articles divided into 13 chapters, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13 Chapters and articles of the previous Higher Education and Universities Council Law

Chapters	Articles
1. General Provisions	It includes 13 articles that explain the basic principles and rules of universities
2. Higher Education Council	It includes five articles that define the responsibilities and structure of the Higher Education Council, that the Prime Minister is the head of the council, and define the university management structure as consisting of the University Council, the University President, and the Vice-Presidents
3. University Council	It includes four articles that define the responsibilities and structure of the university council and that the Minister of Education is the head of the councils of all universities
4. University President	It includes three articles that define the responsibilities of the university president and that their appointment is made by royal decree at the grade of excellent employees
5. University Vice Presidents	It includes two articles clarifying the responsibilities of the vice presidents of the university and that their appointment is made by the Minister of Education
6. Academic Council	It includes four articles that clarify the responsibilities of the Academic Council
7. College Administration	It includes one article that specifies the responsibility of the college administration to the dean and the college council
8. College Council	It includes three articles explaining the responsibilities of the College Council
9. Deans and Vice-Deans	It includes five articles that clarify the responsibilities of deans and their deputies, and that the appointment of deans is made by the Minister of Education
10. Department Council	It includes four articles explaining the responsibilities of the department council
11. Faculty Members	Includes five articles explaining faculty ranks and responsibilities
12. Financial System	It includes five articles related to the financial issues of universities, such as that the government is responsible for providing the entire budget of universities
13. Final Provisions	It includes six articles explaining some final provisions, such as publishing the law in the Official Gazette

In the previous Table 5, the previous Higher Education and Universities Council Law was summarised, and in the next section, the new Universities Law will be presented.

5.3.2. The Universities Law (New)

In 2019, the Prime Minister approved the new Universities Law, which replaces the Higher Education and Universities Law issued in 1993, and the law contains 58 articles divided into 14 chapters, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14 Chapters and articles of the new Universities Law

Chapters	Articles
1. Definitions and Objectives	It includes five articles that explain definitions and general controls, such as that the university is a public, academic institution that has a financially independent legal personality, and defines the university's governance structure as consisting of the Board of Trustees, the University Council, and the University President
2. Universities Affairs Council	It includes five articles that explain the Council's responsibilities, including governance and evaluation of the performance of universities, and that the Minister of Education is the Chairman of the Council
3. Boards of Trustees	It includes five articles that explain the responsibilities of the Board of Trustees and that its members are composed of people from inside and outside the university
4. University Council	It includes four articles explaining the responsibilities of the council and that it is headed by the university president and without representation from the Ministry of Education
5. Academic Council	It includes four articles that clarify the responsibilities of the Academic Council
6. College Council	It includes three articles that clarify the responsibilities of the College Council
7. Department Council	It includes three articles that clarify the responsibilities of the department council
8. University President and Vice-Presidents	It includes five articles that clarify the responsibilities of the university president and his deputies, and that the president is contracted under the labour law for three years and that the Board of Trustees appoints the deputies.
9. Deans and Vice-Deans	It includes three articles that clarify the responsibilities of the deans and their deputies, and that the university president makes their appointment
10. Heads of Departments	It includes two articles that clarify the responsibilities of department heads
11. Academic Accreditation	It includes two articles that require universities to obtain institutional and programme accreditation
12. Advisory Boards	It includes three articles that allow universities to form three advisory councils: international, faculty members, and students
13. Financial System	It includes six articles arranged on financial issues, such as that universities have a budget cut off from the government and that universities provide the rest of the budget from other sources of income
14. General and Final Provisions	It includes seven articles for general provisions, such as that employment of all university employees shall be under the Labour Law

In Table 6, the new Universities Law was summarised, and in the following section, the two laws will be analysed using the comparative analysis method.

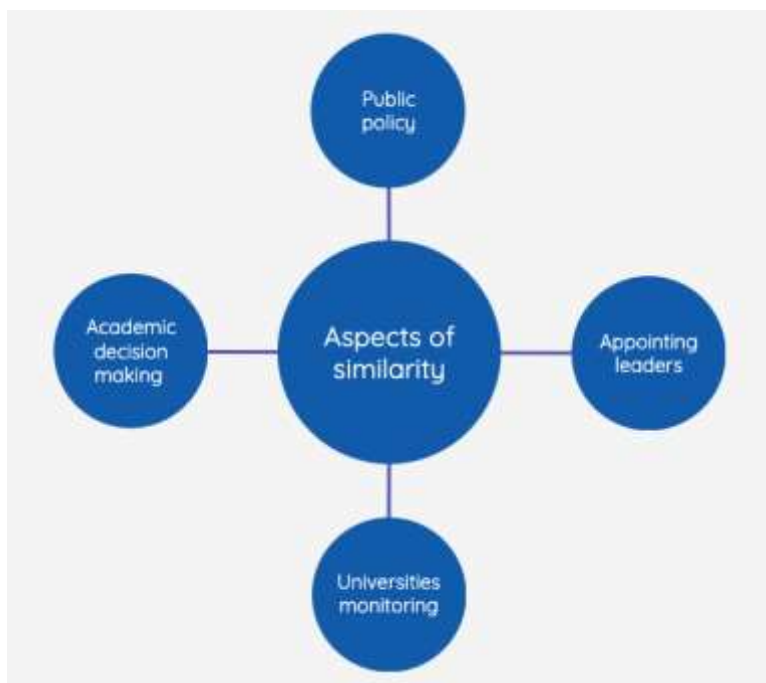
5.4. Comparative Analysis

In this section, the articles on the previous Higher Education Law and the current Universities Law will be analysed to determine the similarities and differences between the two laws using the comparative analysis method.

5.4.1. Aspects of Similarity

The articles of the new Universities Law are consistent with the previous Higher Education Law in certain aspects. This section explains the common articles between the two laws. Four main similar aspects were identified through careful review and comparative analysis of all articles in the two laws. It is public policy, appointing leaders, controlling universities, and academic decision-making processes (See Figure 4).

Figure 4 Aspects of similarities between the two laws



- ***Public Policy***

The articles of the new and previous university law agree on many general policies related to Saudi Arabia's policy in higher education, such as that universities are considered non-profit institutions and have their legal personality. The two laws also agree that the language of university instruction is Arabic unless there is a reason to teach in another language. The two laws also aim to regulate the affairs of universities and higher education institutions.

- ***Appointing Leaders***

In both laws, the government controls the appointment of university presidents and leaders in the bodies supervising higher education. The previous law had a council called the Higher Education Council, and the Universities Affairs Council replaced it in the current law. The Council includes the Minister of Education,

leading members of government ministries, and the Secretary-General of the Universities Affairs Council, who are appointed by a decision of the Prime Minister. The main role of the Council is to supervise the universities and monitor their performance; it is the reference for them. Therefore, the government still has control over appointing leaders in higher education.

- ***Universities Monitoring***

Universities are still monitored and controlled through the Universities Affairs Council, as was the case in the previous Higher Education Council. There are many decisions that universities cannot make without the approval of the Universities Affairs Council, such as approving administrative, financial and academic regulations and establishing new colleges and departments.

- ***Academic Decision Making***

Many articles of the current law are consistent with the previous law regarding making academic decisions within universities. The articles stipulate that academic decisions are made sequentially through the relevant councils, starting with the department council, then the college council, and then the university council. Decisions are taken collectively in the councils through voting, and meetings occur once a month at most. The two laws also agree that the scientific council appoints and promotes faculty members.

5.4.2. Aspects of Difference

There are some differences between the articles on the new Universities Law and the previous higher education law. This section explains the different articles between the two laws. Through careful review and comparative analysis of all articles in the two laws, six main aspects were identified. They are structures and governance, processes and procedures, human resources and recruitment, financial management and budgeting, academic accreditation and advisory councils (See Figure 5).

Figure 5 Aspects of differences between the two laws



In Table 15, the differences between the two laws are summarised, which are structures and governance, processes and procedures, human resources and employees, financial management and budget, and accreditation of academic programmes and advisory boards.

Table 15 Summary of the differences between the two laws

Aspects of Difference	The Higher Education Law (Previous)	The Universities Law (New)
Structures and governance	The Prime Minister chairs the Universities Affairs Council	The Universities Affairs Council is chaired by the Minister of Education
	The University Council is chaired by the Minister of Education and the membership of the Secretary-General.	The University President chairs the University Council
	The university is managed by the University Council, the University President and his deputies	The university is managed and governed by the Board of Trustees, the University Council and the University President
Processes and procedures	There was no evaluation of the universities' performance	The performance of universities is evaluated and governed academically, financially and administratively
	No one outside the council was allowed to attend the meeting	Persons who are not members of the Council are allowed to attend the meeting if necessary
	There was nothing preventing a person from attending the meeting if a topic related to him was being discussed	A member may not attend the meeting if a topic related to him is being discussed
	Responsibility for making decisions is not assigned	Councils bear responsibility for their decisions, and the Universities Affairs Council bears responsibility for the integrity of implementation
Human resources and employees	Faculty and staff were appointed to government jobs	Faculty and staff are appointed on an annual contract system
	Vice-presidents and deans were appointed by the Minister of Education	The Board of Trustees appoints vice presidents of the university, and deans are appointed by the university president
Financial management and budget	The government provides the entire university budget	The government will provide a lump sum subsidy to universities
	Additional sources of income for universities are limited	Allowing universities to expand in finding additional sources of income to cover the budget deficit
	The budget is approved by royal decree	The budget is approved by the Board of Trustees
	The review of the final accounts is carried out with the participation of four ministries	The review of final accounts is carried out under corporate control rules

Accreditation of academic programmes	There was no requirement to obtain academic accreditation	Universities must obtain academic and institutional accreditation from the Education and Evaluation Commission
Advisory boards	There were no advisory boards	There are three advisory boards: the international advisory board, faculty advisory board, and the student advisory board

- **Structures and governance**

The Universities Law differs from the previous Higher Education Law in the university management structures and focuses on the governance concept.

The current law stipulates that a Board of Trustees must be established at each university, and its president, deputy, and majority of its members must be from outside the university. The Board of Trustees is appointed by order of the Prime Minister based on the nomination of the Minister of Education, Chairman of the Universities Affairs Council. The Board of Trustees carries out many of the responsibilities stipulated in the law. Some of these responsibilities were affiliated with the previous Council of Higher Education, such as approving the appointment of vice presidents of the university and approving the administrative and financial rules. Other responsibilities were affiliated with the University Council, such as reviewing the university's final accounts and approving the university's annual budget. Some responsibilities were also added that were not present or affiliated with any council in the previous law. Such as university governance, ensuring that the university's vision and mission are achieved, approving the establishment of university companies, appointing an external auditor for the university's accounts, and forming the university's international advisory council.

Therefore, the general structure of university administration differed. In the previous law, the responsibility for university administration was assigned to the university council, the university president, and the vice presidents. While in the current law, the Board of Trustees, the University Council, and the University President are responsible for the management and governance of the university.

There are also differences in the structure of some councils, such as the Universities Affairs Council and the University Council. The Universities Affairs Council, called the Council of Higher Education in the previous law, was headed by the Prime Minister and the King of Saudi Arabia, while in the current law, the Minister of Education became the head of the council. Likewise, the council of each university was headed by the Minister of Education and the membership by the Secretary-General of the Higher Education Council. In contrast, in the current law, the council is headed by the university's president and there is no representation of the Ministry of Education on the council.

- ***Processes and Procedures***

Both laws agree that decision-making processes are carried out through councils, but there are differences in the mechanisms of decision-making processes and procedures. In the current law, tasks have been added

to the Universities Affairs Council that were not present in the previous law, such as that it is responsible for governing and evaluating universities' academic, administrative, and financial performance. The difference here is in determining the aspects of university evaluation, and governance and evaluation are based on performance indicators and not general reports. In addition, the Universities Affairs Council is responsible for monitoring the performance of the boards of trustees verifying the soundness of their decisions and resolving any conflict of jurisdiction that arises between the Board of Trustees and the University.

Additionally, one of the procedures that differed from the previous law is that the Council President may invite whomever he deems appropriate to attend when discussing any of the topics that require this, without having the right to vote. Likewise, a member of any of the councils stipulated in the law may not attend the council's discussion of matters related to him or one of his relatives. All councils stipulated in the system are responsible for its implementation, and the Universities Affairs Council is responsible for the sound implementation. Therefore, the decision-making processes in the two laws are through the councils, but the differences revolve around adding tasks to some councils and in the mechanisms and procedures of the councils' work.

- ***Human Resources and Employees***

In the previous law, all faculty members and employees were appointed to government jobs, often without an employment contract, and university employees remained there until they reached retirement or submitted their resignations. In the current law, all faculty members and employees will be contracted to annual contracts, like workers in the private sector. Likewise, in the previous law, the university president was appointed by royal decree to an excellent grade, which he often held until retirement. In the current law, he is contracted based on labour law for three years, subject to renewal. If the university president holds a public position or is a faculty member, he has the right to keep his job during his presidency of the university, and that period of service is counted for periodic bonuses, promotion, and retirement.

Also, in the previous law, it was stipulated that the Minister of Education made the appointment of the university's vice presidents and deans, while in the current law, the vice presidents are appointed by the Board of Trustees, and the deans are appointed by the university's president.

- ***Financial Management and Budget***

There are many differences between the two laws regarding university budgets and financial management. In the previous law, universities received their entire budgets from the government. In the current law, the government will pay part of the budget, and the universities will provide the rest of the budget from other sources of income. Therefore, it was indicated that the universities would be given autonomy. In the current law, universities have been allowed to expand by creating additional sources of income, such as setting fees for some study programmes, establishing investment companies, and granting individuals and entities the right to obtain donations and endowments.

The current law also allows universities to provide research and consulting services to parties outside Saudi Arabia and open branches of universities outside Saudi Arabia, unlike what was in the previous law, as universities were not allowed to do that.

Likewise, among the differences between the two laws in financial procedures is that a royal decree approved the universities' budget approved the universities' budget. In contrast, in the current law, the budget is approved by the Board of Trustees of each university. The universities' financial accounts were reviewed with the participation of the Ministries of Higher Education, Finance, and Economy and the General Auditing Office. Under the current law, the General Auditing Office is responsible for auditing the university's final accounts following the rules of oversight for companies and public institutions.

- ***Accreditation of Academic Programmes***

One of the differences between the two laws is that the current law stipulates, through two articles, that universities are obligated to obtain institutional accreditation from the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, which is a non-profit organisation operating under the supervision of the Saudi Ministry of Education, whose mission is to supervise the quality of education. The university is also working to achieve programme accreditation from the Education and Training Evaluation Commission or one of the international bodies accredited by the commission. In the previous law, there were no academic and institutional accreditation articles.

- ***Advisory Boards***

Different councils exist in the two laws, but the difference is that three articles in the current law stipulate the existence of advisory councils. These councils are the International Advisory Council, which is formed by the decision of the Board of Trustees. The Faculty Advisory Council is headed by the University President, and the Student Advisory Council is headed by one of the University's Vice Presidents.

In the next section, these differences will be analysed through the lens of governance principles.

5.5. Analysis of Differences through Governance Principles

In the previous section, the similarities and differences between the two laws were identified using comparative analysis. In this section, the differences will be considered through the lens of governance and its principles: autonomy, transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency and responsibility (See Figure 6). A preliminary discussion will also be presented in this section, and all results will be discussed in depth in the chapter following the next chapter, which is the discussion chapter.

Figure 6 Governance principles



- ***Governance***

This analysis explores the broader concept of governance, laying the groundwork with a fundamental understanding before delving into a nuanced examination of its core principles. The recently enacted Universities Law references governance six times across various sections, a departure from its predecessor, the Higher Education Law, which did not explicitly mention the concept of governance but may be implicit.

Although the concept of governance was explicitly mentioned in the universities law, the detailed processes related to the implementation of governance were not clarified, including the governance model, executive structures, and departments and positions responsible for governance, such as the role of the governor.

The Universities Law underscores the significance of governance within university settings, envisioning its realisation through the establishment of councils inclusive of both internal and external stakeholders (Universities Affairs Council, 2024). Among these councils is the Universities Affairs Council, charged with the governance and assessment of academic, financial, and administrative performance. Additionally, introducing boards of trustees within universities signifies the initial stride towards governance implementation. These boards are tasked with several responsibilities, including overseeing university governance and ensuring alignment with the institution's vision, mission, and objectives.

Distinct disparities emerge between the two legislative frameworks, notably in the structural organisation of universities. Including the Board of Trustees as a governing authority, positioned hierarchically above the University Council and President, marks a significant departure. However, an overlap in governance responsibilities is apparent among the Universities Affairs Council, Board of Trustees, and University President, emphasising the intricate nature of governance, which necessitates collaborative efforts across multiple entities.

This finding aligns with a study by Amaral & Magalhaes (2002), which showed that the relationship between institutions of higher education, government, and society has changed, and universities have become more responsive to society through the involvement of external stakeholders in governance. The study of Austin & Jones (2015) indicated that external stakeholders play a role in university governance, including government, civil society, and the private sector. This is evident in the composition of the Universities Affairs Council, which is different from the past. Prior to the issuance of the Universities Law, Saudi universities were centrally managed through the Supreme Council for Higher Education, which was chaired by the King of Saudi Arabia and whose members were the Minister of Education and university presidents, without the involvement of external stakeholders (Alkhazim, 2003).

The finding aligns with the study of de Boer et al. (2010), who pointed out that university governance boards are appointed by the government or by election. This difference is due to each country's government policy, and government-appointed boards are less effective for governance.

Agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) provides valuable insights into understanding the relationship between the Universities Affairs Council and the Board of Trustees. According to the agency theory, the Universities Affairs Council, as principal, delegates authority to the Board of Trustees as its agents to manage and supervise the university's operations. The Universities Affairs Council, which represents the interests and objectives of the government in educational policy, seeks to ensure that the university operates in line with regulatory requirements and the government's public policy. In this relationship between the principal and the agent, the Universities Affairs Council creates governance mechanisms to monitor the work of the Board of Trustees, including appointing trustees, evaluating the performance of universities, and holding them accountable. Conversely, the Board of Trustees, which includes internal and external stakeholders, assumes the role of agents responsible for carrying out the functions of the Universities Affairs Council while protecting the university's interests. However, agency theory acknowledges the possibility of conflicts of interest and information asymmetries between principals and agents, which may manifest in agency problems. Therefore, applying agency theory helps clarify the complexities of university governance, emphasising the importance of aligning incentives and establishing accountability mechanisms.

- ***Autonomy***

The principle of autonomy in higher education means the independence of universities in decision-making processes and exercising academic freedom (Enders et al., 2013). By examining the disparities between the laws through the lens of autonomy, the alterations in structures aimed at bolstering financial, administrative, and academic independence can be elucidated. For instance, establishing a Board of Trustees for each university, giving it some of the powers previously held by the Higher Education Council, signifies a transition towards decentralised management structures, empowering universities to make strategic decisions autonomously. The finding is in line with Mathies & Slaughter (2013) study, which stresses that

boards of trustees may help achieve university autonomy. On the other hand, the study of Hartley et al. (2016) confirmed that establishing new structures, such as boards of trustees, may not achieve independence and governance due to the continued implementation of policies without accountability.

Furthermore, restructuring the university council to be chaired by the university president, devoid of representation from the Ministry of Education, augments the university's autonomy, allowing it to make decisions free from external influence. This is consistent with Wan's (2019) study, which indicated that the degree of autonomy decreases significantly in universities due to the minister's interference and control over the appointment of university leaders. Similarly, in terms of personnel and human resources, the transfer of authority to appoint vice presidents of the university from the Minister of Education to the Board of Trustees, along with the delegation of authority to appoint deans from the Minister of Education to the President of the University, enhances the administrative independence of the university, enabling it to select leadership internally. The finding is consistent with Kretek et al.'s (2013) study, which confirms that the councils that supervise universities enhance autonomy by assuming some of the tasks of the Ministry of Education, such as appointing some university leaders.

Moreover, concerning financial management and budgeting, universities are granted financial autonomy by allocating partial financial support for the budget, with universities assuming responsibility for covering the remainder of the budgetary costs. The new law authorises universities to engage in investments, establish companies, and levy fees for certain programmes, among other revenue streams.

The finding is in line with Al-Khathlan's (2020) study, which pointed out that governments aim to enhance the diversity of universities' sources of income and not rely solely on government support which helps universities achieve financial independence. This finding is also consistent with studies that indicated that Saudi universities benefited from government support for their budgets and that the new university law allowed universities to generate additional revenues from study programmes, services, and the establishment of companies (Abdelnabi & El-Awady, 2020; Al-Youbi & Zahed, 2021).

The disparities observed in structures, human resources, and financial management contribute to realising the autonomy advocated in the Universities Law. Nevertheless, the absence of a clear explanation regarding this autonomy may result in divergent expectations among universities regarding the degree of autonomy they are expected to attain.

- ***Transparency***

Transparency emphasises the importance of openness in universities and providing access to relevant information to stakeholders (Ramírez & Tejada, 2019). Analysing the disparities between the two laws through the lens of transparency reveals notable advancements in fostering openness and transparency within universities. For instance, regarding structures and governance, the presence of the Board of Trustees, predominantly composed of external members, signals a commitment to transparency.

Additionally, operational procedures now entail greater transparency, as evidenced by the Chairman of the Council's discretion to invite relevant stakeholders to discussions without voting rights on pertinent topics. Furthermore, universities are mandated to present final financial reports to the Board of Trustees, ensuring financial transparency. Moreover, adherence to accreditation requirements necessitates transparency in operations and procedures.

These findings align with the study by Jongbloed et al. (2018), who noted that increasing transparency in higher education can be achieved through three tools: accreditation, rankings, and performance indicators.

Consequently, several provisions in the new law facilitate the realisation of transparency in university governance. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the Universities Law lacks a specific data transparency policy delineating the data types meant for dissemination to stakeholders.

- ***Accountability***

Accountability requires mechanisms to ensure that individuals and institutions are held accountable for their actions, decisions, and performance outcomes (Brinkerhoff, 2017). A comparative analysis of the two laws through the lens of accountability confirms the efforts made to strengthen these mechanisms and increase oversight of university performance.

Regarding differences in structures and governance, the Universities Affairs Council emerges as pivotal in the accountability framework, responsible for evaluating university performance and governance while monitoring the effectiveness of boards of trustees. Additionally, adopting performance measurement indicators in processes and procedures enhances accountability by providing objective standards for evaluating universities.

According to Saint (2009) and Kennedy (2003), an important accountability component is government oversight and stakeholder representation in university management. This suggests that the council acts as a tool for the government to pressure universities from outside to influence and support a balanced governance system (Shattock, 2017).

The activation of the accountability principle is evident in procedural safeguards, such as preventing council members from participating in discussions that present conflicts of interest and establishing mechanisms to resolve conflicts between the Board of Trustees and the university. The finding is in line with de Boer et al. (2010) study, who pointed out that governance boards are either expert boards or representative boards for certain sectors and that representative boards cause many conflicts of interest.

Moreover, financial management and budgeting reinforce financial accountability by presenting final accounts to the Board of Trustees, external auditors, and the General Auditing Bureau. The finding aligns with the study of Soobaroyen et al. (2014), who pointed out that audit committees play a major role in holding universities accountable. While these measures enhance accountability within universities, it is

essential to recognise that an excessive focus on accountability may compromise the autonomy of these universities.

- ***Participation***

Participation emphasises that decision-making processes in universities take place with the participation of various internal and external stakeholders (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006). Examining differences between the two laws reveals initiatives aimed at broadening stakeholder participation.

In terms of structures and governance, establishing a Board of Trustees at each university, which includes a group of internal and external stakeholders, represents a major shift in enhancing stakeholder participation in the management of Saudi public universities. Also, identifying the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and his deputy as external stakeholders may lead to expanding the circle of decision-making and greater benefit and effective participation, which may benefit the university's performance.

Additionally, the formation of advisory councils underscores the principle of participation. These councils, comprising two internal stakeholder groups students and faculty members, and an external stakeholder group the international advisory council represent a proactive step toward empowering stakeholders, amplifying their voices, and involving them in decision-making processes. Consequently, fostering an institutional culture within universities that values both internal and external stakeholders is crucial to achieving success and excellence.

The findings of the study indicated that internal and external stakeholders participate in the governance of Saudi universities. This finding is consistent with many studies that indicated that university governance depends on the participation of internal and external stakeholders in decision-making, such as studies (Saint, 2009; Sifuna, 2012; Shattock, 2002; Trakman, 2008; Marshall, 2018; Magalhães et al., 2018; Leišytė et al., 2014; Tetreanova & Sabolová, 2010).

The finding can be explained by stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasises the significance of stakeholders' input into university decision-making processes. This encompasses any individual or group impacted by university operations, such as the government, society, faculty, and students.

While these differences reinforce the principle of participation, the lack of clarity in the law on the categories of stakeholders and the method of selecting them for board membership may constitute an obstacle towards ensuring the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes.

- ***Efficiency***

Efficiency means allocating resources and optimally using them to achieve the goals of universities (Agasisti & Haelermans, 2016). An analysis of disparities between the two laws through an efficiency perspective unveils measures aimed at streamlining administrative procedures, refining resource allocation methods, and augmenting operational efficacy.

The Universities Law introduces performance-based budgeting provisions, resource allocation criteria, and the tie-in of financial support to universities with their performance outcomes, fostering financial expenditure efficiency. Transitioning university personnel from civil service roles to contractual arrangements ensures the employment continuity of competent individuals, deviating from the prior practice wherein government employees retained their positions until retirement, regardless of performance.

Furthermore, adopting fixed-term contracts for university presidents enhances administrative efficiency, diverging from the erstwhile tradition of appointing presidents through royal decree for indefinite terms. In terms of institutional and academic efficiency, notable changes include the addition of legislation requiring universities to acquire both academic and institutional accreditations. This emphasis on accreditation is anticipated to elevate the quality and efficiency of universities.

- ***Responsibility***

The principle of responsibility affirms the commitment of individuals and universities to ethical behaviour and acting with integrity while taking responsibility for making decisions (Vetterlein, 2018). Examining disparities between the two laws, with a focus on responsibility, illustrates efforts to promote ethical principles and universities' responsibility.

In terms of processes and procedures, strides have been made in enhancing responsibility by disclosing conflicts of interest, coupled with the councils assuming decision-making responsibilities, thereby fostering a culture of ethical responsibility among university stakeholders. Regarding financial management and budgeting, universities have been entrusted with greater financial responsibility and compelled to source additional income streams to support the university budget, thus bearing financial responsibility to compensate for the financial deficit.

Moreover, in terms of the difference in academic and institutional accreditation, universities have become obligated to define the duties and responsibilities of university employees through comprehensive job descriptions outlining their roles and responsibilities.

These measures are poised to imbue universities with a sense of responsibility for their decisions through the councils, concurrently holding individuals accountable for their roles and actions.

5.6. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented an analysis of the Universities Law, which served as a regulatory framework for Saudi higher education institutions. It commenced by delineating the governance principles underpinning the analysis: autonomy, transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency, and responsibility. Following this, an exposition of the Universities Law, including its sections and articles, was provided. Subsequently, the chapter delved into a comparative analysis between the Universities Law and the preceding Higher Education Law, identifying both areas of similarity—such as public policy, leadership

appointments, university oversight, and academic decision-making processes—and points of divergence, including structures and governance, processes and procedures, human resources and employment, financial management and budgeting, academic programme accreditation, and advisory boards. These differences were then scrutinised through the lens of governance principles.

In summary, the differences between the two laws play a role in developing governance principles, and the analysis has prompted several interesting questions, such as: What governance model is currently in place within universities? How is autonomy defined, and what strategies can universities employ to attain financial autonomy given their reliance on government funding? What specific performance indicators will be used to evaluate university accountability? Is there a policy in place regarding data transparency? Furthermore, who are the primary stakeholders, and what criteria are used for their selection?

These questions will guide the qualitative interviews analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Qualitative Data Analysis: Themes From Interviews

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a comparative analysis of the former Saudi higher education law and the new Universities Law was conducted using data collected from various documents. This chapter aims to analyse the data extracted from semi-structured interviews with participants and present the results. This chapter aims to provide an understanding of the coding process and the emergent themes.

This chapter is organised into seven sections. The first section serves as the introduction. The second section provides an overview of the analysis method used in this study. The third section offers a detailed description of the participants interviewed. The fourth section presents the results derived from the initial codes. The fifth section discusses the categories that emerged from grouping these initial codes. The sixth section highlights the overarching themes identified through thematic analysis. Finally, the seventh section summarises the chapter's key findings and conclusions.

6.2 Response Overview

Fifteen people were selected to participate in the study. Participants' data are presented in Table 16. Participants' academic ranks differed from assistant professor to professor and some administrative leaders, and there was a diversity of male and female participants.

Table 16 Descriptive details of participants

Respondent Code	Academic ranks	Interview medium	Length	Participant roles
U1-P1	Professor	Face to face	56 minutes	Member of the Board of Trustees
U1-P2	Professor	Face to face	54 minutes	Member of the Board of Trustees
U1-P3	Associate Professor	Face to face	51 minutes	Member of the Board of Trustees
U1-P4	Professor	Face to face	51 minutes	Member of the University Council
U1-P5	Associate Professor	Face to face	37 minutes	Member of the University Council
U1-P6	Assistant Professor	Face to face	56 minutes	Member of the University Council
U1-P7	Assistant Professor	Face to face	46 minutes	Member of the University Council
U1-P8	Associate Professor	Face to face	43 minutes	Vice Dean and Member of Committees
U1-P9	Assistant Professor	Face to face	62 minutes	Vice Dean and Member of Committees
U1-P10	Administrative leader	Face to face	39 minutes	Member of Executive Committee
UAC-P11	Professor	Face to face	66 minutes	Member of Law Implementation Committee

UAC-P12	Assistant Professor	Face to face	81 minutes	Member of Law Implementation Committee
UAC-P13	Professor	Face to face	53 minutes	Member of Law Implementation Committee
U2-P14	Assistant Professor	Face to face	35 minutes	Member of Governance Committee
U2-P15	Assistant Professor	Face to face	59 minutes	Member of Governance Committee

The male and female participants in this study were drawn from the two universities that have implemented the Universities Law, and from the Universities Affairs Council (UAC) in the Ministry of Education. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, the names of the participants were coded as shown in Table 8 above, and the two universities were coded as (University 1) and (University 2). This approach ensures the protection of participant identities while enabling an in-depth examination of diverse perspectives and experiences across different levels of authority within the higher education system. The actual respondents of (University 2) were limited to two, a male leader and a female leader because of internal limitations. Although these participants were few, they offered rich information regarding the study's goals and objectives. Including participants from both universities and the UAC is crucial for capturing a comprehensive understanding of the processes, challenges, and outcomes associated with implementing the Universities Law.

Students were not included in the sample since they do not occupy a post in the governance structures under the Universities Law at the current time. Interview respondents comprised of governance implementation direct participants and parties with influence on the process.

6.3 Method of Analysis

This chapter presents interview data analysed using thematic analysis with both inductive and deductive approaches. Thematic analysis is a widely recognised method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial codes were derived using a deductive approach based on the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 3, which encompasses governance principles such as autonomy, transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency and responsibility. Concurrently, an inductive approach was employed to extract initial codes directly from the data, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the participants' responses (Patton, 2014). This dual approach ensured a comprehensive analysis, integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence to provide a robust understanding of the data.

6.4 Initial Codes

As described in Chapter 4, the data was coded to about 1,300 initial codes in the first coding cycle. The initial codes were reviewed until they became 800 initial codes in the second cycle of coding.

The process of reviewing the initial codes and merging them with the same meaning and significance continue, making the initial codes more focused and related to the research questions until they became 400 initial codes. Table 17 shows a reduced list of 38 initial codes.

Table 17 Emergent (38) initial codes

(38) Initial codes	
1. Understanding governance	21. Universities Affairs Council establishment
2. Mixed governance model	22. Automating university processes
3. Standards for universities readiness	23. Integration of performance indicators
4. Desiring change and development	24. Audit and governance committees
5. Transformation planning	25. Conflicts of interest
6. Resisting change	26. Capital projects falter
7. Delaying regulation issuance	27. Empowerment without efficiency
8. Ambiguity in procedures	28. Organisational culture
9. Qualifying and training	29. Fear of accountability
10. Administrative autonomy	30. Information asymmetry
11. Managing financial autonomy	31. Expanding stakeholder participation
12. Exercising academic freedom	32. Decision-making processes
13. Disciplined autonomy	33. Ethical leadership
14. Board of Trustees establishment	34. Duties and tasks guide
15. Restructuring universities	35. Job performance evaluation
16. Maximising institutional revenue streams	36. Inactive participation
17. Expenditure efficiency	37. Overlapping responsibilities
18. Centralisation	38. Favouritism
19. Differences in understanding autonomy	
20. Anxiety about giving autonomy	

6.5 Categories

The purpose of the coding was to focus on data relevant to the research questions and related to the research objectives. The 38 initial codes were identified as the most frequently occurring prime symbols and highly relevant to addressing research questions.

As explained in the methodology chapter, the coding process includes six phases: initial codes, coding review, coding comparison, and then placing similar coding into categories to form subthemes, after which the subthemes are linked to the themes.

Through the continuous process of encoding and classifying the 38 emergent initial codes, ten categories have emerged. At the same time, through the continuous comparison process, four categories emerged for these categories. These categories groups are governance adaptation processes, governance adaptation challenges, the reality of institutional autonomy, autonomy and efficiency processes, autonomy and efficiency challenges, transparency and accountability processes, transparency and accountability challenges, participation and responsibility processes and participation and responsibility challenges. The following Tables 18,19,20,21 and 22 show the complete results for categories selection. The following four

tables show the data flow process, coding, and analysis mechanism and will be discussed later in the next chapter.

6.5.1 Categories Related to ' Adapting Governance '

Table 18 below shows how the 9 initial codes are grouped into two categories related to adapting governance.

Table 18 Forming (2) categories related to adapting governance

Initial codes	Tag	(2) Categories - (out of 9)
1- Mixed governance model 2- Standards for universities readiness 3- Desiring change and development 4- Transformation planning	(1)	Governance adaptation processes
5- Understanding governance 6- Qualifying and training 7- Ambiguity in procedures 8- Delaying regulation issuance 9- Resisting change	(2)	Governance adaptation challenges

In the first group of initial codes, which was tagged number (1) on the left side of Table 18, participants explained the governance adaptation processes in the two universities. Four initial codes focused on processes and procedures, including the mixed governance model, where the Ministry of Education changed and adapted the governance model in line with the universities law. The second initial code is the standards for university readiness. This code includes the standards set by the UAC to measure the readiness of universities to transition to the Universities Law. The third initial code is the desire for change and development, and it reflects the feelings of university leaders in their desire and enthusiasm to move to universities law. The fourth initial code is transformation planning, which includes many procedures that prepare the two universities to transition to the Universities Law.

The second set of initial codes is tagged number (2). Some participants explained the challenges encountered during governance adaptation. There were five initial codes reflecting the challenges. The first of these initial codes is understanding governance, which means there is a discrepancy in understanding governance among stakeholders, which poses a challenge in adapting governance. Then, the second initial code focuses on qualifications and training, which reflects a weakness in the qualifications of some faculty members for leadership and governance. The third initial code is the ambiguity in procedures that led to the disruption of some adaptation processes. The fourth initial code is delaying regulation issuance, which identifies the reason for the ambiguity, which is the delay in issuing the executive regulations that help adapt the universities law. Finally, the initial code is resistance to change, which highlights the resistance of some university employees to change and the transition to universities law.

6.5.2 Categories Related to ‘Autonomy and Efficiency’

Table 19 below shows how the 13 initial codes are grouped into three categories related to autonomy and efficiency.

Table 19 Forming (3) categories related to autonomy and efficiency

Initial codes	Tag	(3) Categories (out of 9)
10- Board of Trustees establishment 11- Restructuring universities 12- Maximising institutional revenue streams 13- Expenditure efficiency	(1)	Autonomy and efficiency processes
14- Differences in understanding autonomy 15- Anxiety about giving autonomy 16- Centralisation 17- Capital projects falter 18- Empowerment without efficiency	(2)	Autonomy and efficiency challenges
19- Administrative autonomy 20- Managing financial autonomy 21- Exercising academic freedom 22- Disciplined autonomy	(3)	Institutional autonomy

The first group of initial codes tagged number (1) in Table 19, participants explained the processes to enhance autonomy and efficiency. The first of these processes towards autonomy is the establishment of the Board of Trustees at the two universities. The second initial code is restructuring universities to enhance autonomy and achieve efficiency. The third initial code is maximising institutional revenue streams, which play a role in increasing universities’ sources of income to achieve financial autonomy. The fourth initial code is expenditure efficiency, which focuses on the measures taken by universities to ensure that spending from the budget is on the allocated items and with the highest efficiency.

The second group containing the initial codes is tagged with the number (2) in Table 19. Participants explained the challenges to enhance autonomy and efficiency. There were six initial codes that depicted challenges. The first of these challenges towards autonomy is the differences in understanding of autonomy, which constitute a discrepancy between what the UAC seeks to achieve and what universities expect. The second initial code is anxiety about giving autonomy, meaning that there is concern among the decision-makers about granting autonomy to universities. The third initial code is centralisation, which reflects the centrality of the UAC in the decision-making process, which posed a challenge in achieving autonomy. The fourth initial code is the falter of capital projects, which appeared due to inefficient spending and reduced budgets. Finally, the initial code is empowerment without efficiency, which is the culture of empowering women without regard to efficiency, which has affected the achievement of efficiency in some fields.

The third group containing the initial codes is tagged with the number (3) in Table 19, represents the institutional autonomy in the two universities, the most prominent of which is administrative autonomy, which describes the weakness of the administrative autonomy of the universities. The second initial code is managing financial autonomy, highlighting the reality of universities' financial autonomy and their responsibility to the budget. The third initial code is exercising academic freedom, which has been described as being limited at the two universities. The fourth initial code is disciplined autonomy, which is considered an exploration of a new concept that reflects the autonomy implemented in Saudi higher education.

6.5.3 Categories Related to ‘Transparency and Accountability’

Table 20 below shows how the eight initial codes are grouped into two categories related to the framework.

Table 20 Forming (2) categories related to transparency and accountability

Initial codes	Tag	(2) Categories – (out of 9)
23- Universities Affairs Council establishment 24- Audit and governance committees 25- Automating university processes 26- Integration of performance indicators	(1)	Transparency and accountability processes
27- Conflicts of interest 28- Organisational culture 29- Fear of accountability 30- Information asymmetry	(2)	Transparency and accountability challenges

The first group of initial codes tagged number (1) in Table 20 represents processes of improving transparency and accountability. There were four initial codes depicting processes. The first of these processes is the establishment of the Universities Affairs Council, which is considered a legislative and supervisory authority for universities and one of the mechanisms for accountability and enhancing transparency. The second initial code is audit and governance committees, which are committees that have been formed in the Board of Trustees and have a role in enhancing accountability and transparency. The third initial code is automating university processes, which refers to converting all procedures within the university from manual to automated, which improves transparency in procedures for stakeholders. The fourth initial code is the integration of performance indicators, which have been adopted as an indicator for measuring the performance of universities and holding them accountable based on them.

The second group of initial codes tagged number (2) in Table 20 represents challenges of improving transparency and accountability. There were four initial codes depicting challenges. The first of these challenges is the conflict of interest between the Board of Trustees and the University Council. The second initial code is organisational culture, which played a role in the continuity of work in universities without transparency for some stakeholders-related processes. The third initial code is the fear of accountability,

which posed a challenge to university employees and made them not present any proposal or initiative for fear of falling under accountability. The fourth initial code is the information asymmetry, which is considered one of the agency's problems due to the lack of a representative of the Ministry of Education on the University Council.

6.5.4 Categories Related to 'Participation and Responsibility'

Table 21 below shows how the eight initial codes are grouped into two categories related to participation and responsibility.

Table 21 Forming (2) categories related to participation and responsibility

Initial codes	Tag	(2) Categories (out of 9)
31- Decision-making processes 32- Expanding stakeholder participation 33- Ethical leadership 34- Duties and tasks guide 35- Job performance evaluation	(1)	Participation and responsibility processes
36- Overlapping responsibilities 37- Inactive participation 38- Favouritism	(2)	Participation and responsibility challenges

The first group of initial codes tagged number (1) in Table 21 represents processes of taking responsibility and participation. There were five initial codes depicting processes. The first initial code is making decision processes, which explains the sequence of decision-making processes within universities through councils. The second initial code is expanding stakeholder participation, which indicates an expansion of the participation of internal and external stakeholders in decision-making processes. The third initial code is ethical leadership, which highlights the role of leadership in promoting participation and consultation and not being alone in making decisions individually. The fourth initial code is the duties and tasks guide, which specifies the responsibilities of faculty members and employees, and they are held accountable accordingly. The fifth initial code is job performance evaluation, which indicates the role of the evaluation mechanism in motivating employees and making them work more responsibly.

The second group of initial codes tagged number (2) in Table 21 represents the challenges of taking responsibility and participation. There were five initial codes depicting challenges. The first initial code is overlapping responsibilities, which shows that there is overlap between the responsibilities of the different governance boards, which poses a challenge in defining responsibilities between the boards. The second initial code is ineffective participation, which indicates that their participation sometimes remains ineffective with the expansion of stakeholder involvement. The third initial code is fear of leaders, which affects the effectiveness of participation within councils and the member's freedom to vote on decisions. The fourth initial code is the leadership nomination mechanism, which explains that the selection of leaders

is not done with the participation of stakeholders but rather individually. The fifth initial code is favouritism, which indicates the presence of some unethical and irresponsible practices.

6.5.5 Categorising the Category through Shared Ideas

As shown in Table 22 below, during the coding process, the codes were reviewed and put into categories according to common ideas. The nine categories were grouped, and common themes were identified between them through adapting governance in the first set of categories tagged number (1), autonomy and efficiency in the second set tagged number (2), and transparency and accountability in the third set of categories tagged number (3), and participation and responsibility in the last set of categories tagged number (4).

Table 22 Emergent (4) groups of themes

(9) Categories	Tag	Shared ideas
1. Governance adaptation processes 2. Governance adaptation challenges	(1)	Adapting governance
3. Autonomy and efficiency processes 4. Autonomy and efficiency challenges 5. Institutional autonomy	(2)	Autonomy and efficiency
6. Transparency and accountability processes 7. Transparency and accountability challenges	(3)	Transparency and accountability
8. Participation and responsibility processes 9. Participation and responsibility challenges	(4)	Participation and responsibility

The categories have been developed into subthemes that are related to the themes derived from the data. Table 23 includes the four themes and their definitions.

Table 23 Themes and their definitions

(9) Categories	Categorised by	Definitions	(4) Themes
1. Governance adaptation processes	(1) Adapting governance	Participants' opinions and experiences concerning adapting governance implementation. This includes the UAC making efforts to adapt to governance, represented by choosing a mixed governance model and then harmonising the legal regulations to adapt to the new legislation, and the standards	Adapting governance implementation

2. Governance adaptation challenges		set to measure the readiness of universities to transition to the Universities Law. However, governance adaptation processes faced some challenges. Such as the disparity in understanding of governance among stakeholders, weak qualifications, and the lack of specialists in leadership and governance, which posed a challenge in adaptation. There was also ambiguity in the adaptation processes resulting from the delay in issuing the executive regulations of the law	
3. Autonomy and efficiency processes	(2) Autonomy and efficiency	Participants' answers revealed the processes and challenges of autonomy and efficiency. The processes began with forming boards of trustees in universities, restructuring universities, and strengthening internal resources to achieve financial autonomy and efficient spending. However, universities faced some challenges from differences in understanding autonomy among stakeholders. There is also anxiety about granting universities complete autonomy and centralisation. In terms of efficiency, there were two challenges: the faltering of some projects and empowerment based on inefficiency	Enhancing autonomy and efficiency
4. Autonomy and efficiency challenges			
5. Institutional autonomy			
6. Transparency and accountability processes	(3) Transparency and accountability	Participants explained the processes and challenges of improving transparency and accountability. The processes include establishing the UAC and the audit and governance committees affiliated with the Board of Trustees, automating university operations, and adopting accurate indicators to measure the performance of universities and holding them accountable accordingly. However, universities have faced some challenges in improving transparency and accountability, such as conflict between boards, fear of accountability, organisational culture, and information asymmetry	Improving transparency and accountability
7. Transparency and accountability challenges			
8. Participation and responsibility processes	(4) Participation and responsibility	Participants answered about the processes and challenges of taking responsibility and participation. Decision making at universities is done collectively through councils and there is an expansion of stakeholder participation. Ethical leadership played a role in enhancing participation and responsible leadership work. Job performance evaluation has also been developed to become more responsible. On the other hand, universities faced some challenges represented by overlapping responsibilities between councils, the ineffective participation of some stakeholders and their fear of presidents, and there is also the presence of favouritism in the university.	Assuming responsibility and participation
9. Participation and responsibility challenges			

In the previous Table, themes were defined, containing categories and initial codes. All themes will be presented and explained in detail in the following sections.

6.6 Themes

This section presents the four key themes extracted from the thematic analysis: ‘adapting governance implementation’, ‘enhancing autonomy and efficiency’, ‘improving transparency and accountability’ and ‘assuming responsibility and participation’. Each theme will be introduced and supported by a representative participant quote. A more detailed discussion, including interpretation of results and additional citations, will be provided in the next chapter.

6.6.1 Theme 1: Adapting Governance Implementation

This theme represents the opinions and experiences of the interviewees regarding the processes and challenges of adapting governance implementation at the two universities. Two categories are related to this theme: governance adaptation processes and governance adaptation challenges. The following table shows the breakdown of the identified theme in terms of the number of mentions, and frequency of participants who mentioned it.

Table 24 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 1

Properties	Frequency of mentions	Number of participants	Institution/Body
Mixed governance model	8	3	UAC
Standards for universities readiness	12	6	UAC + Both Universities
Desiring change and development	7	4	University 1
Transformation planning	14	7	Both Universities
Understanding governance	11	8	UAC + Both Universities
Qualifying and training	10	6	Both Universities
Ambiguity in procedures	13	7	Both Universities
Delaying regulation issuance	16	12	UAC + Both Universities
Resisting change	9	5	University 1

- **Governance Adaptation Processes**

The first category is governance adaptation processes. This category includes various actions, which are the UAC of the Ministry of Education and the two universities, to adapt governance and transition to the universities' laws.

Universities previously operated under the Higher Education and Universities Law based on an academic governance model (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). When drafting the new Universities Law, the governance model was changed to suit the goals of Saudi higher education. Therefore, the UAC chose the trustee

governance model and developed it from other governance models, so the governance model used was a mixed governance model.

“To choose the governance model, we analysed some higher education systems in the world, and we saw what is good and appropriate for Saudi Arabia and what we want to achieve in the future. Therefore, the Board of Trustees model was chosen with some modifications from other models, so we have a mixed model” [UAC-P11].

Universities which had previously operated under the previous Higher Education Law needed to undergo major amendments to align their existing legislation and regulations with the requirements of the new Universities Law. This alignment process was extensive and required a coordinated effort to ensure all administrative, financial and academic regulations are aligned with the new governance framework. One participant from UAC highlighted the complexity and comprehensiveness of this endeavour.

“The process of preparing administrative, financial, and academic regulations is arduous. The UAC adopted a very wonderful method, starting with setting regulations, and then reviewing them with a group of committees, jurists, and experts to be compatible with other regulations” [UAC-P13].

This quote demonstrates the collaborative approach adopted by the UAC, which brings together multiple stakeholders and experts to ensure comprehensive and effective regulations. The iterative review process helped improve and align the new regulations with existing laws, thus facilitating a smoother transition for the universities.

Moreover, the UAC has established specific criteria to evaluate the readiness of universities to transition to the new law. These criteria covered financial, administrative and academic dimensions, providing a comprehensive framework for assessment. The selection of the top two universities based on these assessments underscores the merit-based and governance-focused approach followed by the UAC.

“The council approved criteria to be applied to universities to measure their readiness to transfer to the new law financially, administratively, and academically. The two highest universities were selected in the evaluation, and this is considered a matter of governance, as the university was not chosen at random” [UAC-P12].

This selection process highlights the UAC's commitment to ensuring that universities with sufficient readiness and capacity to lead the implementation process are selected. This not only enhanced equity but also set a standard for other universities to aspire to.

The intense competition among universities for the opportunity to be chosen as pioneers in implementing the new law reflects the university leaders' eagerness for change and their belief in the benefits of the new governance framework. This enthusiasm is embodied in the sentiments expressed by one of the university leaders.

“We received this law with much pleasure and saw it as a breakthrough. The university president was very happy that our university was chosen to implement the law because it is an indication that the university has administrative, academic and research maturity that makes it among the independent universities” [U1-P3].

This positive reception indicates a strong commitment to and confidence in the new governance model, indicating that universities are well placed to embrace the changes and drive forward the objectives of the Universities Law.

The UAC mandated the two selected universities to develop comprehensive transition plans to ensure an orderly and well-managed transition process. This guidance aims to provide a clear roadmap for the transition process, including timelines and specific actions to be taken. The participant from the UAC confirmed this.

“The Council of Ministers’ decision stipulated that universities be given a two-year opportunity to convert to the new law. Accordingly, the UAC asked the two universities to work on a transformation plan” [UAC-P13].

The development of these plans confirms the UAC strategic approach to adapting to management, emphasising careful planning and phased implementation. By providing a two-year transition period, the UAC has provided sufficient time for universities to adapt to the new regulations.

These steps outline governance adaptation and efforts to implement the universities law effectively. The next category within this theme addresses the challenges encountered during this adaptation.

- **Governance Adaptation Challenges**

The second category addresses the governance adaptation challenges. This category includes several challenges that highlight university and higher education leaders' obstacles in implementing the universities law.

The disparity in understanding governance concepts among university leaders represents a major challenge in adapting governance implementation. This disparity has hampered the effective adaptation of the governance principles set out in the Universities Law. This is what the participant from the university pointed out.

“The failure of law implementation up to this point is due to a lack of understanding of governance, whether by members of the current Board of Trustees or even the university administration” [U1-P5].

This quote underscores the insufficient knowledge and understanding of governance among key stakeholders. The problem is exacerbated by the shortage of qualified specialists in the field of governance within universities due to the lack of training and preparation of faculty members for leadership roles.

“The university administration does not work to qualify second-level leaders, and the selection of leaders is managed randomly and personally” [U1-P8].

This lack of leadership development and random selection processes hinders the establishment of good governance practices, making it difficult for universities to align with governance requirements.

In addition, ambiguity in adaptation processes and procedures further complicated implementation efforts at the two universities. One participant highlighted the initial confusion and uncertainty surrounding the new law.

“It is no secret to you that the law is new and that the most notable challenge at the beginning was that there was somewhat ambiguity” [U2-P14].

This ambiguity is primarily due to the delay in issuing the executive regulations of the new law, which left universities struggling fully to interpret and implement its provisions:

“The Universities Law was initially not clear to us, and we faced a challenge in not issuing the law regulations from the UAC so that we could fully implement the law” [U2-P15].

The delay in issuing these basic regulations has created significant obstacles, as universities have been left without clear guidance on how to proceed with the new universities law.

Furthermore, resistance to change among university staff was a major obstacle. Many employees, accustomed to the old system, were reluctant to embrace the new law.

“People themselves disrupt change and planning, by resisting change. The new university law is a major radical change system. There are samples of people who are accustomed to the old law and who resist change to the new law” [U1-P7].

This resistance highlights the human factor in the adaptation process, where entrenched habits and familiarity with the previous system lead to hesitation and opposition to new governance practices.

In summary, the challenges of management adaptation are multifaceted and include both structural and human elements. Understanding these challenges is crucial to effectively address them and successfully implement the new Universities Law. Chapter 7 will further analyse and discuss these issues, providing further insights into the complexities of adapting governance in higher education.

6.6.2 Theme 2: Enhancing Autonomy and Efficiency

This theme represents the views and experiences of the interviewees regarding the processes and challenges of enhancing the autonomy and efficiency of universities. Three categories are related to this theme: the processes of autonomy and efficiency, the challenges of autonomy and efficiency, and institutional

autonomy. The following table shows the breakdown of the identified theme in terms of the number of mentions, frequency of participants who mentioned it.

Table 25 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 2

Properties	Frequency of mentions	Number of participants	Institution/Body
Board of Trustees establishment	12	7	University 1
Restructuring universities	11	6	UAC + Both Universities
Maximising institutional revenue streams	5	2	UAC
Expenditure efficiency	8	4	UAC + University 1
Differences in understanding autonomy	8	7	UAC + Both Universities
Anxiety about giving autonomy	4	4	University 1
Centralisation	7	5	Both Universities
Capital projects falter	4	2	University 1
Empowerment without efficiency	10	8	Both Universities
Administrative autonomy	8	5	Both Universities
Managing financial autonomy	12	6	Both Universities
Exercising academic freedom	10	7	Both Universities
Disciplined autonomy	20	15	UAC + Both Universities

- **Autonomy and Efficiency Processes**

Establishing the Boards of Trustees at the two universities chosen to implement the Universities Law was an important step towards achieving university autonomy. One of the participants from the UAC stressed the importance of this measure.

"The most important measure taken by the UAC was the formation of boards of trustees in the two universities because the law aims to give universities more autonomy and dependence on their own resources" [UAC-P13].

The UAC restructured the universities to facilitate the implementation of the Universities Law. This restructuring process aims to align universities with the articles of the Universities Law, to achieve autonomy and efficiency of spending as one participant in the UAC noted.

“Restructuring universities aims to raise the readiness of universities to implement the new law and reduce centralisation through boards of trustees to achieve autonomy, accountability, and expenditure efficiency” [UAC-P12].

One of the main processes for achieving financial autonomy included strengthening the universities' resources and enabling them to cover part of their expenses independently. One participant from the UAC explained this.

“The new law aims to maximising institutional revenue streams, because the government was spending 25% of its budget on education, but in contrast, when you see the outputs from universities, it is not considered an investment at all and cannot be accepted in any country” [UAC-P11].

The same participant also explained that with universities now required to generate a portion of their budget through their resources, there has been a renewed focus on spending efficiency. Ensuring expenses are allocated appropriately and managed efficiently has become crucial.

“Expenditure efficiency is very important. Today, the dean of the college does not come out until he makes sure that the lights are turned off in his college. Because the Ministry of Finance has started to accountable universities for electricity bills” [UAC-P11].

This category focused on processes related to autonomy and efficiency. In the next section, the focus will shift to the challenges associated with achieving autonomy and efficiency.

- **Autonomy and Efficiency Challenges**

The challenges of autonomy and efficiency reflect the obstacles facing the two universities in achieving these two principles. One major challenge is the different understanding of autonomy among stakeholders. This discrepancy affects the achievement of expected autonomy. Universities expected complete autonomy after implementing the Universities Law, which was indicated by one of the participants.

“The university did not become autonomous, but the powers were withdrawn from the university administration, and the autonomy was not reflected in the faculties and faculty members, and the bureaucracy still exists” [U1-P8].

However, another participant from the same university believes that achieving autonomy is linked to accountability and acting based on government policies.

“Autonomy does not mean that the university operates outside the framework and laws of the government, so people must understand that the existence of autonomy is linked to the accountability of the government because it is responsible for financing the budget” [U1-P1].

There is also anxiety about granting full autonomy to universities. One participant noted the drafters of the university law may have been wary of granting full powers and independence to universities:

“I expect that the person who drafted this law has worried about giving universities complete autonomy, because if powers are given, they may be misused, and giving powers is not an easy matter, meaning when you are in a specific position and you have all the powers and decisions, then you give them to someone else, it may be a difficult decision” [U1-P3].

This anxiety from the UAC may stem from a lack of confidence in universities, which leads to universities being obligated to obtain multiple approvals for their decisions.

“The ministry needs to put confidence in the universities and tell them, do whatever you want, do not come back to us” [U1-P6].

Another challenge is the centralisation of decision-making in Saudi higher education. The UAC continues to exercise significant oversight over universities, requiring its approval of many decisions. A participant from a university confirmed this.

“I think the problem is that the UAC has not fully implemented the law, because, in fact, they say that you are an autonomous university but at the same time you cannot make a decision and you have to take our approval, so where is the autonomy” [U1-P6].

As for the challenges of spending efficiency, the pursuit of financial independence and spending efficiency affected some construction projects, causing their delay and suspension. This is what the participant from the university pointed out.

“On the financial side, recently some capital and construction projects may have been affected and work on them has been suspended until later notice” [U1-P4].

Another challenge to human resources efficiency is an exaggerated focus on empowering women at the expense of men without regard to efficiency. This concern was expressed by one participant.

“I am afraid that after a year we will claim the rights of men. What is happening now is not empowerment but racism. Because appointment and promotions to positions are not based on qualifications, but only because I want to appoint a woman” [U1-P6].

This category focused on challenges related to autonomy and efficiency. In the next section, the focus will be on the category of institutional autonomy.

- **Institutional Autonomy**

This category explores the current state of institutional autonomy at the two universities, focusing on aspects of administrative, financial and academic autonomy.

The results revealed the lack of real administrative autonomy in both universities. Despite the promise of greater administrative autonomy following the announcement of the Universities Law, this autonomy remains largely nominal, as one university participant noted.

“It was previously promoted autonomy and that there will be complete freedom for universities to dispose of their financial and administrative matters in a large way, but unfortunately, there is no real autonomy, meaning that what exists now is only nominal autonomy on paper” [U1-P5].

Financial autonomy also remains elusive. The two universities continue to receive their entire budget from the government and thus lack financial independence. As another participant explained, financial autonomy is seen as the most difficult form of autonomy to achieve.

“Currently, it is difficult to obtain financial autonomy without government support, but this may be in the future. That is why The Universities Law allowed us to invest and increase sources of income, and this is what we started to do to reach financial sustainability” [U1-P4].

Regarding academic freedom, the concept of complete academic freedom is absent in universities. Instead, an organised framework governs the educational process, with limited freedom in teaching and research. One of the university participants expressed this perspective.

“There is no complete academic freedom for a faculty member at our university or any other Saudi or international university. But there is limited freedom in research, teaching, creative presentation, and interaction with students” [U1-P3].

Therefore, “disciplined autonomy” is applied in Saudi universities. This new concept, repeatedly mentioned during data collection, reflects the extent to which autonomy has been achieved in universities that have implemented the Universities Law. It has become a widely used term within the Saudi higher education environment. One participant explained this concept by saying.

“I think disciplined autonomy is a kind of gradual implementation of the Universities Law, so after the completion of the transitional period, I think it will increase the level of autonomy” [U1-P3].

In summary, understanding the processes and challenges of institutional autonomy is crucial to addressing them effectively and ensuring the implementation of the new Universities Law. Chapter 7 will analyse and discuss these issues in more detail, providing further insights into achieving university autonomy and efficiency.

6.6.3 Theme 3: Improving Transparency and Accountability

This theme represents the opinions and experiences of the interviewees regarding the processes and challenges associated with improving transparency and accountability in universities. Two categories are related to this theme: transparency and accountability processes and transparency and accountability challenges. The following table shows the breakdown of the identified theme in terms of the number of mentions, and frequency of participants who mentioned it.

Table 26 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 3

Properties	Frequency of mentions	Number of participants	Institution/Body
Universities Affairs Council establishment	10	3	UAC
Audit and governance committees	7	5	University 1
Automating university processes	11	8	Both Universities
Integration of performance indicators	8	5	Both Universities
Conflicts of interest	12	6	UAC + University 1
Organisational culture	8	4	Both Universities
Fear of accountability	9	5	University 1
Information asymmetry	8	5	UAC + University 1

- **Transparency and Accountability Processes**

This category focuses on steps taken to enhance transparency and accountability within universities. The first important process was the establishment of the UAC, a supervisory and legislative body for universities that was established by the decision of the Prime Minister. The UAC is responsible for managing and evaluating the academic, administrative and financial performance of universities and supervising the performance of the various university councils. As one participant emphasised.

“The UAC has the authority to supervise and follow up on the work of the boards of trustees and university councils, we have a committee responsible for studying universities' decisions and whether they are heading to governance properly” [UAC-P11].

In addition, audit and governance committees have been formed as part of the transparency and accountability process. These committees, established by the university's Board of Trustees, include the committees on academic and research affairs, nominations and remuneration, audit, and investment. One participant explained the rationale behind this structure.

“The Board of Trustees formed committees because it believed that these committees would help it in the process of university governance” [U1-P2].

One of the processes undertaken to improve transparency is the automation of university processes due to its role in controlling the quality of processes and ensuring transparency. This is what one of the participants in the UAC highlighted.

“One of the criteria for selecting universities that implement the law is that they have automation of academic, administrative, and financial processes to achieve transparency and quality” [UAC-P13].

To enhance accountability for universities, performance indicators have been adopted as a basic tool used by universities and the Ministry of Education to measure the level of governance implementation, track processes and procedures, and ensure their quality. One participant explained this by saying.

“Part of the Universities Law is for the university to have a strategic plan with clear and studied indicators, and to be in an annual report prepared by a committee at the university with clear and specific indicators from the Ministry of Education to ensure the achievement of the ruling” [U1-P7].

These processes confirm the efforts made to improve transparency and accountability in universities. The next section will address the challenges universities have faced in improving transparency and accountability.

- **Transparency and Accountability Challenges**

This category addresses the challenges that universities have faced in their efforts to improve transparency and accountability. One of the big challenges is the conflict between the Board of Trustees and the University Council because the Board of Trustees holds the University Council accountable for some of the decisions it makes. As one UAC participant noted.

“There is a university that has conflicts between the board of trustees and the university, and the reason is that the concept of trustees is new to them, and our role comes here in resolving these differences and bringing points of view closer” [UAC-P12].

The increased focus on accountability mechanisms has also generated fear among employees, discouraging them from proposing new initiatives. One participant explained this phenomenon.

“The regulatory authorities are now very strict, and people have become afraid to present any initiative that increases the income of the university because they may be investigated. This fear is due to previous cases of people who did things in good faith and were punished for violating the law” [U1-P6].

In addition to improving transparency, the organisational culture within universities is considered one of these challenges that often lacks a strong commitment to transparency, as the organisational culture in universities is not based on transparency. An example is that the governance framework is not announced

to some internal stakeholders in the university because it will not benefit them, according to what the participants from the university expressed.

“We have a governance framework that is announced to the work teams and senior management only, but for the university community it will not benefit them much” [U2-P14].

Moreover, one of the accountability and transparency challenges is the asymmetry of information between the university and the Ministry of Education, which is one of the agency's problems. The University Council has become independent and lacks a representative from the Ministry of Education, which has led to an asymmetry of information between the two parties. This communication gap is a problem, as one participant noted.

“Currently, the University Council does not include a representative from the Ministry of Education, and therefore there is a gap in information about the decisions taken. Therefore, we established an internal review committee to review the decisions and ensure their validity” [UAC-P12].

In summary, there are multiple challenges to transparency and accountability and need further analysis and explanation. Understanding these challenges is crucial to effectively address them and successfully implement the new universities law. Chapter 7 will analyse and discuss these issues further, further discussing achieving transparency and accountability.

6.6.4 Theme 4: Assuming Responsibility and Participation

This theme represents the opinions and experiences of the interviewees regarding the processes and challenges associated with stakeholder participation and taking responsibility. Two categories are related to this theme: processes of participation and responsibility and challenges of participation and responsibility. The following table shows the breakdown of the identified theme in terms of the number of mentions, frequency of participants who mentioned it.

Table 27 Summary of properties and participant data for theme 4

Properties	Frequency of mentions	Number of participants	Institution/Body
Decision-making processes	14	7	Both Universities
Expanding stakeholder participation	11	6	Both Universities
Ethical leadership	8	4	Both Universities
Duties and tasks guide	6	4	Both Universities
Job performance evaluation	7	5	Both Universities
Overlapping responsibilities	8	4	University 1

Inactive participation	7	5	University 1
Favouritism	5	4	University 1

- **Participation and Responsibility Processes**

The participation and responsibility processes category focus on stakeholders' participation in decision-making and their assumption of responsibilities. In universities, decision-making processes are collective through councils rather than individual, as one participant from the university explained.

“Decision-making processes are based on councils, and there are no individual decisions. The department head, dean, or university president cannot make decisions except with the approval of the relevant councils” [U1-P2].

After implementing the Universities Law, there was an expansion in the circle of decision-making to include external parties in many councils. Another participant described this broader implication.

“Academic accreditation requires us to have an international advisory council for the university in which external stakeholders participate, and sometimes they participate in committees for changing study plans to ensure their compatibility with the needs of the labour market” [U1-P2].

Ethical leadership also plays an important role in decision-making processes. Some university presidents enhance participation by consulting some vice presidents in most decisions, enhancing leaders' satisfaction and reassurance. One participant shared this experience:

“The university president came to all the vice presidents in their offices and consulted them and took their opinions. This happened to me more than once, and sometimes he contacts us in the evening for consultation, and this gives us a kind of comfort and reassurance in making decisions” [U1-P4].

Regarding responsibility processes, faculty members and staff are now working based on a manual of duties and tasks that clearly defines their responsibilities and duties. As another participant noted:

“Faculty members have clear responsibilities, and there is evidence approved by the University Council of the rights and duties of faculty members. There is a job description for the university staff, in which their responsibilities are explained, and students are also informed of their rights and duties” [U1-P3].

In addition, job performance evaluations have been developed to motivate faculty and staff to work more responsibly.

“The new job performance evaluation is somewhat different, as promotions have different criteria for employees and faculty members, and now they have only one choice, which is to work responsibly in order to be part of this university” [U1-P7].

These processes demonstrate a commitment to stakeholder participation and ensure that all university community members effectively assume their responsibilities.

- **Challenges of Participation and Responsibility**

The challenges of participation and responsibility category addresses the obstacles universities face in promoting effective stakeholder participation and responsibility. One of the big challenges in participation is the overlapping of powers between councils, which can lead to disagreements, as one participant noted.

“Overlapping powers between councils is one of the reasons for disagreements between the Board of Trustees and the university” [U1-P10].

Although expanding participation in decision-making processes was discussed in the previous category, the effectiveness of such participation remains questionable. One stakeholder noted ineffective stakeholder engagement.

“In all honesty, there is no participation of stakeholders, and what is done is their involvement only formally. For example, we have a student council, but does the student council influence the university’s decisions? No” [U1-P5].

In addition, one of the challenges of participation is the fear of superiors due to concern about public voting within department councils, which affects the effectiveness of member participation, as one participant explained.

“Faculty members participate in department councils, but they fear the department head and there is courtesy towards him, so they agree to everything he sees because he is the one responsible for approving or rejecting their matters. That is why voting within the council is supposed to take place in secret” [U1-P6].

One of the processes stipulated in the Universities Law is establishing a mechanism for nominating leaders to ensure the participation of stakeholders in the selection process. However, this mechanism has not been implemented effectively, as one participant explained.

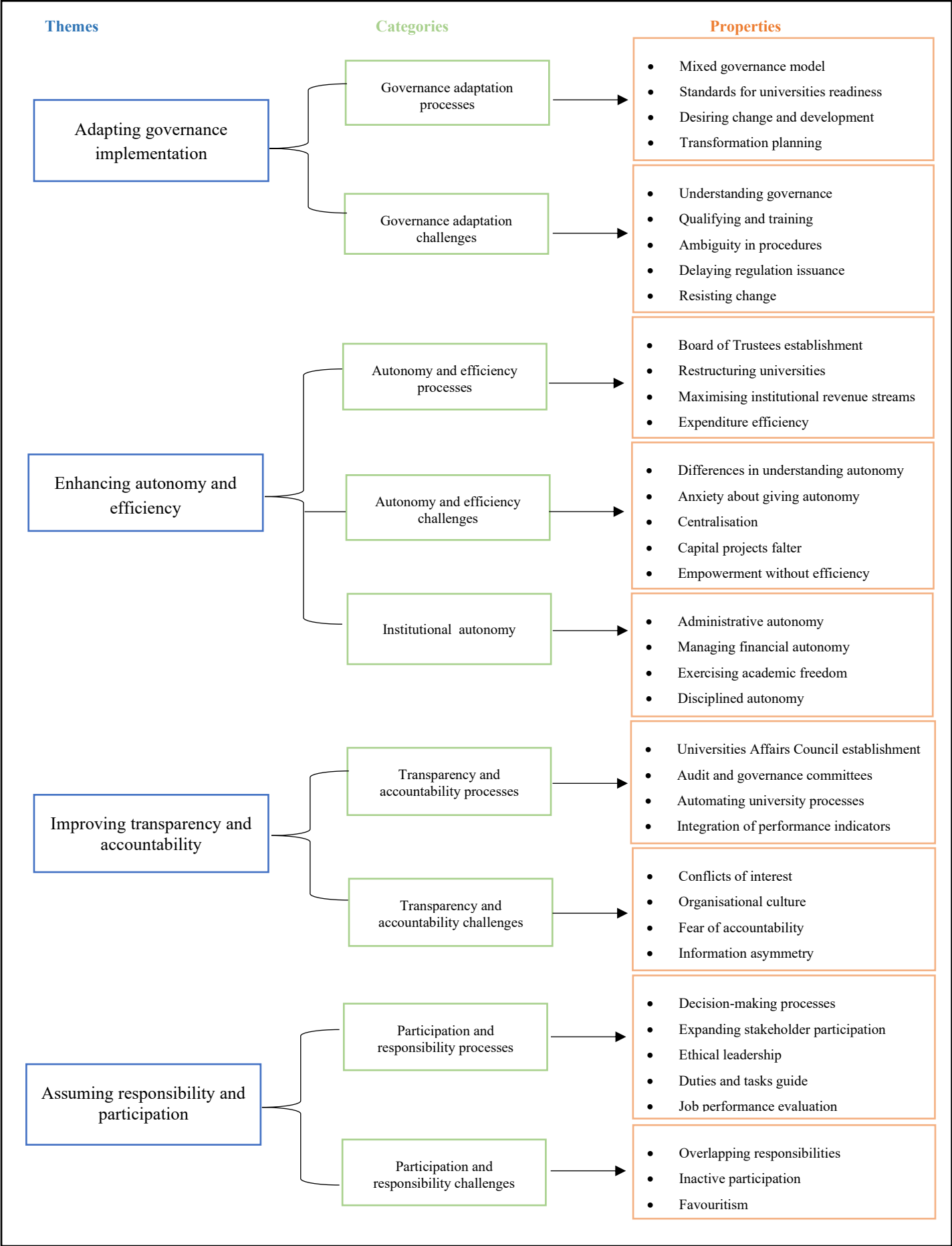
“The Universities Law established a mechanism for nominating leaders so that there is participation in decision-making, but unfortunately, we are still surprised by the appointment of deans and department heads, and our opinion as faculty members is not taken into consideration” [U1-P8].

Another challenge related to ethical responsibility is the prevalence of favouritism in some university matters. One participant from the university described this problem by saying.

“But there remains some favouritism and benefit me, and I will benefit you in some matters that may not reach the stage of violating the rights of others, but rather facilitating the affairs of a specific person” [U1-P6].

In summary, these challenges highlight the complexities and difficulties that universities face in ensuring meaningful and accountable engagement among stakeholders and highlight areas where further improvements are needed. In the following Figure 7, the key themes are summarised.

Figure 7 The themes, categories, and properties



6.7 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presents and describes the results of the initial and focused coding phases of the thematic analysis of data extracted from participant interviews. Four key themes emerged from the thematic analysis: ‘adapting governance implementation’, ‘enhancing autonomy and efficiency’, ‘improving transparency and accountability’ and ‘assuming responsibility and participation’.

These four key themes are the outcomes of the thematic analysis of the interviews. The themes, associated categories, and properties presented in this chapter will be thoroughly examined in the next chapter. Additionally, the results will be interpreted through relevant theoretical frameworks, discussed in the context of existing literature, and their implications will be determined.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings of this study were presented and analysed through thematic analysis of qualitative data. Building upon these findings, the current chapter addresses the research questions that guided this investigation and contextualises the findings within the existing literature. Specifically, this chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding by applying agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories to interpret the results and propose a governance framework for Saudi higher education.

The primary aim of this study is to develop an effective governance framework suitable for Saudi universities, considering the unique sociocultural, political, and economic characteristics of Saudi Arabia. The study set out with specific objectives: to explore governance concepts and theories, synthesising them into a coherent framework; to apply these theories in crafting a governance model that aligns with the requirements of the new Universities Law in Saudi Arabia; to examine the procedures and challenges encountered during the implementation of governance in two Saudi universities, offering practical recommendations for improvement; to solicit and integrate stakeholders' perspectives to enhance the development of an optimal governance framework; and finally, to propose a governance framework that is not only suitable but also applicable within the Saudi Arabian context.

The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: How does the new Universities Law differ from the previous Saudi Higher Education Law, and what are the implications of these differences for governance?

RQ2: What are the procedures and processes involved in implementing governance under the Universities Law?

RQ3: What are the difficulties and challenges that Saudi higher education faces during the implementation of governance?

RQ4: How can the implementation of governance in Saudi higher education be improved?

This chapter is structured into four main sections: a summary of the findings from the research, a detailed discussion of these findings in relation to the literature, the presentation of the proposed governance framework, and finally, a comprehensive summary of the chapter's key points.

7.2 Summary of the Findings

In this section, a summary of the findings of the four key themes, categories, and properties of each category will be presented in this chapter. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a qualitative approach was used for this study. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 stakeholders from the two universities under examination and leaders of the

Universities Affairs Council (UAC) in the Ministry of Education, the highest authority for universities based on the new universities law. The data has been analysed using thematic analysis.

7.2.1 Theme 1: Adapting Governance Implementation

- **Governance Adaptation Processes**
 - *Mixed governance model*
 - *Standards for universities readiness*
 - *Desiring change and development*
 - *Transformation planning*
- **Governance Adaptation Challenges**
 - *Understanding governance*
 - *Qualifying and training*
 - *Ambiguity in procedures*
 - *Delaying regulation issuance*
 - *Resisting change*

7.2.2 Theme 2: Enhancing Autonomy and Efficiency

- **Autonomy and Efficiency Processes**
 - *Board of Trustees establishment*
 - *Restructuring universities*
 - *Maximising institutional revenue streams*
 - *Expenditure efficiency*
- **Autonomy and Efficiency Challenges**
 - *Differences in understanding autonomy*
 - *Anxiety about giving autonomy*
 - *Centralisation*
 - *Capital projects falter*
 - *Empowerment without efficiency*
- **Institutional Autonomy**
 - *Administrative autonomy*
 - *Managing financial autonomy*
 - *Exercising academic freedom*
 - *Disciplined autonomy*

7.2.3 Theme 3: Improving Transparency and Accountability

- **Transparency and Accountability Processes**

- *Universities Affairs Council establishment*
- *Audit and governance committees*
- *Automating university processes*
- *Integration of performance indicators*

- **Transparency and Accountability Challenges**

- *Conflicts of interest*
- *Organisational culture*
- *Fear of accountability*
- *Information asymmetry*

7.2.4 Theme 4: Assuming Responsibility and Participation

- **Participation and Responsibility Processes**

- *Decision-making processes*
- *Expanding stakeholder participation*
- *Ethical leadership*
- *Duties and tasks guide*
- *Job performance evaluation*

- **Participation and Responsibility Challenges**

- *Overlapping responsibilities*
- *Inactive participation*
- *Favouritism*

7.3 Discussion of the Findings

The discussion of the findings will build on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 3. This framework proved invaluable for data collection, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the results. It employs agency, stakeholder, and stewardship theories as lenses for analysing and interpreting the findings. Additionally, the conceptual framework incorporates key principles of governance: autonomy, transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency, and responsibility.

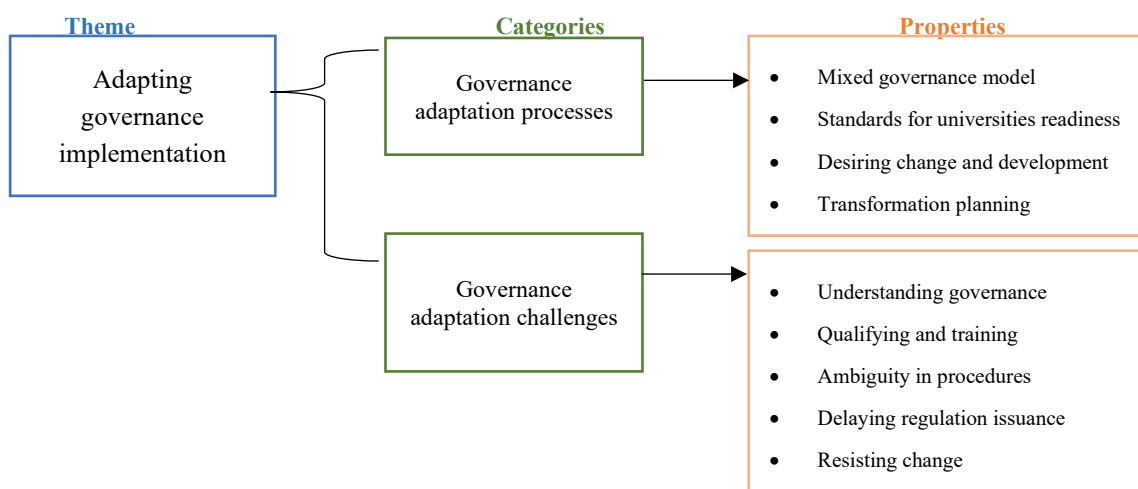
The literature supports the integration of governance principles, such as transparency with accountability, autonomy with efficiency, and responsibility with participation. These principles are frequently discussed together due to their interconnected nature. Transparency and accountability are mutually reinforcing, providing the necessary information for effective accountability mechanisms (Hood, 2014). Similarly, autonomy and efficiency are linked, as autonomy allows for more tailored and timely decision-making, enhancing efficiency (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Responsibility and participation are also closely related,

as active participation fosters a sense of responsibility among stakeholders (Bovens, 2007). This theoretical framework supports integrating these principles into combined themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of governance in higher education.

7.3.1 Theme 1: Adapting Governance Implementation

This theme represents the opinions and experiences of the interviewees regarding the processes and challenges of adapting governance implementation at the two universities. Two categories are related to this theme: governance adaptation processes and governance adaptation challenges (See Figure 8).

Figure 8 Theme 1 Adapting governance implementation



• Governance Adaptation processes

This category includes various actions the UAC and the two universities took to adapt governance and transition to the Universities Law.

○ *Mixed Governance Model*

This property indicates the adoption of the mixed model governance in Saudi higher education. Universities previously operated under the Higher Education and Universities Law based on an academic governance model. This is confirmed by the study of Al-Eisa and Smith (2013), which indicated that the academic governance model dominated Saudi higher education for many years and may not be suitable for overcoming future challenges facing the country.

When drafting the new Universities Law, the governance model was changed to suit the goals of Saudi higher education. Therefore, the UAC chose the trustee governance model and developed it from some other governance models so that the governance model used was a mixed governance model, as explained by a participant.

“To choose the governance model, we analysed some higher education systems in the world, and we saw what is good and appropriate for Saudi Arabia and what we want to achieve in the future. Therefore, the

Board of Trustees model was chosen with some modifications from other models, so we have a mixed model” [UAC-P11].

A participant explained that the mixed governance model developed is composed of governance models: trustees, academics, and stakeholders.

“We cannot say that we are only implementing the trustee’s model, rather is a combination of governance models suitable for Saudi universities, through the participation of trustees, academics, and stakeholders” [UAC -P12].

The current study's findings align with previous research, such as Dearlove (2002), which suggests that the hybrid governance model can effectively combine the benefits of various governance models to meet the diverse demands and objectives of universities. Additionally, Sultana (2012) emphasised the necessity for university governance models that account for the roles of academics and address the challenge of redistributing power. Moreover, the results are consistent with the studies of Castro (2012) and Burns et al. (2016), which argue that no single governance model is universally suitable for all institutions due to the differing strategies and goals of national higher education systems. Consequently, each nation adopts the governance model that best fits its resources and specific context.

Additionally, the components of the mixed governance model adopted in Saudi higher education align with Trakman (2008), who indicated that this model consists of various governance structures, including academic, corporate, trustees, and stakeholder models.

The current findings contribute to filling a gap in the literature. Albeshir's (2022) study provided a comparative analysis of the new university law and the previous higher education law, indicating that the new law will achieve governance. However, the gap in Albeshir's study lies in not identifying the specific governance model adopted in Saudi higher education. The current study addresses this gap by determining the components of the governance model. Consequently, these findings contribute to documenting the governance model applied in Saudi higher education, providing a clearer understanding and framework for future research and implementation.

The mixed governance model in Saudi higher education can be comprehensively explained through the integration of agency theory, stewardship theory, and stakeholder theory. Governance is structured through several councils, with the UAC at the highest authority level. This council, chaired by the Minister of Education and including representatives from government ministries and university presidents, is responsible for holding the boards of trustees accountable, aligning with agency theory. This theory highlights the principal-agent relationship, where the UAC (principal) oversees and ensures accountability from the boards of trustees (agents), mitigating potential misalignments of interests (Chandar et al., 2012; Faleye et al., 2011).

Each university has a Board of Trustees led by a non-academic chairperson and includes members from the private sector, investment specialists, academics, and stakeholders with educational and university sector experience, as well as the university president. According to stewardship theory, trustees and administrators act as stewards, aligning their goals with the university's long-term success and fostering an environment where academic and financial objectives are synergistically met (Davis et al., 1997).

Additionally, stakeholder theory is evident in including diverse members on the Board of Trustees, reflecting the importance of considering all parties affected by university governance. By integrating perspectives from the private sector, academia, and stakeholders with educational experience, the model ensures that decision-making processes are inclusive and reflect a broad range of needs and expectations (Freeman, 1984).

This mixed governance model represents a theoretical contribution by challenging traditional frameworks that rely solely on academic leadership. It demonstrates how insights from agency, stewardship, and stakeholder theories can be combined to provide a comprehensive understanding of governance adaptation in higher education. This approach explains the current shifts in Saudi higher education governance and suggests a framework for other institutions facing similar challenges, highlighting the value of an integrated theoretical approach to governance. By incorporating these multiple theoretical perspectives, the model proposes a more holistic approach that enhances both accountability and inclusivity, demonstrating the potential for improved governance practices in higher education (Duerrenberger & Warning, 2018; Alshaerb et al., 2017).

- ***Standards for Universities Readiness***

This property refers to Saudi universities' readiness standards for implementing the new Universities Law. According to the Council of Ministers' decision, the UAC must choose three universities as the first stage, at most, for the law to be implemented. Then it will be implemented in other universities gradually after studying the advantages and challenges of implementation (Universities Law, 2019).

The criteria for selecting universities were accurate in several fields, and there was organised and highly professional work to measure the readiness of universities, and the participant confirmed this.

“The standards were 23 standards that included 74 indicators to measure these standards in three administrative, financial, and academic fields. Then the data were collected and analysed in a systematic scientific statistical analysis, and considering them, the top two universities were selected” [UAC -P13].

The criteria were applied to all universities, after which data were collected based on 74 indicators (Appendix K) and analysed statistically. Based on the analysis results, the two best universities were chosen to implement the Universities Law at this stage. These two universities are the ones participating in this

study. The UAC made great efforts to select universities that have a strong infrastructure and the potential to implement the law, to ensure the success of governance, and this was confirmed by the participant.

“The standards were developed by specialists in measurement, and the aim was to assess the readiness of universities to implement the new law to ensure the success of implementation. The competition was great between universities, and these criteria helped us choose the best” [UAC -P11].

This finding aligns with several studies that advocate for assessing and measuring university autonomy across multiple dimensions. Pandey (2004) identifies academic, administrative, and financial aspects as crucial to evaluate when implementing university autonomy.

Jarernsiripornkul and Pandey (2018) reinforce the importance of assessing universities' preparedness for autonomy before implementing higher education governance, echoing the call for comprehensive evaluation frameworks. Additionally, Abdeldayem and Aldulaimi (2018) highlight the necessity of implementing governance standards in universities to ensure quality, autonomy, and operational effectiveness.

Furthermore, Büscher et al. (2023) propose the creation of frameworks to assess societal readiness for governance, emphasising the critical role of standards in measuring preparedness and guiding decision-makers towards effective governance implementation. These studies underscore the significance of structured assessments and standards in advancing university autonomy and governance practices. This finding contributes significantly to filling a gap in the literature. Alwarthan's (2021) study indicated that universities implementing the new University Law were selected based on specific criteria, but these criteria were not detailed. The current study addresses this gap by clarifying the methods and criteria used to measure university readiness. By providing a detailed explanation of these criteria, this study enhances our understanding of the selection process and offers a more transparent framework for assessing universities' readiness to implement the new law.

○ ***Desiring Change and Development***

The property of desiring change and development indicates the universities leaders' eagerness for change, their belief in the benefits of the new Universities Law, and their intense competition between universities to implement the law in the first stage. This enthusiasm is embodied in the sentiments expressed by one of the University 1 leaders.

“We received this law with much pleasure and saw it as a breakthrough. The university president was very happy that our university was chosen to implement the law because it is an indication that the university has administrative, academic and research maturity that makes it among the independent universities” [UI-P3].

This positive reception indicates a strong commitment to and confidence in the new governance model, indicating that universities are well placed to embrace the changes and drive forward the objectives of the Universities Law.

In addition, at University 2, some leaders believe that they are in the best position to implement the universities law, which reflects their desire to lead the transformation.

“Our university, based on the indicators, is ready for independence because it is one of the most prestigious Saudi universities. We will be one of the leading universities in the transition to the new law, and then the rest of the universities will follow us later” [U2-P15].

The current study reveals a pronounced desire among university leaders to change, develop, and adapt to the new university law. This finding aligns with Kok & McDonald's (2017) study, which identifies change management as crucial for achieving departmental excellence. Their research confirms that effective change management necessitates appropriate mindsets and structures, enabling reactive and proactive adjustments to enhance performance. Cultivating a culture that embraces change is essential in this context. Similarly, Hemsall (2014) emphasises the desire for higher education leaders to develop and respond effectively.

Additionally, Costandi et al. (2019) found a strong desire among academics in the Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, for positive change and governance implementation. The current study uniquely highlights the enthusiasm and commitment of university leaders to adapt to the new universities law. Understanding this desire helps elucidate the progress in adaptation processes, the leadership's influence on these processes, and the potential challenges these universities may encounter.

○ **Transformation Planning**

This property refers to the transformation planning that aims to develop a plan for transforming processes into the new Universities Law. The two universities developed a transformation plan based on the decision of the UAC, which recommended the need to develop a plan to follow up the implementation of the transformation processes during the specified period. This was explained by a participant from the UAC.

“The Council of Ministers’ decision stipulated that universities be given a two-year opportunity to convert to the new law. Accordingly, the UAC asked the two universities to work on a transformation plan” [UAC-P13].

Therefore, the process of implementing the transformation plan for governance in the two universities is somewhat similar since the UAC is the one that sets the standards and follows up on their implementation. However, during data collection, it appeared that there were differences in the implementation of the plan between the two universities.

In University 1 they have a transformation plan based on the same criteria that were used to measure universities' readiness for the new law. This was confirmed by a participant

"At the university, we have a transformation plan based on criteria close to the criteria established for selecting universities that implement the law" [U1-P3].

However, this plan has not been announced, and there is centralisation in managing the transition. This was confirmed by a participant.

"I was a member of the Transformation Committee, but unfortunately, in all honesty, the committee was managed centrally, there was no good interaction, and it did not take into account the opinions of the stakeholders" [U1-P5].

Therefore, the transformation plan at University 1 is not announced on the website, and there is no administration at the university responsible for the transformation. Matters are managed centrally, and there is a weakness in transparency.

On the other hand, the transformation plan in University 2 was more organised, as they established the transformation office to supervise the transformation plan, activate governance, and provide the necessary data for all university departments. This is what the participant explained.

"We began to draw a road map and set the paths and basics of the transformation plan. Accordingly, the transformation office was established" [U2-P15].

The transformation office at this university publishes plan information on the university's website, has an integrated work team and organisational structure for the office, and achieves the main goal of the transformation plan. This is what the participant indicated.

"The transformation office works to raise awareness of the universities law and awareness of the transformation office and its role in managing change, and we have a website where we publish all the important information" [U2-P14].

The current study's findings align with the study by Mader et al. (2013), who emphasised that change management is vital for governance transformation in higher education institutions due to its role in planning and coordinating the process. Additionally, the UAC centralised the planning for the transition to the university law. This finding aligns with Al-Khazim (2003), who noted that Saudi higher education is centrally managed with limited stakeholder participation. Despite this, the planning for transformation was different between the two universities, as explained by the participants. These differences will likely impact on the process and pose challenges in resisting change, which will be further discussed in the next category on the challenges of governance adaptation.

- **Governance Adaptation Challenges**

This category includes several challenges highlighting the obstacles that universities and higher education leaders face in implementing the Universities Law.

- ***Understanding Governance***

This property refers to the disparity in understanding governance concepts among university leaders, representing a major challenge in adapting governance implementation. This disparity has hampered the effective adaptation of the governance principles set out in the universities law, due to insufficient knowledge and understanding of governance among key stakeholders. This is what a participant from University 1 explained.

“The failure of law implementation up to this point is due to a lack of understanding of governance, whether by members of the current Board of Trustees or even the university administration” [U1-P5].

The other participant pointed out that governance should seek to achieve the university’s goals and aspirations and not disrupt them.

“Governance should not hinder the goals or ambitions of the university. Therefore, the goal of governance should be to motivate and focus on strategies” [U1-P1].

While another participant asserts that university employees and internal stakeholders need to be aware of governance.

“I will be transparent: we still need more awareness of governance for all university employees” [U1-P4].

Also, some external stakeholders and community members have a different understanding of governance and need to be aware of the concept of governance. This is what the participant indicated.

“The external community also still needs more awareness about governance and what this law means, because there is an understanding that the university will become independent, and therefore fees will be imposed on students and their rewards will be stopped” [U1-P7].

Moreover, at University 2 there are attempts to raise governance awareness through the transformation office. This is what the participant indicated.

“Governance is one of the matters that the Transformation Office is working on, and we are currently working on the procedures for transitioning to the new law based on the institutional governance framework” [U2-P14].

These measures aim to increase awareness and understanding of governance, and therefore, the university holds workshops for internal stakeholders, excluding students. As indicated by the participant.

“We have workshops to raise awareness of governance and to prepare faculty and staff, while students may not have a direct relationship in implementing governance” [U2-P15].

The exclusion of students from governance awareness programmes highlights a significant discrepancy in the understanding and implementation of governance within the university. As the most important internal stakeholders, students' perspectives and engagement are vital for the success of governance (Marshall, 2018).

As revealed in the literature, the challenge of differences in understanding governance in Saudi universities underscores a fundamental issue where stakeholders lack a coherent understanding of governance principles and practices (Schmidt, 2015; Scott, 2018). This contradiction is evident in the different interpretations and expectations regarding governance structures and responsibilities, which are largely influenced by the prevailing reliance of corporate governance approaches on academic or collective models (Barac & Marx, 2012; Sultana, 2012). While some participants demonstrate familiarity with governance norms, others struggle with the terminology and purpose of governance, highlighting a lack of foundational knowledge and engagement (Brown, 2011). This lack of clarity complicates decision-making processes and affects perceptions of governance effectiveness and institutional stability (Carnegie & Tuck, 2011).

The challenge of differing understandings of governance in Saudi universities can be effectively explained through the theory of stakeholders. According to stakeholder theory, organisations must navigate the diverse interests and expectations of stakeholders who have an acquired interest in the institution's operations and outcomes (Freeman, 1984). In Saudi universities, stakeholders such as faculty members, business leaders, and the local community may hold different perspectives on governance priorities. Faculty members typically define the priorities of academic autonomy and educational quality, while business leaders may focus on financial sustainability and strategic management. Meanwhile, societal stakeholders often advocate transparency, inclusivity, and social responsibility in governance decisions. Therefore, universities must intensify awareness of governance and its principles for all stakeholders.

○ ***Qualifying and Training***

This property indicates weak qualification and training, which presented challenges to adapting governance, due to faculty members' lack of training and preparation for leadership roles. As indicated by the participant.

“The university administration does not work to qualify second-level leaders, and the selection of leaders is managed randomly and personally” [U1-P8].

This lack of leadership development and random selection processes hinders the establishment of good governance practices, making it difficult for universities to align with governance requirements. The other participant asserts that academics are the best people to govern the university, but he needs training and qualifications.

“The academic is the son of the university and is the best for its governance, but we must qualify him administratively and leadership so that he can be a successful leader and participate in decision-making” [U1-P5].

However, the other participant, an academic and leader at the university, believes that some leadership positions do not require the appointment of a faculty member, but rather the administrative employee can be qualified for those positions.

“In some deanships, we may not need to appoint an academic as their dean, but rather the administrative employee is sufficient, but we may need to qualify them and give them experience to carry out leadership tasks” [U1-P1].

Governance training programmes are crucial for equipping university leaders and staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement governance frameworks effectively (Naciri, 2009; Zinkin, 2011). Such training ensures that employees understand the core principles of governance, enabling them to effectively address stakeholder needs and expectations (Prasad, 2014). Moreover, Solomon (2007) emphasises that governance education helps organise and maintain healthy relationships between the university and its stakeholders, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability. Without these essential training programmes, Saudi universities may struggle with mismanagement and inefficiencies, undermining their organisational performance and stakeholder trust. Thus, prioritising comprehensive governance training is imperative for Saudi universities to navigate the complexities of governance and enhance their overall effectiveness and resilience in the face of evolving challenges.

○ ***Ambiguity in Procedures***

This property refers to ambiguity in adaptation processes and procedures, further complicating implementation efforts at the two universities. In University 1, there was confusion in the adaptation due to the continued operation of old regulations that conflicted with the new law. This is what the participant indicated.

“We at the university felt disoriented due to the failure to issue new regulations and the continued implementation of old regulations with a new law. Also, it is not within our authority to be diligent in changing the regulations, as when implementing the new law, we became confused” [U1-P1].

The other participant revealed that the ambiguity is beyond the university's control and that even some leaders at the university do not have the information to answer some inquiries about the new law.

"There is still a lack of clarity in some things that are beyond the control of the university. In many cases, you ask some university officials about implementing some points in the law and what is the procedure in this case, and they answer you and say we do not know" [I-6-M].

The other participant asserts that ambiguity in procedures may cause chaos and disagreements.

"Whenever there are clear laws, policies, and implementing rules down to the smallest details, independence can be achieved. As for leaving things in this way to personal whims, it will undoubtedly cause chaos and be a source of great disagreements" [U1-P5].

Moreover, in University 2, ambiguity was challenging for them in their adaptation processes. As the participant pointed out.

"It is no secret to you that the law is new and that the most notable challenge at the beginning was that there was somewhat ambiguity" [U2-P14].

The other participant revealed that this ambiguity caused some employees to be afraid of their retirement status.

"Any major change brings with it ambiguity and fear, and when the decision came out, there were many questions from administrators and doctors who would retire whether their retirement would be affected. Unfortunately, the executive and detailed regulations were not clear" [U2-P15].

The outcome of ambiguity in governance procedures is a multifaceted issue with positive and negative implications, reflecting diverse perspectives in the literature. On one hand, ambiguity can be seen as a beneficial feature that enhances governance by fostering flexibility and responsiveness. For instance, Lipsky (2010) and Meier (2019) argue that administrative discretion, enabled by ambiguity, allows officials to adapt public services to the needs of citizens, thereby promoting active representation and more effective service delivery. This viewpoint is consistent with the idea that ambiguity allows for adaptive decision-making in complex and changing environments, encouraging innovation and responsiveness to local needs (Raaphorst and Groeneveld, 2019).

Conversely, ambiguity can also be viewed as a hindrance to governance, creating challenges in accountability and coherence. Hupe and Hill (2007) and Rabiee and Assef (2012) highlight that ambiguity can lead to inconsistent application of laws and policies, allowing for the manipulation of programmes and potential corruption. This perspective is supported by the notion that unclear procedures and goals can result in a public service gap, where citizens' expectations are not met due to the misalignment of services (Hupe

& Buffat, 2013; Zahariadis, 2014). The divergence in these viewpoints underscores the complexity of managing ambiguity within institutions, necessitating a balance between the need for flexibility and the imperative of maintaining clear, accountable, and coherent governance structures. Thus, while ambiguity can enhance responsiveness and adaptability, it simultaneously poses risks to the principles of accountability and equity.

The challenge of ambiguity in procedures faced by Saudi higher education institutions during governance adaptation can be effectively explained through the agency theory. According to agency theory, organisational governance involves relationships where principals (UAC) delegate authority to agents (universities) to act on their behalf (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). In Saudi universities, procedure ambiguity may arise due to unclear delineation of roles and responsibilities between governing bodies, administrators, and faculty members. This lack of clarity can lead to inefficiencies, decision-making delays, and potential conflicts of interest, as agents may pursue personal agendas rather than align with institutional goals (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, the UAC needs to work with universities with greater transparency in procedures and processes and make them clearer so universities can adapt their governance processes.

- ***Delaying Regulation Issuance***

This property indicates the delay in issuing the regulations for the new university law, which constituted a major challenge to governance adaptation. When the Universities Law was issued, it included 58 articles that needed implementing regulations so that universities could fully implement the law. Everyone whose opinions were collected from both universities concurred that this problem has impeded implementation because the Universities Law cannot be completely implemented without rules. This is what the participant from University 1 indicated.

“I have some blame on the UAC for the delay in issuing the regulations. The university cannot determine the regulations of the law alone. Unfortunately, two years since the law was passed and no regulations have been issued” [U1-P1].

Moreover, in University 2, the participant indicated that the delay in issuing regulations was a challenge for them.

“The Universities Law was initially not clear to us, and we faced a challenge in not issuing the law regulations from the UAC so that we could fully implement the law” [U2-P15].

Issuing university law regulations is the UAC's responsibility, so the two universities have no role in facing this challenge. Participants from the UAC acknowledged that this is a challenge being addressed. This is what the participant explained.

“The main challenge announced by the universities that implemented the new law is the lack of issuance of regulations, and we agree with this. We are now working to full potential to issue these regulations, and their issuance is expected soon” [UAC-P13].

The other participant also attested to the reality of this challenge, which is a major reason for the ambiguity discussed in the previous property.

“The point is clear to us that the failure to issue regulations obstructed the implementation of the law. The UAC is aware of this, and the regulations are on their way to being issued” [UAC-P12].

The delay in issuing the regulations is due to the approach followed by the UAC in drafting the regulations, as they are carried out with the participation of all universities and require coordination and more time. This is confirmed by the participant.

“The process of issuing regulations is done very professionally. Starting from communicating with universities to take their opinions on the draft regulation, passing through legal committees, and ending with review and arbitration by experts, it takes a long time to complete it” [UAC-P11].

The other reason is that the regulations need to be compatible with other laws and not conflict with them, and this requires comprehensive review by experts. This is confirmed by the participant.

“The process of preparing administrative, financial, and academic regulations is arduous. The UAC adopted a very wonderful method, starting with setting regulations, and then reviewing them with a group of committees, jurists, and experts in order to be compatible with other regulations” [UAC-P13].

These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the critical role of legal regulations in enabling robust governance frameworks. For instance, Kataoka and Shahverdyan (2013) found that the absence of a legal framework undermines governance implementation, failing to achieve necessary autonomy and accountability. Similarly, Windholz (2017) emphasised that the formulation and enactment of regulations are persistent challenges higher education officials face during governance implementation. Davies and Ramia (2008) also underscored the essential nature of legal regulations in controlling governance, noting that the lack of resources and understanding of these regulations hampers effective governance practices.

The UAC has cited various reasons for the delay in issuing regulations, which are well-supported by existing literature. Barlian (2016) emphasised the importance of aligning local regulations with existing legal structures to prevent conflicts. MacNeil et al. (2003) further highlighted the need for legal regulations to adapt to global environmental changes to maintain effectiveness. Additionally, Bachri et al. (2021) stressed that the rule of law requires public participation in drafting laws, fulfilling the principle of participation and enhancing the legitimacy and applicability of governance frameworks.

The delay in issuing regulations is a significant finding that underscores the necessity for policymakers in Saudi higher education to complete comprehensive legal frameworks before fully implementing the Universities Law in the next stages for other universities. This approach ensures effective governance and supports successfully adapting governance structures across all universities.

○ *Resisting Change*

This property indicates the of resisting change presence of resistance among some employees of both universities, which posed a challenge to adapting governance.

To adopt the universities law, the two universities began to implement some governance principles that were met with resistance but were different in the two universities. At University 1, there was great resistance to change from some employees accustomed to bureaucracy. This is what the participant indicated.

“The university has good human resources, but it may need time to change the mentality of some employees to work with the new law because they are used to the old law and the traditional way and bureaucracy” [U1-P6].

The other participant indicated that the resistance was caused by the fact that the employees were accustomed to working under the previous law for many years, and changing to a different law was difficult for them.

“People themselves disrupt change and planning, by resisting change. The new university law is a major radical change system. There are samples of people who are accustomed to the old law and who resist change to the new law” [U1-P7].

The other participant pointed out that the culture of society is the reason for resistance to change.

“If you are implementing something new, you may find, for example, internal resistance to change in the university, because of the culture they are accustomed to and the method they have been learning for many years” [U1-P2].

Resistance to change can be overcome by strengthening the principle of transparency and the rule of law as the participant pointed out.

“Resistance to change exists in the university, but whenever there is high transparency, good governance, and the law is implemented for everyone, society will accept this change” [U1-P5].

On the other hand, at University 2, there was no great resistance to change, rather, it was described as normal. This is what the participant indicated.

“There is no doubt that it is normal for there to be resistance when moving from a law that has been in place for many years to a new law that may not be widely accepted” [U2-P14].

The governance transformation plan discussed in the previous category played a major role in counteracting resistance to change. This is confirmed by the participant.

“One of the tracks in the Transformation Office was the Change Management track. Its mission is to address resistance to change, prepare people, spread awareness, and hold workshops to prepare faculty members” [U2-P15].

Also, the other participants confirmed that the university adopted an approach to managing change and spreading awareness.

“The university took steps through change management methods and worked on the media side and spreading awareness in order for the transition to be acceptable to the university community and also worked on clear procedures and mechanisms for rapid transition with high efficiency” [U2-P14].

There was no significant resistance to change at University 2 since their transformation strategy was well ‘which was discussed in the previous category under the transformation planning property. On the other hand, the lack of transparency in implementing the transformation plan at University 1 and the lack of a department responsible for managing change led to significant resistance within the campus.

This finding aligns with existing studies highlighting resistance to change as a common challenge in university managerial transformation processes. Kulati (2000) underscores leaders' difficulties in managing organisational change within higher education contexts, particularly during governance implementation. Similarly, Revitt and Luyk (2016) identify administrative resistance as a barrier to fostering democratic decision-making processes in universities. Caruth & Caruth (2013) emphasise that resistance to change is a natural aspect of organisational transformation, necessitating proactive strategies from universities to navigate these challenges successfully.

However, this finding contrasts with the findings of Kalfa et al. (2018), which suggest that academics generally comply with new laws and administrative changes with minimal resistance, often on an individual basis. Similarly, Soin and Huber (2021) indicate widespread academic resistance to new administrative policies is uncommon.

Understanding the challenge of resistance to change within Saudi universities can be effectively contextualised through stewardship theory. Stewardship theory posits that leaders and administrators act as stewards who prioritise the organisation's and its stakeholders' long-term interests (Davis et al., 1997). In Saudi universities, resistance often stems from entrenched traditions, cultural norms, and institutional

inertia that hinder adopting new governance practices to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency (Van der Voet, 2014).

- ***Summary of Theme 1***

Implementing governance under the new Universities Law in Saudi higher education has involved several key processes and encountered notable challenges. The primary adaptation processes include establishing a mixed governance model, developing standards for university readiness, a strong desire for change and development, and careful transformation planning. The mixed governance model integrates various stakeholders, including academics, private sector representatives, and investment specialists, ensuring diverse perspectives in decision-making. Standards for university readiness have been set to evaluate and ensure that institutions are prepared for the governance transition. There is a clear desire among stakeholders for change and development, reflecting a commitment to advancing the higher education sector. Additionally, comprehensive transformation planning has been undertaken to guide institutions through the transition process.

Despite these efforts, several challenges have emerged. Understanding governance principles remains a significant hurdle, as does the need for extensive qualifying and training programmes to equip stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge. Ambiguity in procedures has created confusion, while delaying regulation issuance has hindered smooth implementation. Moreover, resistance to change from within institutions has posed a barrier to effective governance adaptation.

These findings address the research questions by highlighting the procedures and processes implemented to facilitate governance under the new universities law, as well as the difficulties faced during this transition. To improve governance, the proposed framework should include strategies to enhance understanding of governance principles, comprehensive training, clear procedural guidelines, and measures to manage resistance and reduce delays.

The aspect of the proposed governance framework is extracted from the Theme 1:

- **Adapting Governance that Includes Four Elements:**
 - ***Transformation Planning:*** detailed planning to manage the transition effectively.
 - ***Governance Awareness:*** initiatives to increase understanding and awareness of governance principles.
 - ***Training and Qualification:*** training courses to train and qualify stakeholders involved in governance.

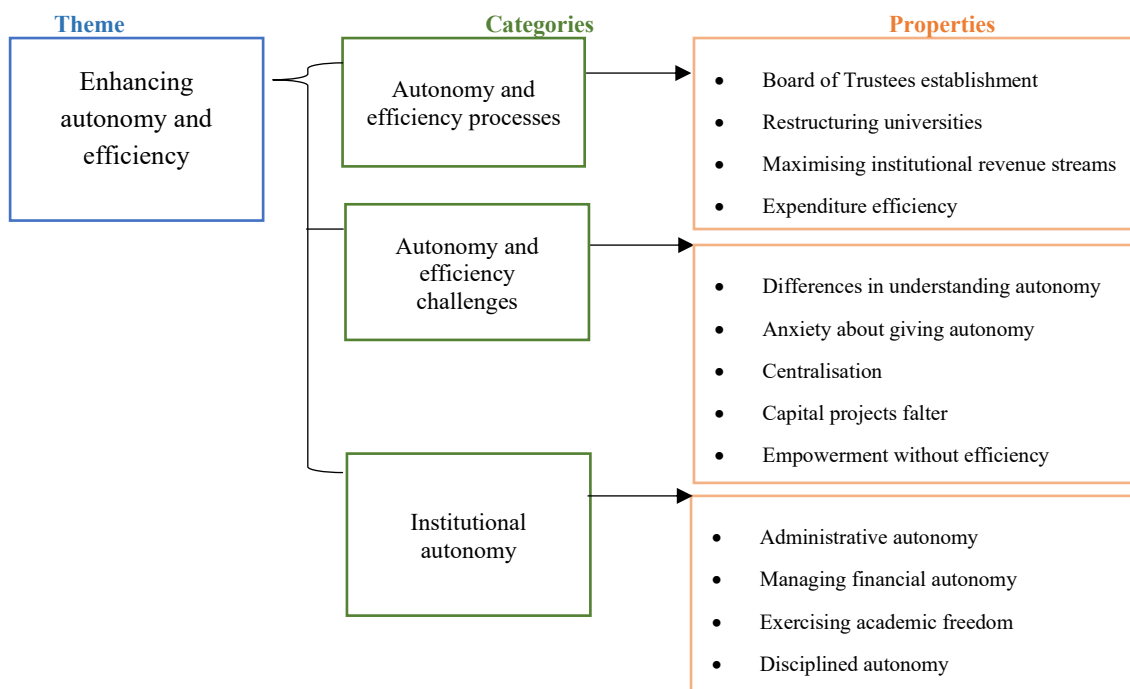
- **Issuing Regulations:** clear and unambiguous regulations to guide the governance processes.

By incorporating these elements, the proposed framework aims to address the operational processes and challenges identified, ensuring a more effective governance adaptation in Saudi higher education.

7.3.2 Theme 2: Enhancing Autonomy and Efficiency

This theme represents the interviewees' opinions and experiences regarding enhancing university autonomy and efficiency. The theme describes the processes and challenges universities face to achieve autonomy and efficiency and the reality of autonomy in the two universities. Three categories are related to this theme. These are autonomy and efficiency processes, autonomy and efficiency challenges, and institutional autonomy (See Figure 9).

Figure 9 Theme 2 Enhancing autonomy and efficiency.



- **Autonomy and Efficiency Processes**

This category focuses on steps taken to enhance autonomy and efficiency within universities.

- **Board of Trustees Establishment**

This property refers to the Board of Trustees' establishment in the two universities as the first step to achieving autonomy for universities. The members of the Board of Trustees were selected in a way that has participation and efficiency, as the UAC did not unilaterally decide on the selection of members but took

nominations and opinions from each category with representation on the board. This is what the participant explained.

"The mechanism for selecting members of the Board of Trustees was with the participation of universities by nominating academic members, and the participation of chambers of commerce and industry by nominating members from the private sector" [UAC-P11].

The formation of the Board of Trustees includes a diversity of academics, with experience and competence in the financial and investment fields, and this contributes to achieving administrative, financial and academic autonomy. This is confirmed by the participant.

"The university will be governed administratively, financially, and academically. So, there are members of the academic community, business people and stakeholders there is better participation in decision-making" [UAC-P12].

Because this is the first experience with public universities, establishing boards of trustees is a crucial milestone in Saudi higher education. The boards of trustees are expected to achieve many of the gains of the Universities Law, the important of which is empowering universities and granting them the autonomy that helps them achieve their goals and excellence. The participant confirmed it.

"The most important measure taken by the UAC was the formation of boards of trustees in the two universities because the law aims to give universities more autonomy and dependence on their own resources" [UAC-P13].

Establishing the Board of Trustees in Saudi universities represents a significant step towards achieving autonomy, enhancing efficiency, and ensuring governance. This outcome aligns with the findings of Azzi (2018), who emphasises the necessity of collective participation in university governance through the formation of boards of trustees comprising stakeholders and academics. Such boards are instrumental in promoting transparency and accountability within universities. This approach is further supported by Abdeldayem and Aldulaimi (2018), who argue that enhancing stakeholder participation in decision-making through boards of trustees is crucial for achieving governance. Leisyte and Westerheijden (2014) also highlight the importance of involving internal and external stakeholders in the Board of Trustees to ensure academic quality and effective governance. Furthermore, the finding resonates with several studies affirming the pivotal role of board trustees in realising university autonomy and governance (Mathies & Slaughter, 2013; Lam and Lee, 2012).

This outcome aligns with and complements the findings from the comparative analysis presented in Chapter 5. The analysis highlighted that one of the key distinctions between the previous higher education law and the new one is the introduction of the Board of Trustees, which is pivotal in promoting the independence of universities. This result underscores the importance of such governance structures in enhancing

university autonomy and addresses a gap in the literature by elucidating the mechanism for selecting and forming the Board of Trustees in Saudi universities.

- ***Universities Restructuring***

This property refers to universities restructuring in line with the articles of the Universities Law and achieving autonomy, accountability, and expenditure efficiency. This was indicated by the participant from the UAC.

“Restructuring universities aims to raise the readiness of universities to implement the new law and reduce centralisation through boards of trustees to achieve autonomy, accountability, and expenditure efficiency” [UAC-P12].

In University 1, restructuring the university was carried out by reviewing responsibilities, distributing roles, and proposing a new structure in line with the universities law. This is what the participant indicated.

“The universities law made the university think about updating its organisational structure. There must be an agile organisational structure in which responsibilities are defined and there is some kind of accountability” [U1-P1].

Also, the other participant referred to the new structures aimed at achieving expenditure efficiency.

“The structure has been changed, and it has become more agile. The vice-presidents of the university were six, now they are four, and there are deanships that have been cancelled and replaced by centers that cost less” [U1-P2].

The other participant also indicated that the previous structures are incompatible with the new university law.

“The previous organisational structure was incompatible with autonomy, and it needed to update the powers and be in line with the regulations of the law in order to enhance the principle of expenditure efficiency” [U1-P7].

In the same way at the University 2, the university restructuring process aimed to achieve governance and expenditure efficiency. This is what the participant explained:

“Governance is controlled through performance indicators and organisational structures, and we have restructured the university to comply with governance requirements and achieve expenditure efficiency” [U2-P15].

The restructuring of universities to align with governance requirements marks a critical step towards enhancing autonomy and efficiency in Saudi higher education institutions. This restructuring process is consistent with the findings of Shattock (2002), Rodgers et al. (2011), and Kataoka & Shahverdyan (2013),

which emphasise that a well-designed governance structure enhances participatory decision-making with stakeholders and strengthens accountability. Additionally, it aligns with the studies of Edwards (2000), Knott & Payne (2004), and Sziegat (2022), which highlight the importance of governance structures in role distribution, responsibility definition, administrative hierarchy, decentralisation, and increased productivity and efficiency. This outcome also resonates with the studies of Alkhazim (2003), Al-Eisa & Smith (2013), and Lebeau & Alruwaili (2021), which identified centralisation in higher education structures as a significant obstacle to achieving university autonomy in Saudi Arabia.

The outcome of restructuring universities as part of the process to achieve autonomy and efficiency in governance highlights several key objectives. Primarily, it focuses on aligning institutional structures with new councils and positions and simplifying these structures to enhance spending efficiency. This involves eliminating redundant positions and departments and merging others, reducing centralisation and promoting greater autonomy. These findings are consistent with the comparative analysis in Chapter 5, which identified structural changes as a significant difference between the previous Higher Education Law and the new Universities Law. Establishing new councils and positions, such as the Board of Trustees, is a crucial aspect of this restructuring. Consequently, the current results corroborate the findings of the comparative analysis and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the restructuring goals.

○ ***Maximising Institutional Revenue Streams***

The property of maximising institutional revenue streams refers to enabling universities to cover part of their expenses independently and benefit from their resources as the participant from UAC explained.

“The new law aims to maximising institutional revenue streams, because the government was spending 25% of its budget on education, but in contrast, when you see the outputs from universities, it is not considered an investment at all and cannot be accepted in any country” [UAC-P11].

At University 1, an investment company was established, and plans were developed to maximise institutional revenue streams. This is what the participant explained.

“The Ministry began to reduce the university's budget, so the Board of Trustees agreed to open a company to invest and maximise institutional revenue streams to fill the budget deficit” [U1-P2].

Also, at University 2, emphasis was placed on maximising institutional revenue streams by establishing an office for financial sustainability.

“A special office for financial sustainability has been established at the university, the aim of which is to increase the university's own income” [U2-P14].

Maximising institutional revenue streams is a helpful process in increasing the autonomy and efficiency of university governance, and the literature discusses various results about the role of maximising institutional

revenue streams in universities in achieving autonomy. On the one hand, proponents argue that diversifying funding sources away from sole reliance on government funding can significantly enhance universities' financial sustainability and operational autonomy. For instance, the mixed financing pattern, which combines public and private funding, has been highlighted as a model that mitigates the drawbacks of relying on a single source of funds, thus promoting financial independence and reducing the fiscal burden on the state (Al-Maliki, 2014). This model has been successfully adopted by many universities globally, such as Harvard and Stanford, where endowments, grants, and donations complement government support, fostering a robust financial ecosystem that supports innovation and long-term planning (Alkhathlan, 2020). This approach enhances financial stability and aligns universities with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030, aiming to improve educational outcomes and economic contributions through diversified funding streams (Alkhathlan, 2020).

Conversely, critics caution that heavy reliance on self-generated resources might lead to a shift of academic priorities. They argue that the drive to secure alternative funding could shift the focus from academic excellence to education towards profit-driven motives. This is particularly concerning in contexts where universities may lack robust frameworks to manage and regulate private funding, potentially leading to disparities in resource allocation and educational quality (Al-Khazim, 2018). Moreover, the effectiveness of non-governmental funding mechanisms such as endowments and partnerships with private sectors is not uniform across all universities. For example, despite efforts to diversify funding, Saudi universities still mostly rely on government support, and their attempts at self-funding have been relatively marginal (Al-Harbi, 2015). Given the difference in capabilities and internal resources of Saudi universities, the UAC may take this into account and continue to provide the universities' budget until they reach a stage where they can bear their expenses.

○ ***Expenditure Efficiency***

This property refers to expenditure efficiency, which involves allocating and managing university expenses to ensure the optimal use of financial resources. With the new requirement for universities to generate a portion of their budget through their own resources, there is an intensified emphasis on maximising spending efficiency. This involves meticulous financial planning and monitoring to ensure that expenditures are justified, cost-effective, and aligned with the university's goals. This was indicated by the participant from the UAC.

"Expenditure efficiency is very important. Today, the dean of the college does not come out until he makes sure that the lights are turned off in his college. The electricity bill became means something to the university because the Ministry of Finance is holding them accountable for everything" [UAC-P11].

Universities increasingly recognise their responsibility to contribute a portion of their budget from their resources. Consequently, there is a heightened focus on ensuring that spending processes are conducted

efficiently. To achieve this, universities are implementing reward and incentive programmes for employees who propose innovative ideas that enhance spending efficiency. A participant from University 1 exemplifies this approach.

“Any employee or faculty member who is able to take an initiative and result in saving a certain amount for the university will be paid a bonus of six salaries. This is considered expenditure efficiency and helps the university achieve independence” [U1-P2].

The result of the current study highlights the significant role of expenditure efficiency as a critical component in enhancing the independence and efficiency of Saudi higher education institutions. The emphasis on rationalising spending, reducing expenditures, and increasing revenues aligns with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's economic strategy and general trend towards promoting efficient resource utilisation (Algobaisi and Sweiti, 2023). Establishing the Expenditure Efficiency Center, in coordination with the National Center for Privatisation, underscores the government's commitment to adhering to allocated spending ceilings and transitioning from random to regulated spending practices (Expenditure Efficiency and Projects Authority, 2024).

As higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia grow in complexity and expand their roles, the need for advanced administrative methods to raise spending efficiency becomes paramount. Algobaisi & Sweiti (2023) emphasise the importance of administrative structures fostering accountability and transparency. Despite the substantial government funding allocated to the education sector, which received 19% of the total government spending in 2021 (Algobaisi & Sweiti (2023), there are concerns about the inefficiency in resource utilisation, particularly in public universities where expenditure is higher compared to private institutions (Algobaisi & Sweiti (2023).

The prevalence of waste in the education sector, with a wastage rate of 97% (Al-Khuraiji, 2021), further highlights the necessity for efficient spending practices. Therefore, achieving spending efficiency in Saudi universities is challenged by prevalent financial waste. Consequently, as previously discussed, universities' recognition of their responsibility to conserve a portion of their budget by enhancing internal resources compels them to focus on spending efficiency.

- **Autonomy and Efficiency Challenges**

The category autonomy and efficiency challenges describe the reasons that influenced the lack of autonomy and efficiency. This category will be discussed and analysed with five properties: the differences in understanding of autonomy, anxiety about giving autonomy, centralisation, capital projects falter, and negative empowerment practices.

○ *The Differences in Understanding Autonomy*

The property of differences in the understanding of autonomy indicates that there are disparities in the understanding of the concept of autonomy to be achieved among stakeholders, which constituted a challenge in achieving the desired autonomy. Universities expected that they would be completely independent after implementing the Universities Law. In contrast, the UAC believe that autonomy has been achieved through the boards of trustees and that there must be oversight and accountability of the government even with autonomy.

At University 1, there was a difference in the understanding of autonomy among the participants, as one of the academics believed that the Board of Trustees needs more autonomy.

“The Board of Trustees is supposed to be given more autonomy and given more powers so that they can make decisions without referring to the UAC” [U1-P6].

The other participant from the same university, a faculty member, believes that the powers have decreased after implementing the Universities Law.

“The university did not become autonomous, but the powers were withdrawn from the university administration, and the autonomy was not reflected in the faculties and faculty members, and the bureaucracy still exists” [U1-P8].

While another participant from the same university who is a member of the Board of Trustees believes that autonomy exists in the university and is linked to the framework of the government.

“Autonomy does not mean that the university operates outside the framework and laws of the government, so people must understand that the existence of autonomy is linked to the accountability of the government because it is responsible for financing the budget” [U1-P1].

The other participant indicated that autonomy is a gradual process and that it is normal to take time to reach full autonomy.

“The university cannot become autonomous in a day, but the process is gradual, and for this, the Ministry of Education gave us a period of three years to achieve autonomy” [U1-P2].

At University 2, the participant indicated that the university is in the transitional phase of the universities law, and therefore, autonomy will be in stages.

“We are now in the transitional phase of the universities law. Therefore, we have the transitional structure, and we have achieved part of autonomy for this stage, but there may be other stages” [U2-P14].

At the level of the two universities, it is noted that there are differences in understanding the concept of autonomy. Some participants believe that autonomy does not exist, some believe that it will be achieved gradually, and others believe that autonomy exists according to their understanding.

On the other hand, the UAC believes that the two universities have autonomy and are governed by the general frameworks of the government. This is what the participant indicated.

"It is true that universities have autonomy, but this autonomy is governed by the general frameworks of the government's policy regarding university education" [UAC-P13].

The other participants from the UAC explained the reason for the differences in understanding the concept of autonomy, as there is a difference between independence and autonomy. That is why universities thought they would get independence when the goal is to achieve autonomy.

"The Minister of Education assures us that we do not say independence, which means complete independence and the absence of a reference. Rather, we use autonomy, which means that you have freedom, but there is some discipline with the framework set by the government" [UAC-P11].

The findings of this study indicated that there are challenges faced by Saudi higher education that contributed to the failure to achieve autonomy for universities, the first of which was that there were differences in understanding the concept of autonomy. The findings are in line with the study of Fumasoli et al. (2014), which indicated that the concept of autonomy is complex and must be understood through an institutional approach to avoid emerging tensions between academics and executives. Moreover, it is consistent with Fávero's (2004) study, which indicated differences in the understanding of the autonomy of universities. Also, it aligns with the study of Korr et al. (2005), who indicated the need to understand the difference between autonomy and independence because they are different concepts. In addition, the findings are consistent with Zgaga's (2012) study, which indicated that institutional autonomy is not a static concept but is negotiated to achieve a balance between autonomy and accountability to achieve successful governance.

The findings of the current study are characterised by being different in the context of the study, as the results of previous studies were in different contexts from Saudi Arabia. The findings of the current study confirm that the cultural context affects the understanding of the concept of autonomy. Also, these differences in understanding between internal and external stakeholders made achieving autonomy difficult. Therefore, it may be appropriate to redefine autonomy according to the Saudi context, and this is what will be discussed in the next category under the title of disciplined autonomy.

On the other hand, some studies show contradictory findings with the current findings and indicate that the concept of autonomy is one of the traditional and understood concepts in universities and has been identified in four types of autonomy for universities, which are organisational, financial, human resources and

academic autonomy (Reilly et al., 2016; Michavila & Martínez, 2018). These discrepancies present a challenge in understanding the concept of autonomy in the context of higher education, and this concept may be interpreted according to the context so that each context has its own definition of autonomy.

○ *Anxiety About Giving Autonomy*

The property of anxiety about autonomy indicates the anxiety of the UAC in giving the two universities full autonomy. The UAC began to give universities autonomy by establishing the Board of Trustees. However, the Boards of Trustees are not fully autonomous, and the UAC still treats them with some anxiety. This is what the participant from University 1 indicated.

“Some decisions still require the approval of the Ministry of Education, which means that the Board of Trustees does not have complete independence. It is clear that the UAC wants to give independence, but there are fears about that” [U1-P6].

On the other hand, the participant from the UAC believes that the idea of complete autonomy was put forward in the initial draft of the Universities Law, but after evaluating the universities, it was found that some universities are not ripe for full autonomy.

“The draft of the Universities Law previously aimed to give universities full autonomy, but after study and review it was found that some universities are not mature and some are more like a high school, so we thought it was more appropriate to give them disciplined autonomy” [UAC-P12].

This means that the first reason for anxiety about giving full autonomy to universities is that universities are not ripe for full autonomy, and hence, they have been given disciplined autonomy, a concept that will be discussed in the next category.

In addition, the other participant from the UAC confirmed that the independence will be gradual; the experience of the two universities will be evaluated to ensure the success of the governance implementation processes, and then the universities will be granted complete autonomy in the future.

“The aim of the Universities Law was to give Saudi universities complete autonomy, but it was found difficult to give them complete autonomy, which we aim for in the long term, now disciplined autonomy has been given. Unfortunately, had it not been for the disappointing beginnings that happened in the two universities, the start would have been strong” [UAC-P11].

This means that the second reason for anxiety about giving universities autonomy is the disappointing beginnings and some behaviours that emerged from universities after implementing the Universities Law, as one of the two universities committed some financial irregularities. The participant from the UAC explained this:

“One of the two universities found a loophole in the old financial regulations through which it was able to commit some financial irregularities. Therefore, the new financial regulations were urgently adopted” [UAC-P12].

This financial transgression by the university forced the UAC to form an internal review committee to ensure the soundness of the university's decisions. This is confirmed by the participant.

“We are auditing all decisions of the University Council, and we intervene if there is a decision that is financially wasteful. We noticed that there is an attempt by the University Council to isolate the Board of Trustees, and sometimes there are disputes between the two councils, and here comes our role” [UAC-P11].

These practices of the universities made the trust between the UAC and the universities shake. Therefore, to achieve autonomy, the two universities must be keen to gain the trust of the UAC through their commitment to the law and regulations, and the UAC must focus on policies and accountability. This was confirmed by the participant from the UAC.

“I say that the UAC should focus on policies and leave the work details to the universities and give them the confidence to lead themselves while at the same time putting in place monitoring tools” [UAC-P12].

The findings are consistent with those of Sirat (2010), who indicated that it is not feasible to grant autonomy to universities as long as the government continues to provide its budget. Consequently, more regulation and supervision are required. The Saudi government may find it challenging to rapidly grant autonomy to universities due to a lack of trust in these institutions. Therefore, even after implementing the Universities Law in the two universities, the government continues to exercise guardianship over them. To gain the trust of the UAC, universities must adhere to the guidelines and properly implement the Universities Law.

○ **Centralisation**

The property of centralisation refers to the centrality of decision-making in Saudi higher education, and it is one of the challenges universities faces in achieving autonomy. At University 1, one of the participants believes that decisions within the university are made centrally.

“There is no participation and decisions are centralised and taken by specific people” [U1-P8].

The other participant believes that the UAC is central and does not allow the university to decide without referring to it.

“I think the problem is that the UAC has not fully implemented the law, because, in fact, they say that you are an autonomous university but at the same time you cannot make a decision and you have to take our approval, so where is the autonomy” [U1-P6].

While the other participant indicated that the university is managed centrally, except for some decisions that require discussion in the councils concerned.

“The university is still managed in a centralised way, except in some aspects that require councils such as academic affairs” [U1-P5].

As for the other participant, who is a member of the Board of Trustees, he believes that centralisation may be necessary sometimes.

“In some matters, you need some kind of centralisation in order to control the work” [U1-P2].

On the other hand, the participant from the UAC believes that Saudi higher education was centralised in the past, but now, after the issuance of the new Universities Law, it has become less centralised.

“The previous law was centralised and there was no autonomy. However, with the new law, there is a kind of autonomy through the Board of Trustees” [UAC-P12].

The findings are in line with the study Baschung et al., (2011), who indicated that centralisation poses a challenge to achieving autonomy for universities and that the administration should move towards decentralisation. Moreover, the results are consistent with studies conducted in the Saudi context and indicate that Saudi higher education depends on the centralisation of power in decision-making (Abu Alswood & Youde, 2018; Alkhazim, 2003; Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013).

The findings can be interpreted by looking at the Saudi culture and its influence on achieving autonomy. Based on Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, the power distance in Saudi Arabia is high, and there are large differences between individuals in society in terms of levels of power and control. The findings of this study are characterised by the fact that it was conducted on Saudi universities after the implementation of the Universities Law, which was expected to achieve a kind of decentralisation. However, the findings confirmed the central culture still prevails in the administration of Saudi higher education.

○ ***Capital Projects Falter***

This property indicates that capital projects falter as one of the challenges of expenditure efficiency, as the pursuit of financial autonomy and spending efficiency affected some construction projects, causing their delay and suspension. This was indicated by the participant from the University 1.

“On the financial side, recently some capital and construction projects may have been affected and work on them has been suspended until later notice” [U1-P4].

This sentiment is echoed by another participant from the same university, who pointed out the persistent financial constraints under the new law.

“Since the beginning of the implementation of the new law, we have always received responses from the university administration that there is no money and that we must wait. Therefore, we see a negative impact of the law and a reduction in the budget” [U1-P6].

These financial constraints have led to a focus on spending efficiency, as another participant from University 1 noted.

“Increasing or decreasing budgets affects the university’s expansion. The university is now in a period of efficient spending, so that the allocated amounts are directed according to what achieves the greatest benefit for this period” [U1-P3].

The transition from government-funded budgets to a model requiring universities to generate a portion of their resources has necessitated re-evaluating financial strategies. A participant from the UAC reflected on this shift.

“The government was funding the entire budget of the universities in the past years. The universities were requesting a high budget and expanded more than necessary. Therefore, we are currently working to address the situation and correct the financial path” [UAC-P12].

Furthermore, another participant from the UAC criticised the past financial practices, stating.

“When you see the billions allocated to the budget of each university over the past years and see what the universities have given you, I think it is an academic and financial waste” [UAC-P11]. This critique underscores the necessity of a more prudent and efficient allocation of resources to avoid past inefficiencies.

The literature underscores the importance of diversified funding sources in enhancing universities' financial stability and efficiency. Almaliki (2014) emphasises the benefits of a mixed financing pattern, which combines public and private funding to mitigate the drawbacks of relying solely on government or private resources. This approach reduces the financial burden on the state and encourages universities to develop their revenue streams, thereby promoting financial independence.

Algobaisi & Sweiti (2023) highlights that government expenditure on education reflects the state's commitment, but excessive reliance on state funding can stifle the development of self-sufficiency in universities.

Therefore, the UAC can consider the universities' capital projects and develop a plan for the financial independence of the universities gradually in a way that does not affect the universities' projects.

○ ***Negative Empowerment Practices***

This property refers to the negative empowerment practices as a challenge to human resources efficiency, which is that there is an exaggerated focus on empowering women at the expense of men without regard to efficiency. This concern was expressed by one participant.

"I am afraid that after a year, we will claim the rights of men. What is happening now is not empowerment but racism. Because appointment and promotions to positions are not based on qualifications, but only because I want to appoint a woman" [U1-P6].

A similar situation is observed at University 2. A participant emphasised that initial efforts at empowerment were not based on competence but aimed at ensuring women's representation in leadership positions. This strategic approach was intended to lay the groundwork for future empowerment based on merit. As one participant noted.

"In the past, there had to be a representation of women in jobs, so that we could then reach real empowerment. We are now at this stage and looking at the most efficient" [U2-P15].

The results of negative women's empowerment practices at the expense of men present a multifaceted challenge to efficiency within higher education institutions. The literature highlights the challenges that hinder women from attaining leadership positions despite their qualifications and increasing their enrolment rates in higher education globally (Morley, 2013; Alghofaily, 2019). Factors such as gender discrimination in hiring and promotion (Alimo-Metcalf, 2010), segregation of job roles based on gender (Acker, 2010), and exclusion from influential networks (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015) perpetuate a skewed representation at leadership levels. Although Saudi Arabia has made strides under Vision 2030 to address these disparities by encouraging women's participation in the workforce and appointing women to key positions (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017), deep-seated cultural norms and traditional roles continue to impede progress (Alotaibi, 2020).

Conversely, the results of the current study indicated that the focus on women's empowerment in leadership roles may inadvertently marginalise men who perceive themselves as disadvantaged in the current social and economic landscape. As women are increasingly encouraged to take on leadership roles to balance gender representation, there is a concern that merit-based selection criteria may be compromised to achieve gender parity goals.

The current findings are inconsistent with the results of the comparative analysis presented in Chapter 5, which indicated that the new university law established mechanisms to enhance the efficiency of human resources. In practice, however, there has been an observed trend of empowering women at the expense of

men, often without regard to competence. Such empowerment practices may create future challenges, potentially leading to demands for the re-empowerment of men, thereby negating progress and returning to initial conditions. Therefore, universities must implement empowerment policies based on competence and merit to ensure equitable advancement.

- **Institutional Autonomy**

The category institutional autonomy describes the aspects of achieving institutional autonomy. This category will be discussed and analysed with four properties: administrative autonomy, managing financial autonomy, exercising academic freedom, and disciplined autonomy.

- ***Administrative Autonomy***

The property of administrative autonomy indicates the extent of the autonomy of the two universities in making administrative decisions. The findings showed that the two universities lack administrative autonomy, which the participants from the two universities considered as one of the challenges they faced during the implementation of governance.

As discussed in the previous category, one of the processes that took place in the two universities was the establishment of the Board of Trustees as the first step in achieving autonomy. However, the UAC still exercises centralisation over the two universities, and the university cannot make all decisions without referring to it. This made implementing governance slow because the decision-making process takes a long time through the boards. This was explained by the participant from University 1.

“In the past, the University used to obtain approvals for its decisions directly from the Ministry of Education, but now there is an additional step that is the approval of the Board of Trustees and then the UAC, so there is no autonomy” [U1-P6].

In addition, the other participant from the same university indicated that autonomy may have started through the establishment of the Board of Trustees. However, the UAC still deals with all Saudi universities in the same way, whether universities with a board of trustees or other universities that have not implemented the Universities Law.

“It may be autonomy began through the Board of Trustees, but it did not reach full autonomy, and the UAC still deals in the same way with universities that have implemented the Universities Law and other universities, so we may need more time to feel autonomy” [U1-P4].

Moreover, the other participant indicated that there was a promotion of the concept of autonomy, which made them expect a lot through this autonomy, but the situation was different.

“It was previously promoted autonomy and that there will be complete freedom for universities to dispose of their financial and administrative matters in a large way, but unfortunately, there is no real autonomy, meaning that what exists now is only nominal autonomy on paper” [U1-P5].

The situation at University 2 was the same. The Board of Trustees is the beginning of autonomy, but the university is still linked to the Ministry of Education. This is what the participant indicated.

“The features of autonomy may have begun to become apparent through the Board of Trustees, but in actual implementation, the university still receives full support from the Ministry of Education” [U2-P14].

Also, the other participants indicated that they did not feel the difference in dealing with the Ministry of Education after autonomy.

“We did not feel that there is a difference in dealing with the Ministry of Education after the implementation of the Universities Law” [U2-P15].

Furthermore, the UAC supports what the participants in the two universities said and that autonomy has not yet been achieved.

“The two universities lack autonomy because the legal regulations have not been completed. Also, based on the decision of the Prime Minister, we are still in the transitional period for the new law, which is set for two years” [UAC-P13].

The findings of the current study are consistent with the findings of some studies that were conducted in different contexts and cultures, such as studies that have indicated that lack of administrative autonomy is one of the challenges academic leaders face while implementing governance (Hartley et al., 2016), due to increased accountability (Albornoz, 1991), limitation of regulations (Wang, 2010), and centralisation of government (Estermann et al., 2011; Larsen et al., 2009).

Moreover, the findings align with some studies conducted in the same context, such as Al-Eisa & Smith's (2013) study, which indicated that Saudi higher education lacks autonomy and that the Saudi higher education reform agenda indicated the need to shift from centralisation to autonomy. This finding also aligns with Alamri's (2011) study, which indicated that one of the challenges facing Saudi higher education is the lack of autonomy.

The current study's findings are notable for their practical application to Saudi universities that have implemented the new Universities Law to grant institutional autonomy. Despite the Saudi Ministry of Education's efforts to enhance university autonomy, as highlighted by the comparative analysis in Chapter 5, the findings reveal a discrepancy between the intended outcomes and actual progress. The autonomy processes are still ongoing, and Saudi universities require a more extended period to achieve full autonomy.

This indicates that while significant strides have been made, the journey towards complete independence is far from complete and necessitates continued efforts and time.

- ***Managing Financial Autonomy***

The property of managing financial autonomy indicates that the two universities still receive the entire budget from the government and are not financially autonomous. Financial autonomy is the most difficult type of autonomy, and therefore the UAC has begun some measures that contribute to reducing universities' expenses. This was explained by the participant from the UAC.

“The most difficult thing is financial autonomy, unlike administrative and academic autonomy. Therefore, there were important decisions that helped financial autonomy, such as restructuring universities and expenditure efficiency” [UAC-P12].

The UAC plans to prepare universities for a subsidy system instead of the government paying the entire university budget. So, government financial support for universities will be a certain percentage of their budget, and the universities provide the rest of the budget from their resources. As explained by the other participant from the UAC.

“Previously, the government paid the entire university budget, but now with the new law, universities are allowed to increase their financial resources in order to prepare them for the subsidy system. Where the government will pay the cost of students only” [UAC-P13].

Therefore, the Universities Law allowed universities to expand investments through the infrastructure and opportunities they possess that help them diversify sources of income. This is what the other participant from the UAC indicated.

“The new Universities Law gave universities tools for financial autonomy by allowing them to partner with the private sector and increase investments to maximise institutional revenue streams and achieve expenditure efficiency” [UAC-P11].

This means that the UAC is working to achieve the financial autonomy of the two universities by reducing expenses, achieving expenditure efficiency, and maximising institutional revenue streams.

At the level of the two universities, University 1 began to invest and increase sources of income, and this is what the participant indicated.

“Currently, it is difficult to obtain financial autonomy without government support, but this may be in the future. That is why The Universities Law allowed us to invest and increase sources of income, and this is what we started to do to reach financial sustainability” [U1-P4].

Also, at University 2, an office for financial sustainability was established, and its aim is to develop a plan to increase the university's self-income, which was confirmed by the participant.

“In order to achieve financial autonomy, the university's financial sustainability office was established, which aims to develop a plan to increase the university's self-income” [U2-P14].

Financial autonomy is strongly correlated with managerial autonomy. The two universities cannot obtain administrative autonomy while receiving financial support for the budget from the government. Therefore, the less government support for the two universities, the more autonomy is expected. This was indicated by the participant from the UAC.

“There is no university in the world where the government supports its budget 100% and gives it complete autonomy” [UAC-P11].

The study's findings reveal that Saudi universities lack financial autonomy due to their heavy reliance on government funding. This is consistent with de Boer & Enders' (2017) observations that European universities face similar restrictions in financial autonomy due to dependence on public treasury funds. Additionally, Alkhatlan's (2020) study proposed several financial and investment strategies to help Saudi universities achieve financial independence, highlighting the Saudi Ministry of Education's reduction in financial support as a catalyst for these initiatives (Alsayyari et al., 2019). The current findings align with research indicating that while Saudi universities have historically benefited from substantial government support, recent legislative changes under the new Universities Law have aimed to diversify revenue streams through study programmes, services, and the establishment of companies (Abdelnabi & Elawady, 2020; Al-Youbi & Zahed, 2021).

Interestingly, while Saudi universities remain dependent on government budgets, there is evidence that they are beginning to strengthen their financial resources. This includes the establishment of companies, suggesting a gradual move towards financial autonomy, although more time is needed to realise this goal fully. In contrast, some studies present a more optimistic view, showing significant progress in financial autonomy through the creation of investment funds, the imposition of tuition fees, and the establishment of endowments (Dominicis et al., 2011; Petlenko et al., 2021; Lambroboulos et al., 2022). Therefore, while the journey towards financial independence for Saudi universities is underway, progress varies, and continuous efforts are required to achieve complete autonomy.

○ ***Exercising Academic Freedom***

The property of exercising academic freedom indicates limited academic freedom in the two universities, as this freedom is linked to the requirements of academic accreditation bodies, and the faculty member does not have absolute academic freedom. This is what the participant from University 1 indicated.

"We have academic freedom in the sense that I can teach however I want, but in the light of a structured framework based on academic and institutional accreditation requirements" [I-I-M].

Also, the other participant from the same university indicated that the idea of complete academic freedom may not exist in any university because there must be an organised framework for the educational process and that there may be limited academic freedom in teaching and research.

"There is no complete academic freedom for a faculty member at our university or any other Saudi or international university. But there is limited freedom in research, teaching, creative presentation, and interaction with students" [U1-P3].

In addition, the participant from University 2 indicated that academic freedom is regulated by the framework of academic accreditation bodies.

"Our academic freedom at the university may be disciplined, meaning that I can do what I see fit in the classroom, but in light of the framework of the academic accreditation bodies" [U2-P14].

On the other hand, the participant from the UAC indicated that the Universities Law will give universities autonomy and academic freedom for faculty members. However, this freedom must be disciplined in light of the government's general policy.

"Academic freedom must have some degree of discipline with the framework of the government's work" [UAC-P11].

The study's findings indicated that Saudi universities have limited academic freedom in teaching, research, and publishing. The findings align with some studies conducted in the same context, such as the study of Galal & Kanaan (2011), which indicated that academic freedom in Arab universities is limited due to the universities' reliance on government support. This finding is also in line with the descriptive study and evaluation survey conducted by Al-Saeed (2021), which concluded that academic freedom in Saudi universities is modest and that faculty members question their intellectual freedoms. The current study's findings are characterised by the fact that they emerged from a qualitative study and are consistent with the results of the previous quantitative study conducted at the same university. These findings also reflect the extent of academic freedom enjoyed by faculty members after implementing the Universities Law.

However, some studies show contradictory findings with the current findings and indicate the lack of academic freedom in universities, such as the study of Lynch & Ivancheva (2016), who indicated that the commercial exploitation of universities had a role in the absence of academic freedom in teaching and research. Moreover, the study of Habib et al. (2008) indicated that state policy threatens academic freedom and makes it weak.

These disparities suggest a challenge to achieving academic freedom in universities and encourage further research to understand the meaning of academic freedom and the impact of culture and politics on universities.

○ ***Disciplined Autonomy***

The property of disciplined autonomy refers to a new concept that was mentioned frequently during data collection with all participants. The disciplined autonomy concept has become widely circulated within the Saudi higher education environment reflecting the extent to which Saudi universities that implemented the Universities Law have obtained autonomy.

The participant from University 2 believes that it has been called disciplined autonomy because it is governed by the Board of Trustees and the UAC.

"The universities law gives the university autonomy as they call it disciplined, through the UAC and the Board of Trustees" [U2-P15].

While the participant from University 1 believes that disciplined autonomy is a kind of gradual implementation of autonomy and that the university is expected to obtain autonomy in the future.

"I think disciplined autonomy is a kind of gradual implementation of the Universities Law, so after the completion of the transitional period, I think it will increase the level of autonomy" [U1-P3]

On the other hand, the participant from the UAC believes that it was called disciplined autonomy for two reasons: the government still pays the full budget for universities, and that this autonomy is governed through the councils.

"Since the government is responsible for financing universities, they were given disciplined autonomy, and named disciplined, because they are governed through councils. Now, the president of the university cannot spend any amount except through those councils" [UAC-P11].

The concept of "disciplined autonomy" has emerged as a distinctive feature of autonomy in Saudi higher education, reflecting the Saudi approach to balancing institutional independence with regulatory oversight during the transitional phase of implementing the new Universities Law. Historically, Saudi universities operated under the centralised control of the Ministry of Education, with uniform academic, administrative, and financial regulations. However, the new Universities Law introduced a model of autonomy characterised by establishing Boards of Trustees for each university, allowing them to develop their own regulations within the framework of government policies. This concept of disciplined autonomy has not been extensively discussed in higher education governance literature but finds parallels in studies on

digitalisation and innovation, where it is described as a blend of discipline and autonomy aimed at minimising risks while fostering innovation (Saldanha et al., 2017).

Applying agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) to this concept, disciplined autonomy can be understood as a mechanism to align the interests of universities (agents) with those of the government (principal). Agency theory suggests that principals must design appropriate incentives and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that agents act in the principal's best interests. In the context of Saudi higher education, disciplined autonomy allows universities a degree of self-governance to create and manage their own regulations while remaining accountable to government oversight through the UAC. This balance ensures that universities have the necessary freedom to innovate and operate efficiently while adhering to national educational objectives and maintaining accountability for performance and funding utilisation.

This discovery contributes theoretically by proposing a new definition for disciplined autonomy in higher education: granting universities sufficient autonomy to manage their administrative, financial, and academic affairs while ensuring they remain aligned with government policies and accountability standards. This balanced approach fosters institutional innovation and efficiency without compromising the oversight necessary to uphold public interests. Thus, disciplined autonomy in Saudi higher education represents a nuanced and context-specific application of agency theory, offering a framework that other nations with similar governance challenges might consider.

- ***Summary of Theme 2***

The efforts to enhance autonomy and efficiency within Saudi higher education under the new Universities Law have encompassed several key processes and faced notable challenges. The main processes implemented include the establishment of Boards of Trustees, restructuring universities, maximising institutional revenue streams, and improving expenditure efficiency. The creation of Boards of Trustees aims to decentralise governance, allowing for more localised decision-making and oversight. Restructuring universities is designed to streamline operations and improve organisational effectiveness. Efforts to maximise institutional revenue streams focus on increasing universities' financial independence, while measures to improve expenditure efficiency aim to optimise the use of available funds.

However, several challenges have impeded these processes. Significant differences in understanding the concept of autonomy lead to inconsistencies in its application. Anxiety about granting autonomy persists, with concerns about the potential risks and consequences. Centralisation remains a barrier, as some institutions struggle to embrace decentralised governance fully. The faltering of capital projects has been a particular issue, slowing progress and affecting morale. There are concerns about empowerment without corresponding efficiency, where institutions are given autonomy but cannot utilise it effectively.

These findings address the research questions by highlighting both the procedures and processes implemented to enhance autonomy and efficiency as part of the governance changes under the new Universities Law.

The aspects of the proposed governance framework extracted from the Theme 2:

- **Autonomy Includes Five Elements:**

- ***University Restructuring:*** implementing structural changes within universities to streamline operations and improve flexibility in decision-making.
- ***Board of Trustees Establishment:*** creating governance bodies with diverse expertise to oversee institutional affairs.
- ***Disciplined Autonomy:*** balancing institutional autonomy with regulatory oversight to maintain accountability.
- ***Trust in Universities:*** fostering a culture of reliability and integrity to ensure stakeholders' confidence in university governance and operations.
- ***Decentralisation:*** distributing decision-making authority to various levels within the university to enhance responsiveness and adaptability.

- **Efficiency that Includes Three Elements:**

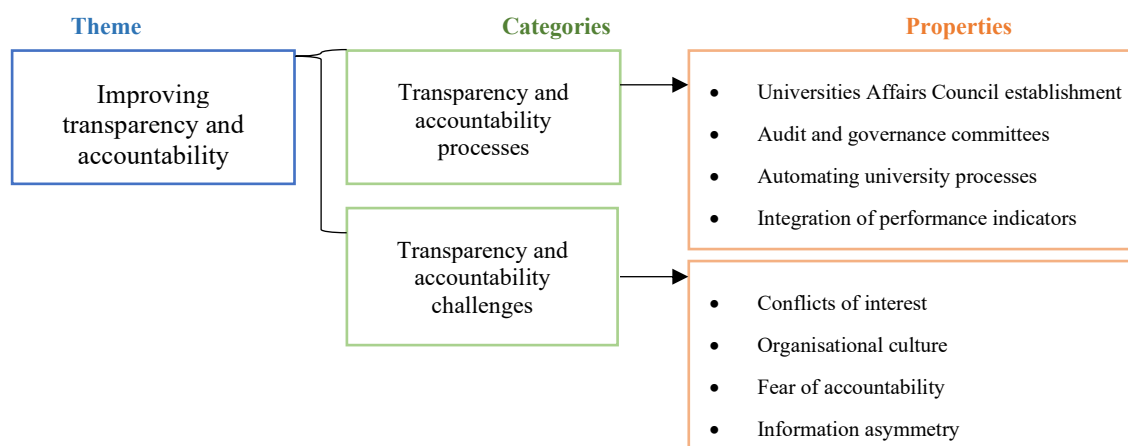
- ***Maximising Institutional Revenue Streams:*** developing strategies to increase financial independence through diversified revenue streams and efficient resource management.
- ***Expenditure Efficiency and Operations:*** optimising financial resources by improving budget allocation processes and operational efficiencies.
- ***Human Resources Efficiency:*** enhancing the effectiveness of human capital through training, development, and strategic workforce planning.

These framework elements address the dual objectives of enhancing autonomy and efficiency within Saudi higher education.

7.3.3 Theme 3: Improving Transparency and Accountability

This theme represents the opinions and experiences of the interviewees regarding the processes and challenges associated with improving transparency and accountability in universities. Two categories are related to this theme: transparency and accountability processes and transparency and accountability challenges (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 Theme 3 Improving transparency and accountability



• Transparency and Accountability Processes

This category focuses on steps taken to improve transparency and accountability within universities.

○ *Universities Affairs Council Establishment*

The property of the Universities Affairs Council establishment refers to the highest authority in Saudi higher education, which is considered one of the mechanisms for holding universities accountable and monitoring the performance of the councils. This is confirmed by the participant.

“The UAC has the authority to supervise and follow up on the work of the boards of trustees and university councils, we have a committee responsible for studying universities' decisions and whether they are heading to governance properly” [UAC-P11].

The UAC is presided over by the Minister of Education and includes several university presidents, officials from government ministries, and some experts and specialists. This formation aims to reinforce the principle of participation in decision-making. This is confirmed by the participant.

“The UAC has members from the government sectors that are related to university education, such as the Ministry of Finance, Economy, Planning, Human Resources, and the Education Evaluation Commission” [UAC-P12].

Looking at the responsibilities of the UAC stipulated in the Universities Law, it has a role in achieving some principles of governance, such as transparency and accountability. As explained by the participant.

“If you see the main roles of the UAC, you will find that it is considered part of the governance, through the governance of administrative and financial performance of universities and their commitment to transparency and accountability” [UAC-P13].

The establishment of the UAC represents a significant shift in the governance of Saudi universities, aligning with global trends in higher education governance. According to Amaral and Magalhaes (2002), the relationship between higher education institutions, government, and society has evolved to include greater involvement of external stakeholders, enhancing universities' responsiveness to societal needs. Austin and Jones (2015) further highlight the role of external stakeholders, including government, civil society, and the private sector, in university governance. Prior to the implementation of the Universities Law, Saudi universities were centrally managed by the Supreme Council for Higher Education, composed solely of high-ranking government and university officials (Alkhazim, 2003). The UAC includes the Minister of Education, academics, and external stakeholders, embodying a more inclusive governance model.

Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) and De Boer et al. (2010) underscore the importance of external councils in monitoring and improving university governance, which the UAC aims to achieve by delegating decision-making to university boards of trustees while holding them accountable for performance. This approach is consistent with agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), which posits that principals (government) must design mechanisms to ensure agents (universities) act in their best interests. By establishing the UAC, the government ensures that universities operate with autonomy while remaining accountable for their actions, balancing freedom with oversight.

Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) further elucidates the UAC's role by emphasising the importance of considering the interests of all parties affected by university operations, including government, society, and faculty. The UAC's inclusive composition promotes transparency and participatory decision-making, which are crucial for sustainable and high-quality education outcomes. Saint (2009) and Kennedy (2003) argue that such stakeholder representation enhances accountability, a critical aspect of effective governance.

This dual application of agency and stakeholder theories provides a comprehensive understanding of how the UAC enhances governance in Saudi higher education. By delegating authority to boards of trustees while ensuring accountability, the UAC facilitates a governance model that is responsive to societal needs and aligned with governmental objectives, thus contributing to the continuous improvement of university performance and educational quality.

○ ***Audit and Governance Committees***

This property indicates the audit and governance committees within the two universities. The method of activating and managing the meetings of the boards of trustees within the two universities was not the same, but there were differences in the processes of activating and managing the meetings. Therefore, the similarities and differences between the two universities will be discussed in how to activate the boards of trustees within the two universities.

Both universities have begun to activate the Board of Trustees through periodic meetings and to exercise the role of the Board stipulated in the Universities Law. This was confirmed by the participant from University 1.

“The Board of Trustees has begun to exercise its powers specified in the law. Now many decisions in the university require the approval of the Board of Trustees, and this is part of governance” [U1-P3].

In the same way in the University 2, the Board of Trustees was activated through meetings. This is what the participant explained.

“The Board of Trustees is intended as a governance framework and makes its decisions through meetings, and we have noticed that decisions in the university have become faster” [U2-P14].

The prominent difference between the two universities in managing the board of trustees is the formation of internal committees. University 1 has formed internal committees to organise work and distribute roles, which are four committees: academic and research affairs, nominations and remunerations, auditing, and investment committees. This is what the participant explained.

“The Board of Trustees formed committees because it believed that these committees would help it in the process of university governance” [U1-P2].

These committees have important roles based on their responsibilities; for example, the nomination committee is responsible for nominating the vice president of the university. As confirmed by the participant.

“The procedure for forming committees is in line with the Universities Law, and this good awareness from the Board of Trustees, and an important step for the nomination and selection of vice presidents of the university” [U1-P5].

Also, these committees help in preparing well for the board meetings. As confirmed by the participant.

“There are four committees emanating from the Board of Trustees whose role is to study issues and make recommendations before presenting them to the Board of Trustees for approval” [U1-P10].

In contrast to University 2, which has no committees within its board of trustees and is run in a fashion that fosters some degree of confidentiality, and much information is kept from the public. This contradicts one of the Trustees' objectives, which is to promote accountability and transparency. This is evident from the responses of participants from University 2.

“In fact, I cannot answer because I am not fully aware of what is happening on the Board of Trustees” [U2-P14]. And the other participant said, *“I am not the person who can answer anything related to the board of trustees” [U2-P15].*

The UAC believes that this difference between the boards of trustees of the two universities is an indicator that reflects the extent of the autonomy of the boards of trustees. This was confirmed by the participant from the UAC.

“The difference in the working mechanism of the Board of Trustees between the two universities is considered a kind of autonomy for the university, as each board sets the appropriate mechanism for governance, such as committees or others” [UAC-P13].

The audit and governance committees within the boards of trustees play a critical role in enhancing accountability and transparency in university governance. The findings align with Wang and Shi's (2020) study, which demonstrates that university boards of trustees' function effectively through structured meetings, adhering to established rules and regulations, with power distributed between the board and the university president.

Soobaroyen et al. (2014) emphasise the significance of audit committees in higher education, noting their role in overseeing financial practices and providing advisory support to the board of trustees. These committees ensure that universities' financial operations are transparent and that discrepancies are promptly addressed.

However, transparency in board operations remains a challenge, as highlighted by de Boer et al. (2010), who noted that some boards of trustees do not make their meetings public or disclose decision-making outcomes to stakeholders. This lack of transparency can hinder trust and accountability.

The variation in the activation of boards of trustees across different universities can be attributed to each board's independence. Each university may adopt governance practices that best suit its unique context and operational needs. This tailored approach allows universities to implement governance structures that align with their strategic objectives while maintaining accountability and transparency.

The present findings contribute to filling a gap in the existing literature. Albeshir's study (2022) offers a comparative analysis of the new Universities Law and the previous higher education law, highlighting the introduction of a Board of Trustees for each university. However, a notable limitation of Albeshir's study is its lack of detailed clarification on the operational mechanisms of these boards of trustees and their role in achieving effective governance. The current study addresses this gap by elucidating the functioning of the board of trustees' committees and their pivotal roles in audit and governance. Doing so provides a clearer understanding of how these committees contribute to enhancing accountability and transparency.

○ ***Automating University Processes***

This property automating university processes refers to the fact that most of the processes in universities have become automated, which shows that most of the processes in universities have become automated, enhancing transparency and accountability. This was indicated by the participant from the UAC.

“One of the criteria for selecting universities that implement the law is that they have automation of academic, administrative, and financial processes to achieve transparency and quality” [UAC-P13].

Both universities had a high rate of automation of their administrative, academic, and financial processes, which qualified them to implement the Universities Law. For example, University 1 has a student records system in which all processes are done electronically, which ensures transparency and accountability. This is what the participant explained.

“The student information system is a joint system of stakeholders, which means there is high transparency and participation in decision-making. The system is based on the principle of transparency and accountability, as it contributes significantly to achieving governance within the university” [U1-P7].

Also, University 2 has the same arrangements, and its processes are automated. This is confirmed by the participant.

“The systems and policies are clear in the university, and the transparency is high through digital transformation or automation of processes, and one of our strong points is automation and technical infrastructure because it helped a lot in controlling and governing performance and linking it to a control panel” [U2-P15].

Automating university processes is a significant step towards enhancing transparency and accountability in Saudi higher education institutions. Before implementing the Universities Law, some Saudi universities had already automated certain processes. However, the comprehensive automation of administrative, financial, and academic processes became a crucial criterion for measuring readiness for governance under the new law. This initiative aligns with the findings of several studies that emphasise the benefits of process automation in universities.

According to Degerli (2020) and Jesse (2010), the automation of operations in universities facilitates monitoring performance indicators, ensuring the effective implementation of governance structures. Nachouki and Naaj (2019) highlight that automation contributes to increased transparency by providing clear and accessible records of all processes. Ginige and Ginige (2007) further argue that automated systems enhance accountability by tracking decisions and actions taken within the university, making it easier to hold individuals and departments accountable for their performance.

Moreover, Birnbaum (2000) and Kofman et al. (2009) indicate that automation leads to greater efficiency and effectiveness within higher education institutions. By streamlining processes and reducing the potential for human error, universities can operate more smoothly and focus on their core educational missions. Automating processes also support the goal of governance by providing a reliable and consistent framework for managing university operations.

○ *Integration of Performance Indicators*

This property integration of performance indicators refers to one of the tools used by universities during the implementation of governance to measure the level of implementation of governance, follow up on processes and procedures, and ensure their quality. Both universities use the same indicators identified to measure universities' readiness to implement governance.

At University 1, performance indicators are measured periodically, and reports are submitted to the UAC to evaluate implementation. This is what the participant explained.

“Part of the Universities Law is for the university to have a strategic plan with clear and studied indicators, and to be in an annual report prepared by a specialised committee at the university with clear and specific indicators from the Ministry of Education to ensure the achievement of the ruling” [U1-P7].

Also, in University 2, performance indicators are controlled through the database, and here, the importance of automating processes becomes clear to obtain accurate data for all operations, and thus, the university can evaluate performance. This is what the participant explained.

“Governance is often controlled through indicators, and performance indicators depend on the database in the university, provided that they are accurate indicators and a clear mechanism for calculating them” [U2-P15].

Integrating performance indicators into university processes serves as a vital mechanism for enhancing transparency and accountability within higher education institutions. This approach aligns with the findings of numerous studies, which underscore the pivotal role that performance indicators play in governance and institutional performance.

Zaman (2015) emphasises that performance indicators are crucial in fostering a culture of accountability by providing measurable benchmarks against which university performance can be evaluated. Huisman and Stensaker (2022) further elaborate that these indicators facilitate transparency by offering clear, quantifiable data that stakeholders can use to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of university operations. This transparency is essential for building trust among stakeholders, including students, faculty, and external partners.

Moreover, Buduru and Pal (2010) argue that performance indicators are powerful tools for monitoring and controlling systems within higher education institutions. By systematically tracking performance metrics, universities can identify strengths and pinpoint improvement opportunities. This continuous monitoring not only aids in maintaining high standards of educational quality but also ensures that universities are held accountable for their outcomes.

Abdelaziz (2022) highlights the role of performance indicators in governance, noting that they provide a structured framework for decision-making and resource allocation. Universities can make informed decisions that drive progress and innovation by aligning institutional goals with specific performance

metrics. This alignment is particularly important in the context of the new Universities Law, which aims to enhance transparency and accountability.

- **Transparency and Accountability Challenges**

This category addresses the challenges that universities have faced in their efforts to improve transparency and accountability.

- ***Conflicts of Interest***

The property of conflict of interest pertains to the emergence of disputes among various governance boards within the university. This conflict initially arose when the Board of Trustees rejected certain academic decisions approved by the University Council. Some academics perceived this action as an encroachment by the Board of Trustees into areas where they lacked adequate expertise. This sentiment was articulated by a participant, who underscored the tension between the governance bodies due to differing perspectives and the perceived overreach of the Board of Trustees into academic affairs.

“The board of trustees has become more obstructive than useful. They are supposed to focus on strategic issues.” [U1-P1].

Also, the overlapping of powers is one of the reasons for this collision. This is what the participant indicated.

“There is a disagreement between the Board of Trustees and the University Council because of the overlapping powers and maybe most members of the Board of Trustees do not have academic experience, and their backgrounds are from the private sector” [U1-P10].

The other participant believes that the cause of the conflict was a lack of understanding of the role of the Board of Trustees.

“The failure of the Board of Trustees experiment was due to the lack of understanding of the members of the Board of Trustees and the University Council of the duties and powers of the Board of Trustees” [U1-P5].

On the other hand, the UAC believes this conflict between the two councils is normal and expected. This is what the participant indicated.

“Sometimes you need this conflict because it generates more ideas. We do not want to continue with academic governance to achieve investment and autonomy. We also do not want to transform the university into a private university. The solution may be in the balance between the two councils” [UAC-P11].

The other participant from the UAC confirms that they have knowledge of these conflicts and that their role is to settle any conflicts of jurisdiction that arise between the Board of Trustees and the University Council, according to Article 7 of the Universities Law.

“There is a university that has conflicts between the board of trustees and the university, and the reason is that the concept of trustees is new to them, and our role comes here in resolving these differences and bringing points of view closer” [UAC-P12].

The conflict of interest between governance boards, particularly the Board of Trustees and the University Council, represents a significant challenge to accountability and transparency in university governance. This finding aligns with studies highlighting that conflicts between academics and non-academics can adversely affect the decision-making process, posing a substantial hurdle in implementing effective governance (Bhushan, 2023). One primary reason for these conflicts is the perception among academics that their role in decision-making has been diminished (Carvalho & Videira, 2019). Additionally, a lack of trust between trustees and academics exacerbates these tensions (Migliore, 2012).

Addressing such conflicts necessitates the creation of an operational model for the Board of Trustees, establishing a clear division of labour between the university president and the trustees (Wang & Shi, 2020; Ambrosio & Ehrenberg, 2007). Furthermore, proposing regulations to resolve disputes between academics and trustees can ensure organisational justice and activate shared governance (Hogler et al., 2009).

Agency theory provides a relevant framework for interpreting these conflicts. According to the agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), professors act as agents representing academic interests, while trustees represent the administrative and financial interests of the university. When the perspectives of these agents diverge, conflicts arise, making it difficult to balance the different interests. For instance, while academics might prioritise increased funding for research and education, trustees may focus on financial stability and sustainability.

This divergence was evident when the Board of Trustees rejected certain academic decisions, leading to the establishment of committees within the board to study these decisions before submission. This procedural adjustment helped mitigate conflicts by ensuring a more thorough review process, fostering better understanding, and promoting cooperation between the academic and administrative agents.

Incorporating stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) alongside agency theory further enhances our understanding of these dynamics. Stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of involving all relevant parties in decision-making processes. By creating mechanisms that facilitate the active participation and cooperation of academic and administrative stakeholders, universities can better navigate conflicts and promote a governance structure that upholds transparency, accountability, and shared governance. This dual-theory approach underscores the necessity of balancing diverse interests to achieve effective

governance in Saudi higher education. This result is significant as it reveals the first instance of a conflict of interest in Saudi universities following the implementation of the Universities Law. Consequently, this finding will assist decision-makers in Saudi higher education to take proactive measures to address such conflicts before implementing the Universities Law in subsequent phases.

- ***Fear of Accountability***

The property of fear of accountability indicates that the increased focus on accountability mechanisms has generated fear among employees. This is what the participant indicated.

“The regulatory authorities are now very strict, and people have become afraid to present any initiative that increases the income of the university because they may be investigated. This fear is due to previous cases of people who did things in good faith and were punished for violating the law” [U1-P6].

Accountability mechanisms have increased after the implementation of the new university law. For example, the General Auditing Office now reviews the final accounts, and the Board of Trustees appoints an external auditor for the university’s accounts. This was confirmed to him by one of the participants.

“There is a tight system led by the General Auditing Office and the Ministry of Finance, which plays the role of financial monitoring and accountability. Therefore, any amount we spend is subject to a financial controller” [U1-P1].

One participant attributed the fear of accountability to weak legal awareness, stating that this lack of understanding leads to a pervasive apprehension about potential repercussions in the workplace.

“The legal awareness of the professor’s rights and powers and what he should do may be lacking, so he works in fear because he may transgress the law and thus get into trouble” [U1-P4].

This sentiment reflects a broader concern that insufficient knowledge of legal frameworks and regulations may hinder effective decision-making and create an environment where individuals constantly fear making errors that could lead to disciplinary actions.

Furthermore, as accountability measures increase, the UAC should consider that increased accountability may affect the achievement of autonomy. As discussed in the previous theme, there is a weakness of university autonomy, and oversight has increased over them. Therefore, an increased focus on accountability can lead to weaker creativity and innovation as individuals may fear risks and become more deferential to authority. This is what the participant indicated.

“Unfortunately, the many accountability measures from regulatory authorities have made officials tend to avoid risks and respect authority. This limits development and upgrading in the academic aspects” [U1-P3].

The study reveals an increase in accountability mechanisms within Saudi universities, aligning with de Boer and Enders (2017), who found that universities' financial dependence on the government heightens their autonomy and accountability requirements. This correlation is supported by Frølich (2011), who indicated that performance-based funding leads to increased accountability. Additionally, de Boer et al. (2010) and Soobaroyen et al. (2014) highlight the role of governance boards and audit committees in enforcing accountability. Furthermore, Huisman and Stensaker (2022) emphasise that performance measurement indicators are critical for university governance and accountability.

However, these findings also reveal significant challenges. Increased scrutiny and accountability can inhibit academic innovation and threaten academic freedom (Findlow, 2008; Scott, 2018; Craig et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2019). This heightened accountability can create an environment of fear among faculty members, who may avoid assuming responsibilities due to the potential for criticism and mistakes (Abiodun-Oyebanji, 2019; Njoroge, 2018). This issue is further exacerbated by high levels of confidentiality and ineffective communication within university departments.

While accountability is essential for governance and preventing corruption (Shacklock & Galtung, 2016), the study suggests that the current mechanisms may be overly restrictive, stifling academic creativity. To address this, the UAC should review and enhance accountability mechanisms to balance accountability with independence and academic freedom. These mechanisms should motivate faculty members and staff, fostering an environment conducive to innovation while maintaining essential governance standards.

○ ***Organisational Culture***

The property of organisational culture indicates one of the challenges of improving transparency. As discussed in the previous category, the two universities have embarked on initiatives to automate various administrative processes and set performance indicators to enhance transparency. However, these efforts are still marred by inconsistencies in data disclosure. Regarding administrative transparency, the participant from University 1 points out that employee promotions are done secretly, and there are no announced criteria for promotions.

“There is some ambiguity in some matters, there is secrecy, and there is no transparency, such as employee promotions being done secretly, and promotion criteria are not clarified” [U1-P10].

Likewise, on the financial side, the other participant from the same university pointed out that not all financial data are published.

“Previously, I was the dean of the college, and the college budget was not known or announced because there was no transparency at the university” [U1-P5].

The other participant indicated that the lack of transparency in some financial statements is due to the employees' resistance to transparency.

“Sometimes we want to develop some financial procedures to make it automated and transparent, but there is opposition and resistance to change from some employees because it will achieve high transparency” [U1-P6].

Moreover, the participants from University 2 indicated that they have transparency in the university, but there is some data that is confidential and is not announced.

“Transparency exists, but there is some data that is supposed to be undeclared and of a confidential nature. This is only announced to those involved” [U2-P14].

This may be understood in some sensitive data that has privacy, and therefore, only the authorised person can see it, but it is noted that the issue of data publication is subject to personal decisions, and there is no data governance. For example, the participant from University 2 indicated that they have a governance framework, but it has not been announced.

“We are developing a governance framework based on 74 indicators that were used to measure the readiness of the university. But the framework has not been made public because it will not benefit the university community” [U2-P14].

The organisational culture significantly influences the attainment of transparency within universities. According to Wallis (2020), the growing complexity of organisational environments necessitates open communication and trust, particularly in universities with diverse stakeholders. Transparency, characterised by clear communication and accurate information sharing, is crucial for preventing corruption, building trust, and enhancing overall effectiveness (Kaptein, 2008; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Embedding transparency into the organisational culture helps universities manage their reputation, foster collaboration, and ensure responsible decision-making (Awaysheh & Klassen, 2010). However, this integration requires leadership to model transparent behaviours and establish clear accountability expectations (Doh & Quigley, 2014).

The current study's findings indicate that organisational culture poses a significant challenge to enhancing transparency in Saudi universities. This challenge is consistent with the findings of Al-Saif and Abdel-Wahab (2021), who emphasised the necessity for Saudi universities to enhance transparency through electronic recruitment platforms. Similarly, Omar and Almaghthawi (2020) highlighted the importance of data governance and the development of policies for transparency and data management within Saudi

universities. These findings align with the research of Alhuthali and Sayed (2022), Alsharif (2019), and Elsayed and Saleh (2018), who collectively underscored the need for improved transparency and accountability in Saudi higher education.

Despite implementing the Universities Law, which was expected to enhance transparency, current practices reveal that transparency in the universities under study remains weak. This shortcoming can be partly attributed to the entrenched organisational culture that does not prioritise transparency.

Conversely, studies by Jongbloed et al. (2018) and Hofmann and Strobel (2020) indicate that universities implementing governance measures have experienced increased transparency. These studies demonstrate that transparency is achieved through accreditation, classification, and performance indicators, with internal data disclosure contributing to faculty satisfaction. This suggests that while the potential for transparency exists, its realisation is hindered by deep-rooted cultural norms within the universities.

Fostering a culture of transparency in universities requires addressing both structural and cultural complexities. It involves articulating transparency as a core value and ensuring its consistent practice across all organisational levels.

○ ***Information Asymmetry***

The property of information asymmetry signifies a discrepancy in the distribution of information between universities and the UAC, presenting a significant challenge to the principles of accountability and transparency. Previously, the University Council was comprised of the Minister of Education and a representative from the UAC. However, enacting the new university legislation has resulted in the University Council attaining independence and no longer including a representative from the UAC. This development has precipitated a disparity in the information accessible to both councils. The ensuing gap in communication is problematic, as highlighted by one participant.

“Currently, the University Council does not include a representative from the Ministry of Education, and therefore there is a gap in information about the decisions taken. Therefore, we established an internal review committee to review the decisions and ensure their validity” [UAC-P12].

To address the issue of information asymmetry, the UAC has utilised its authority to monitor the activities of the Board of Trustees. This oversight is achieved by examining the minutes from University Council meetings, ensuring that decisions are made accurately and transparently. By implementing this measure, the Council aims to mitigate the information gap. This approach was elucidated by one participant.

“The UAC has the authority to monitor on the work of the boards of trustees and the university, and since there is no representative of the Ministry of Education on the university council, we review the decisions and ensure that the universities are on the right track” [UAC-P11].

The literature extensively discusses the challenge of information asymmetry in achieving transparency and governance in universities, especially through the lens of Agency Theory. This theory has been instrumental in strategic management and policy change analysis in higher education (Ahmad et al., 2012; Kim & Mahoney, 2005). Agency Theory posits that information asymmetry arises when agents (universities) have more information about their activities than principals (governments), leading to potential goal conflicts where universities might pursue actions misaligned with governmental objectives (Kivistö, 2007). This disparity makes it difficult for governments to effectively monitor and ensure that allocated resources are used as intended, often resulting in suboptimal outcomes (Lane & Kivistö, 2008). In such relationships, universities often have more information about their operations and intentions than the government, which can lead to opportunistic behaviours that undermine the objectives set by the government (Kivistö, 2007).

For instance, one of the universities under study committed financial irregularities due to the absence of a representative from the UAC to oversee and guide decision-making processes. This situation is extensively discussed under the property of anxiety about giving autonomy. To mitigate these issues, the UAC established a committee to review university decisions and ensure their alignment with established goals to address information asymmetry. However, this mechanism may be ineffective, as many university decisions may be implemented before the committee reviews them. This ongoing problem could lead to additional costs associated with rectifying opportunistic decisions. Moreover, this committee's role might inadvertently reduce universities' independence and centralise decision-making, potentially reverting Saudi higher education to its previous state.

However, the argument that information asymmetry is a persistent and insurmountable barrier can be contested. Advances in digital technologies and data analytics have significantly improved the monitoring capabilities of principals (governments). The proliferation of performance metrics, accreditation standards, and transparency tools, such as student reviews and institutional rankings, has enhanced the availability of information and reduced the information gap (Lazić et al., 2021).

Therefore, a mechanism that addresses information asymmetry could be developed by leveraging the automation of procedures. Implementing electronic decision-making processes for the University Council, effective after an agreed-upon period between governance councils, would grant universities the independence to make decisions while enabling the UAC to ensure the validity and alignment of these decisions with governance standards.

- ***Summary of the Theme 3***

The theme of improving transparency and accountability in Saudi higher education reveals significant processes and challenges in the implementation of governance reforms under the new Universities Law. Processes include establishing the Universities Affairs Council to oversee governance frameworks, and introducing audit and governance committees aimed at enhancing oversight and accountability

mechanisms. Additionally, efforts towards automating university processes and integrating performance indicators seek to foster greater transparency and enhance decision-making based on empirical data.

However, several challenges hinder these efforts. Influenced by organisational culture and traditional norms, conflicts of interest among stakeholders pose substantial obstacles to transparent governance practices. Moreover, a pervasive fear of accountability and information asymmetry further complicates the implementation of effective transparency measures.

Addressing these challenges and advancing governance reforms necessitate strategic interventions to mitigate conflicts of interest, promote a culture of openness and accountability, and ensure equitable access to information across all levels of university governance. These measures are crucial not only for aligning with the principles of the new Universities Law but also for fostering trust and enhancing institutional credibility within Saudi higher education.

The aspects of the proposed governance framework extracted from Theme 3:

- **Transparency Includes Four Elements:**

- ***Automating University Processes:*** implementing technological solutions to streamline operations and enhance data transparency.
- ***Integration of Performance Indicators:*** utilising metrics to transparently evaluate and improve institutional performance.
- ***Promoting Organisational Culture:*** cultivating a culture of accountability and ethical conduct to foster transparency across all university operations.
- ***Data Transparency Policy:*** develop a policy for transparency of data in universities that is consistent with governance requirements

- **Accountability Includes Four Elements:**

- ***UAC Establishment:*** strengthening oversight and governance frameworks to ensure transparency in decision-making processes.
- ***Audit and Governance Committees:*** establishing independent bodies to oversee financial practices and ensure accountability in resource management.
- ***Addressing Conflicts of Interest:*** implementing policies to effectively manage and disclose conflicts of interest among stakeholders.

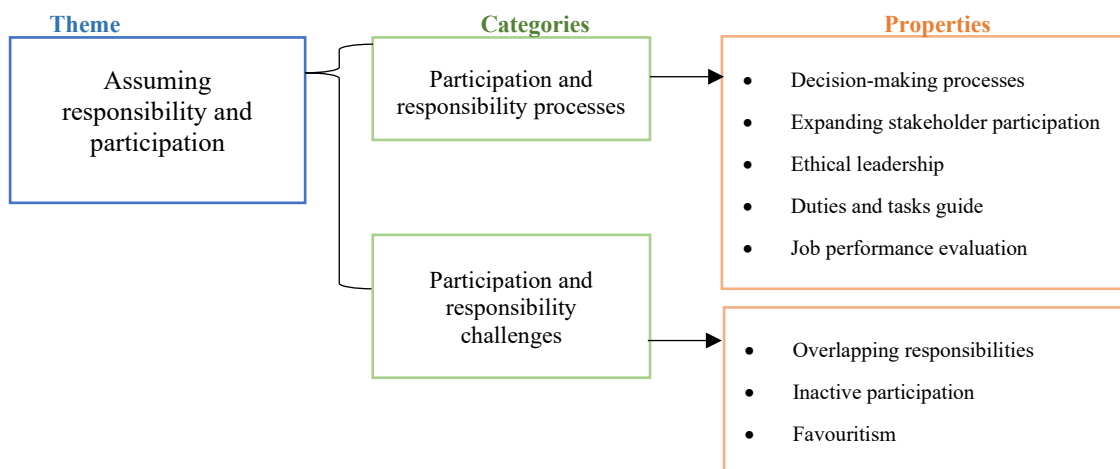
- **Developing Accountability Mechanisms:** reviewing and developing accountability mechanisms to balance accountability and autonomy.

These framework elements aim to strengthen transparency and accountability within Saudi higher education institutions, aligning with the objectives of governance reforms under the new Universities Law. By enhancing transparency through technological innovations and performance metrics and promoting accountability through effective oversight and organisational culture, universities can navigate challenges and realise the benefits of a transparent and accountable governance framework.

7.3.4 Theme 4: Assuming Responsibility and Participation

This theme represents the opinions and experiences of the interviewees regarding the processes and challenges associated with stakeholder participation and taking responsibility. Two categories are related to this theme: processes of participation and responsibility and challenges of participation and responsibility (See Figure 11).

Figure 11 Theme 4 Assuming responsibility and participation



• Participation and Responsibility Processes

This category focuses on steps taken to enhance responsibility and participation within universities.

- **Decision-Making Processes**

The property of decision-making processes refers to the nature of academic decision-making in universities, which is carried out with the participation of stakeholders and collectively through various councils, as one participant explained.

“Decision-making processes are based on councils, and there are no individual decisions. The department head, dean, or university president cannot make decisions except with the approval of the relevant councils” [U1-P2].

The decision-making process follows a structured sequence, starting with the department council, which includes all department faculty members. It then progresses to the college council, comprising department heads, and finally to the university council, which consists of college deans. This hierarchical structure ensures the participation of stakeholders at each level, facilitating a representative decision-making process as another participant noted.

“Most decisions arise from department councils, the members of which are faculty members, as well as college councils in which department heads and deputy deans participate, and this is what the law stipulates” [U1-P3].

The decision-making processes in university governance are crucial for ensuring participation and responsibility, reflecting a balance between traditional academic values and modern managerial practices. Historically, universities have valued collegial participation in decision-making, a process allowing faculty members to have a say in institutional governance, fostering a sense of ownership and alignment with the university's strategic directions (Altbach, 2000). However, recent trends indicate a shift towards managerialism, where senior managers increasingly make decisions without substantial faculty input. This top-down approach, driven by commercial and entrepreneurial influences, can undermine the core values of shared governance, transparency, and collegial debate (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003; Currie, 2005; Harman, 2005).

Conversely, some argue that while managerialism has its drawbacks, it also brings necessary efficiency and responsiveness to the complex demands faced by modern universities. Collegial decision-making, although valued, can be slow and may not always involve the right participants to add the most value to decisions (Harloe & Perry, 2004). The rapid pace of change in higher education requires more agile and strategic decision-making processes, which managerial approaches can provide (Meyer & Evans, 2005). Furthermore, engaging faculty in decision-making is not inherently opposed to managerialism; instead, integrating faculty expertise with strategic management can enhance the quality of decisions and ensure that academic and managerial goals are aligned (Henkel, 2004). Consequently, the current findings complement and corroborate the results of the comparative analysis presented in Chapter 5, which highlighted that both the previous Higher Education Law and the new University Law share a common feature: the academic decision-making process based on participation through various councils.

○ ***Expanding Stakeholder Participation***

The property of expanding stakeholder participation refers to the expansion of the participation of internal and external stakeholders in decisions. External stakeholders have been involved in many boards, such as the Board of Trustees. This is what the participant from the UAC indicated.

“The university will be governed administratively, financially, and academically. For this, members of the Board of Trustees include faculty members, the private sector, and those with experience from the community” [UAC-P12].

Furthermore, external stakeholders are members of some advisory boards within the university. This is what the participant from University 1 indicated.

“Academic accreditation requires us to have an international advisory council for the university in which external stakeholders participate, and sometimes they participate in committees for changing study plans to ensure their compatibility with the needs of the labour market” [U1-P2].

In addition, University 2 also has advisory boards in which external stakeholders participate.

“At the College of Computer Science, we have an advisory committee that includes members from Aramco and SABIC, and they participate in making development decisions for the academic process” [U2-P14].

As for the internal stakeholders, there is participation by boards and committees. Faculty members participate in department councils, employees participate in administrative committees, and students participate in student councils. This is what the participant from University 2 indicated.

“Participation in decision-making exists in the university at all levels. For example, faculty members participate in scientific councils, and there are executive committees in which employees participate, as well as students participate through student committees” [U2-P15].

To expand stakeholder participation, the new University Law stipulates the existence of 3 advisory councils, which universities have begun to form. As indicated by participant from University 1.

“Several advisory councils have recently been formed, an advisory council for faculty members and students, as well as an international advisory council, and its role will be determined through the Board of Trustees and the University Council” [U1-P3].

Expanding stakeholder participation in university governance aligns well with the principles of Stakeholder Theory, emphasising the importance of including diverse stakeholder groups in strategic management processes to create value for all involved. Stakeholder Theory posits that organisations should consider the interests and impacts of all stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, owners, employees, and local communities, to achieve long-term success (Freeman et al., 2020). This approach has increasingly been adopted in higher education institutions, recognising their multifaceted roles in society as educational entities and as hubs for scientific research and community development (Ferrero-Ferrero et al., 2018). The inclusion of advisory councils in university governance is a practical application of Stakeholder Theory, allowing universities to engage with internal and external stakeholders, such as faculty, students, industry

partners, and community members, to ensure that their needs and perspectives are incorporated into decision-making processes (Kettunen, 2015).

However, expanding stakeholder participation through advisory councils also presents several challenges and potential inconsistencies. While Stakeholder Theory advocates for the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders, in practice, identifying and prioritising stakeholders can be complex and contentious (Freeman et al., 2010). Additionally, balancing various stakeholder groups' diverse and sometimes conflicting interests requires careful management and may lead to tensions between academic autonomy and external influence (Lourenço & Mano, 2017). There is also the risk that stakeholder engagement efforts could be superficial or tokenistic, failing to grant stakeholders meaningful influence over governance decisions, which can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of these initiatives (Kuokkanen, 2007).

In the context of the current study, expanding the participation of internal and external stakeholders through advisory councils marks a significant step in the history of Saudi higher education, which has traditionally been insular and managed primarily by academics. However, the effectiveness of this participation is an anticipated challenge, as it may not be readily measurable due to its novelty. Advisory councils will require time to demonstrate their efficacy. This finding is consistent with the results of the comparative analysis in Chapter 5, which indicated that the new Universities Law enhances participation through advisory councils.

○ ***Ethical Leadership***

The property of ethical leadership refers to the role of leaders in universities in enhancing participation and responsibility in university governance. Some university leaders enhance participation by consulting some vice presidents in most decisions, enhancing leaders' satisfaction and reassurance. One participant from University 1 shared this experience.

“The university president came to all the vice presidents in their offices and consulted them and took their opinions. This happened to me more than once, and sometimes he contacts us in the evening for consultation, and this gives us a kind of comfort and reassurance in making decisions” [U1-P4].

This approach is reinforced by another participant from the same university's observation that despite the president's initial support for an idea, he respected the majority's decision, showcasing a flexible leadership style.

“I went through matters in the university council that were discussed in detail. The university president was in favor of the idea, but in the end the idea ended up being rejected due to the majority rejecting it. Therefore, the university president's personality is somewhat flexible” [U1-P6].

Furthermore, even when not legally required, the president's preference for consultation exemplifies his commitment to inclusive decision-making. This was confirmed by the participant.

“For example, the university president was going to take a step in establishing a decision-making support unit in another administration, and yet he called me to consult and ask, and the law does not oblige him to do so, but this is his personality and prefers consultation” [U1-P6].

This ethical leadership extends to strategic transitions, as illustrated by the smooth implementation of new laws under the guidance of wise university leaders, as a participant from University 2 pointed out:

“With the wisdom of the university leadership, the university president and his deputy for development, there were no major problems with the transition because they laid out the road map for the transition to the universities law” [U2-P14].

Additionally, university leaders played a crucial role in alleviating concerns during this transition, demonstrating their responsibility to ensure a positive impact. This was confirmed by another participant from University 2.

“There were questions among many people at the beginning of the implementation of the law, but the university leaders took it upon themselves to reassure people that this is a transitional stage and there will be no negative impact” [U2-P15].

Ethical leadership in higher education involves university leaders practising ethical behaviours and consulting with others to promote transparent, responsive, effective, and accountable governance (Enwereonye et al., 2015; Naidoo, 2012). Ethical leaders foster an environment of accountability and transparency, which is crucial for employee commitment. Furthermore, curbing corruption and adhering to ethical standards are essential for maintaining institutional integrity and employee morale (Heyneman, 2004; Hijal-Moghrabi et al., 2017).

Stewardship theory, which posits that leaders inherently act in the best interests of their organisations (Davis et al., 1997), provides a valuable lens for interpreting the study's results. In the context of this study, university leaders who engage in ethical behaviours and inclusive decision-making exemplify stewardship principles. For instance, one participant noted that the university president's practice of consulting vice presidents and respecting majority decisions fosters trust and reassurance among staff. Another participant highlighted the president's commitment to consultation, even when not legally required, as a demonstration of inclusive leadership. This ethical approach aligns with stewardship theory by promoting transparency, accountability, and collective governance. The smooth transition during the implementation of new laws, guided by wise university leadership, further supports the theory's assertion that leaders' alignment with organisational goals enhances overall performance. Thus, the findings corroborate stewardship theory and suggest its practical applicability in enhancing governance in higher education.

○ ***Duties and Tasks Guide***

The property of duties and tasks guide indicates that faculty and staff members work at the university based on a guide that defines their responsibilities. Previously, there was no guide to the tasks and responsibilities of faculty members. This is what Participant from University 1 pointed out.

“I was vice dean of a college for a year, and I did not know what my tasks were, and when I asked the dean for them, he sent them to me via WhatsApp, and this is not an official way to specify tasks” [U1-P8].

While a participant from the same university pointed out that after implementing the Universities Law, the tasks and responsibilities became clear, and the university developed a guide to responsibilities for faculty members, staff and students.

“Faculty members have clear responsibilities, and there is evidence approved by the University Council of the rights and duties of faculty members. There is a job description for the university staff, in which their responsibilities are explained, and students are also informed of their rights and duties” [U1-P3].

Moreover, in University 2, tasks and responsibilities are defined within executive decisions. This is what the participant explained.

“Nothing is done without a job description, because every department that is created comes with a decision that includes the tasks and organisational structure” [U2-P15].

Implementing the tasks and duties guide in Saudi universities represents a significant stride towards enhancing participation and responsibility within the academic community. This initiative is closely aligned with the comprehensive framework proposed by Kaki and Alaskar (2017), which emphasises the need for clear and specific delineation of duties to ensure fair and transparent achievement of institutional objectives. The guide aims to overhaul educational job regulations to boost performance efficiency by drawing guidance from various national directives such as the Ministry of Education's ninth Development Plan, The National Plan for Science and Technology, and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

○ ***Job Performance Evaluation***

The property of job performance evaluation refers to developing job performance evaluations in universities to motivate faculty and staff to work more responsibly. This is what Participant from University 1 pointed out.

“The new job performance evaluation is somewhat different, as promotions have different criteria for employees and faculty members, and now they have only one choice, which is to work responsibly in order to be part of this university” [U1-P7].

The other participant from the same university explains the development that has taken place in the performance evaluation process so that it has become at three levels.

“One of the important changes is the mechanism for evaluating faculty members as well as leaders. To achieve credibility and fairness, the evaluation now has three levels: from your subordinates, your colleague, and your boss” [U1-P3].

At University 2, the participant indicated that the development of performance evaluation processes included leaders, and it became possible to evaluate leaders' performance through the platform.

“We have a policy for nominating and evaluating the performance of leaders. For example, if you want to nominate yourself for a leadership position, you can apply on the platform and then a vote is taken by colleagues” [U2-P15].

The job performance evaluation processes in Saudi universities represent an important mechanism for enhancing participation and responsibility among faculty and staff. As the literature highlights, effective performance evaluations are essential for motivating employees to work more responsibly and align their efforts with institutional goals (Henard, 2009; Jyothi et al., 2014). The development of these evaluation systems, as observed by the participants, underscores a shift towards greater transparency and fairness through multi-level feedback mechanisms involving colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors. Academic leaders, such as Deans and Department Chairs, play pivotal roles in shaping these evaluations by promoting empowerment and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Paracha et al., 2012). However, challenges persist, particularly in adapting evaluation frameworks to local contexts and ensuring they complement academic freedoms while achieving desired outcomes (Alotaibi, 2022; Mackay, 1995; Simmons, 2002). By integrating peer participation and aligning evaluations with institutional objectives and incentives, Saudi universities are poised to foster a more collaborative and accountable academic environment conducive to sustained performance improvement in teaching, research, and service delivery.

- **Participation and Responsibility Challenges**

This category addresses the challenges that universities have faced in their efforts to enhance responsibility and participation.

- ***Overlapping Responsibilities***

The property of overlapping responsibilities indicates an overlap between the responsibilities of different governance boards, which has posed a challenge for universities. One of the participants from University 1 believes that it is necessary to transfer some powers between the councils to address the overlap.

“As a member of the Board of Trustees, I believe that moving some powers between the three councils: the University Council, the Board of Trustees, and the UAC is necessary for governance to become a help for universities and not an obstacle” [U1-P3].

The other participant from the same university confirmed that the overlap between powers was one of the reasons for the conflict between some councils.

“Overlapping powers between councils is one of the reasons for disagreements between the Board of Trustees and the university” [U1-P10].

Therefore, the Board of Trustees needs greater powers, and the other participant confirmed this.

“I believe that the Board of Trustees is supposed to be given more freedom and greater authority in that they make decisions without referring to the Ministry of Education and that the Ministry to be a supervisory body” [U1-P6].

This quote is supported by another participant who believes that the current powers need to be amended to speed up procedures and reduce bureaucracy.

“The current powers need to be amended, and if we do not amend them, the fear is that these levels of decision-making will become long and add administrative burden, additional bureaucracy, and longer time” [U1-P3].

On the other hand, the participant from the UAC confirms that the University Council and Trustees make most decisions and that the sequence of powers is appropriate.

“Most work will be done by the University Council, a few will require approval by the Board of Trustees, and rarely the approval of the UAC. Therefore, I think the existing hierarchy in governance boards is good” [UAC-P13].

The same participant also confirms that if there is an overlap in powers, the UAC has a role in dealing with the matter and governing relations between the boards.

“The role of the UAC in codifying the relationship with the boards of trustees so that it establishes clear, frank and direct lines of relationship that can rid you of the issue of anxiety about intersection or duplication between the boards” [UAC-P13].

The literature on overlapping responsibilities among governance boards delineates potential benefits and drawbacks rooted in agency and stewardship theories. Agency theory posits that overlapping memberships can foster knowledge spillover and enhance information sharing across committees, thereby mitigating asymmetric information and bolstering monitoring effectiveness (Chandar et al., 2012; Faleye et al., 2011).

Directors holding multiple roles can leverage insights gained in one committee to inform decision-making in others, potentially leading to improved organisational outcomes (Zheng and Cullinan, 2010). Stewardship theory complements this perspective by asserting that directors and managers act in the organisation's best interests, aligning their motivations with company objectives to enhance overall governance (Davis et al., 1997).

However, challenges arise when overlapping responsibilities diverge from stewardship principles, as Laux and Laux (2009) noted. They caution that conflicting interests among directors and managers can arise, particularly under incentive-based compensation structures where personal gains may overshadow long-term organisational interests, potentially increasing risks such as earnings manipulation (Hoitash and Hoitash, 2009). Thus, overlapping responsibilities can facilitate beneficial knowledge sharing and align interests under certain conditions, but they may also introduce conflicts that undermine governance effectiveness.

Addressing overlap in governance structures, some universities have sought to mitigate these challenges by integrating leadership roles across governance and management committees. Marginson and Considine (2000) argue for consolidating roles such as chairperson of the academic board with membership on the executive committee to streamline decision-making and reduce potential conflicts arising from overlapping responsibilities.

In Saudi higher education, Alqahtani and Ayentimi (2021) highlight challenges stemming from overlapping responsibilities between different administrative bodies. This duplication complicates the management and implementation of human resources processes, underscoring the need for a clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities within governance structures.

Therefore, the findings underscore the importance of developing mechanisms to prevent overlapping responsibilities among governance boards in Saudi universities. Reviewing and refining the powers and responsibilities of these boards can enhance clarity, efficiency, and effectiveness in governance practices, ultimately supporting the strategic objectives and long-term sustainability of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia.

○ *Inactive Participation*

The property of inactive participation indicates that some stakeholders do not participate in decision-making and that their participation is sometimes inactive. Although expanding participation in decision-making processes was discussed in the previous category, the effectiveness of such participation remains ineffective. This is what the participant expressed.

“In all honesty, there is no participation of stakeholders, and what is done is their involvement only formally. For example, we have a student council, but does the student council influence the university’s decisions? No” [U1-P5].

The participant from the UAC confirms that not all stakeholders participate in the decision-making process, and an example of this is the Board of Trustees, in which students do not participate.

“Let me be honest with you, the current boards of trustees will not involve all stakeholders. For example, students are among the most important stakeholders in universities, and they are not participating” [UAC-P13].

In terms of the effectiveness of faculty members’ participation, their participation in some councils and committees is not as active as one participant expressed it.

“There are no organisational rules for managing councils. I am a member of the university council, but I do not have the right to speak unless the council president agrees. Therefore, there is no mechanism for participating and clarifying when it is possible to speak or vote” U1-P5].

Another participant points out that the ineffectiveness of participation in the councils is because voting on decisions within the department council is public. Therefore, there is a fear among some members of voting with an opinion different from that of the council president, which makes participation inactive.

“Faculty members participate in department councils, but they fear the department head and there is courtesy towards him, so they agree to everything he sees because he is the one responsible for approving or rejecting their matters. That is why voting within the council is supposed to take place in secret” [U1-P6].

The findings highlight that despite efforts to expand stakeholder engagement through various advisory councils, some stakeholders remain disengaged, posing obstacles to effective participation and responsibility. Ahmed (2018) and Hai & Anh (2021) emphasise the critical role of university policies in fostering active faculty participation, suggesting that policies supporting inclusivity and responsiveness are crucial. Similarly, Revitt & Luyk (2016) attribute weak stakeholder participation to administrative resistance, indicating organisational barriers that hinder effective engagement in decision-making processes. Furthermore, Menon (2005) underscores the dissatisfaction stemming from limited student involvement in governance, reflecting broader challenges in integrating diverse perspectives into university management. Moreover, Algraini et al. (2018) emphasise that Saudi higher education is centralised and needs to enhance the effectiveness of stakeholder participation.

Conversely, conflicting studies argue for the pivotal role of stakeholders, both internal and external, in shaping university governance and decision-making (Saint, 2009; Sifuna, 2012; Shattock, 2002; Trakman,

2008; Marshall, 2018; Magalhães et al., 2018; Leišytė et al., 2014; Tetreva & Sabolová, 2010). These studies suggest that active engagement of stakeholders, including students and faculty, enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance structures. Additionally, McCann et al. (2021) highlight students and faculty as influential stakeholders whose participation is critical for aligning institutional goals with stakeholder interests.

In the context of stakeholder theory, inactive participation among stakeholders in Saudi higher education reflects a departure from the theory's ideal of inclusive decision-making processes that consider and integrate stakeholders' interests. Stakeholder theory posits that organisations should prioritise engagement with all relevant stakeholders, ensuring their voices are heard, and their perspectives inform decision-making (Freeman, 1984). However, the findings suggest that despite efforts to formalise participation structures such as student councils and faculty committees, involvement in decision-making remains superficial and ineffective.

The theoretical contribution highlights the discrepancy between the theoretical expectations of stakeholder theory and the practical challenges encountered in implementing effective stakeholder engagement strategies within educational institutions. The statements from participants underscore barriers such as lack of formal mechanisms for participation, hierarchical constraints on speaking rights, and fear of repercussions for expressing dissenting opinions. These insights challenge stakeholder theory by revealing systemic issues that hinder genuine stakeholder involvement, thereby prompting a reconsideration of how organisations can better facilitate meaningful participation.

Theoretical advancement in stakeholder theory can involve developing frameworks and practices that address these barriers. For instance, establishing clear guidelines for participation, ensuring confidentiality in decision-making processes, and fostering a culture of openness and inclusivity could enhance stakeholders' willingness to engage actively. Moreover, recognising dynamic power and hierarchical structures influencing participation dynamics is crucial for aligning organisational practices with stakeholder theory's principles. Therefore, while inactive participation initially appears as a challenge to stakeholder theory, it ultimately enriches the theory by prompting discussions on improving stakeholder engagement strategies to better align organisational actions with stakeholder interests and expectations.

○ ***Favouritism***

The property of favouritism indicates one of the major challenges related to university ethical responsibility. This undermines justice and creates obstacles to effective responsibility as one participant noted.

“But there remains some favouritism and benefit me, and I will benefit you in some matters that may not reach the stage of violating the rights of others, but rather facilitating the affairs of a specific person” [UI-P6].

This sentiment was echoed by another participant who acknowledged the influence of societal and cultural norms.

“I do not deny that there is an influence of society and culture, and you know that we all belong to a tribal society, and we are all looking for a favouritism, but when the law is applied to everyone and justice and governance are achieved, everyone will feel relieved” [U1-P8].

However, some participants believe that the new university law and transparency measures help mitigate favouritism.

“As for favouritism, I do not think it exists because there is a system in place and the processes have become clear on the platform and everyone can see the available jobs” [U2-P15].

Despite these measures, the challenge remains, especially in the Saudi context, where cultural expectations conflict with formal regulations.

“The situation of our society is different from Western society. They have a system and everyone is bound by it, but with us, if a person does not get what he wants, he gets upset with you, and here you must favor him, especially in the case of university admission” [U1-P6].

Favouritism is a significant ethical challenge within Saudi higher education, undermining principles of integrity, transparency, and fairness as documented in scholarly literature. The persistence of nepotism within institutional frameworks contradicts efforts outlined in the national strategy to combat corruption, emphasising the importance of fair and ethical decision-making processes (National Anti-Corruption Commission, 2024). Study by Alshaer et al. (2017) highlight how nepotism hinders meritocracy and fairness in administrative practices, perpetuating disparities and compromising governance standards. This inconsistency with principles of integrity and equality is further underscored by Duerrenberger and Warning (2018), who argue that nepotism erodes institutional credibility and effectiveness, particularly within educational settings.

Efforts to mitigate nepotism must address the institutional challenges identified by Almansour and Kempner (2015), where centralisation and lack of transparency in decision-making and appointments hinder fair practices. Faculty members at Saudi universities advocate for more transparent processes in appointing administrators and faculty to ensure qualifications take precedence over personal relationships. Strategies emphasising governance rules, transparency, and accountability are pivotal in mitigating the adverse effects of nepotism (Alshaer et al., 2017). By fostering an environment that values meritocracy and institutional fairness, universities can enhance governance effectiveness and educational quality, aligning practices with global standards and fostering comprehensive development goals in Saudi higher education.

Although the participants believed that nepotism is more dominant in Saudi universities than in western universities, this possibility should be questioned. Studies have indicated that nepotism, favouritism and conflict of interest are not unique to certain areas or countries but are prevalent in educational and governmental institutions worldwide. For instance, in UK discrimination and unfairness in university admission and employment are some of the areas well-discussed. Schwartz (2003) revealed that bias pervades the admission procedures, and other cases demonstrate that even institutions, which are committed to meritocracy, face concerns of fairness (Stevens, 2007). In the same regard, works by Giroux (2014) posits that western colleges and universities are not free from power relations, bias, and the exclusion of the other through discriminations that negate the ideals of equity in the institutions.

Such global challenges assert that universities across the globe have the duty of preventing nepotism and favouritism as university governance systems. Recognising this shared struggle underlines the importance of identifying with these ethical challenges assumes significance in directing focus to these issues in the Saudi setting however in the more extensive global discourse on government in higher education. Thus, placing the problem of favouritism in the context of the developed world, this work recognises the imperative of contextual approaches to addressing the problem while avoiding oversimplified comparisons between governance systems.

- ***Summary of the Theme 4***

The theme of assuming responsibility and participation in Saudi higher education reveals significant processes and challenges in implementing governance reforms under the new universities law. The processes identified include reforms in decision-making processes to promote inclusivity and transparency. This includes expanding stakeholder participation in governance structures, emphasising ethical leadership to guide decision-makers, and establishing clear duties and task guides to clarify responsibilities. Additionally, job performance evaluation mechanisms have been introduced to ensure accountability and foster a culture of responsibility among stakeholders.

However, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of these processes. Overlapping responsibilities among different stakeholders create confusion and inefficiencies, undermining the clarity and effectiveness of decision-making processes. Moreover, inactive participation from some stakeholders and the persistence of favouritism poses significant challenges to achieving inclusive and responsible governance.

Addressing these challenges requires strategic interventions to streamline responsibilities, enhance stakeholder engagement, and foster a culture of fairness and accountability within university governance frameworks. By implementing robust mechanisms for decision-making, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and actively addressing issues of favouritism and inactive participation, Saudi higher education institutions can align more closely with the objectives of the new Universities Law.

The aspects of the proposed governance framework extracted from the Theme 4:

- **Participation Includes Three Elements:**

- ***Decision-Making Processes:*** reforming governance structures to enhance inclusivity and transparency in decision-making.
- ***Expanding Stakeholder Participation:*** encouraging active involvement of diverse stakeholders in university governance.
- ***Activating Stakeholder Participation:*** identifying internal and external university stakeholders and developing appropriate mechanisms to activate their participation in decision-making.

- **Responsibility Includes Four Elements:**

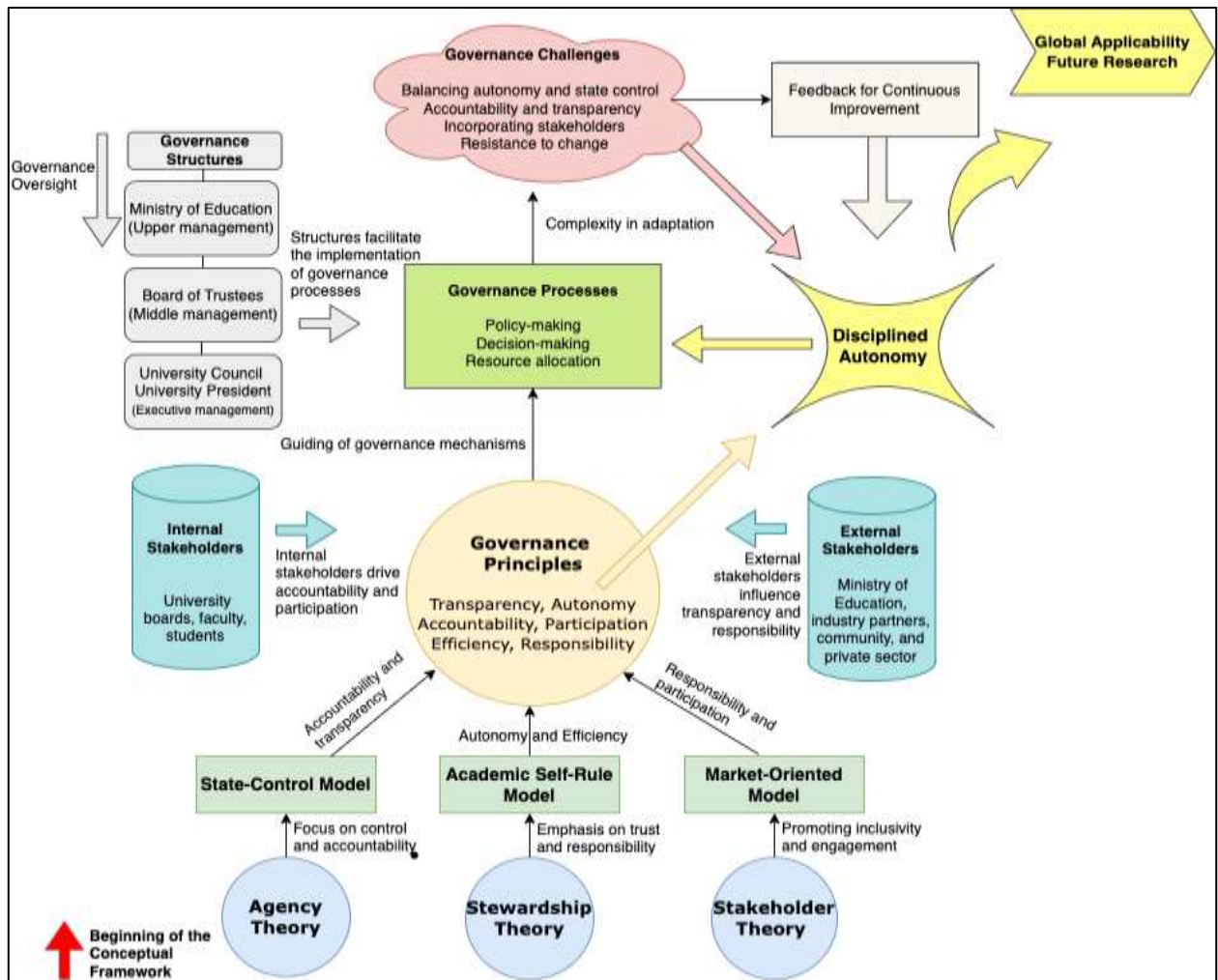
- ***Duties and Tasks Guide:*** establishing clear guidelines for roles and responsibilities to minimise overlapping duties.
- ***Job Performance Evaluation:*** implementing robust evaluation mechanisms to ensure accountability and performance assessment.
- ***Ethical Leadership:*** promoting ethical leadership practices to guide decision-makers and foster a culture of responsibility.
- ***Developing Council Responsibilities:*** review and develop the responsibilities and powers of governance boards to overcome overlapping powers.

These framework elements aim to strengthen participation and responsibility within Saudi higher education institutions, aligning with the objectives of governance reforms under the new Universities Law. By addressing challenges related to overlapping responsibilities, inactive participation, and favouritism, universities can enhance their governance effectiveness and promote a culture of accountability and ethical conduct.

7.4 The Proposed Governance Framework for Saudi Higher Education

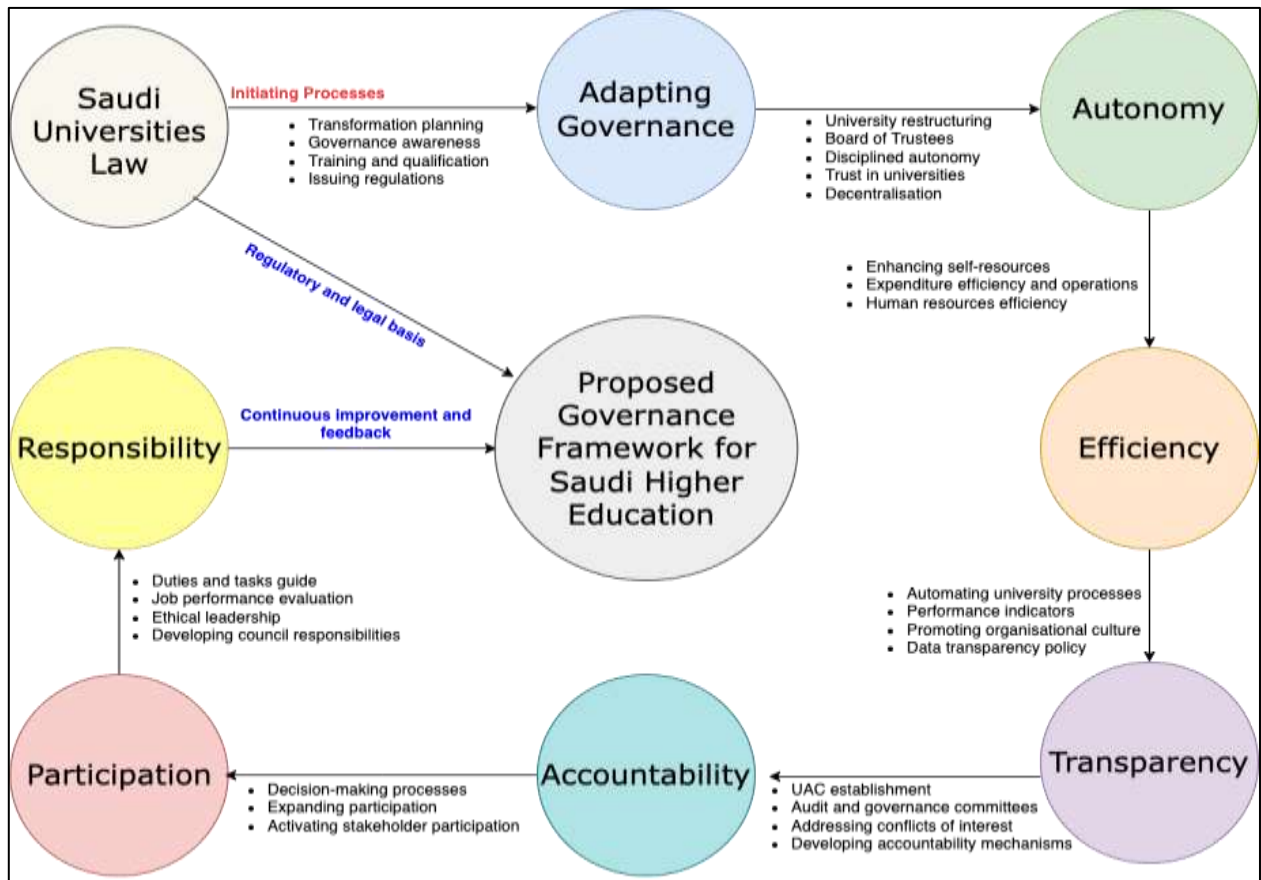
The proposed framework for the governance of Saudi higher education has been systematically developed through a rigorous process integrating conceptual frameworks from Chapter 3 and insights from three key governance theories: agency theory, stewardship theory, and stakeholder theory. A key theoretical contribution to the conceptual framework is the introduction of the concept of disciplined autonomy, which encapsulates the current state of Saudi higher education governance. This concept reflects the balance between granting universities autonomy while ensuring their alignment with government policies and maintaining public accountability. The following figure illustrates the emergence of this concept, demonstrating its foundation in core governance principles, its practical implementation, and the governance challenges encountered. The feedback and continuous improvement mechanisms depicted on the right side of the figure highlight disciplined autonomy as a theoretical contribution with potential applicability in a global context, warranting further study and research (See Figure 12).

Figure 12 The developed conceptual framework



Building on this conceptual framework, a practical governance framework for higher education was developed. This framework was structured through a set of foundational principles and further refined using empirical findings derived from the thematic analysis of four central themes. Each theme of governance adaptation processes, enhancing autonomy and efficiency, improving transparency and accountability, and assuming responsibility and participation contributed distinct elements to the framework. The processes identified as critical components include the establishment of governance councils and boards of trustees. Additionally, initiatives to enhance institutional autonomy and measures to improve transparency through automated processes and performance indicators were highlighted. Efforts to foster active stakeholder participation and ethical leadership were also recognised as important. These elements are interconnected to form a cohesive framework that aims to optimise governance practices in Saudi higher education (See Figure 13).

Figure 13 Proposed governance framework for Saudi higher education



The proposed framework for the governance of Saudi higher education is structured around a series of interconnected processes and principles aimed at achieving comprehensive and effective governance. This framework is visually represented with circles denoting key elements, connected by arrows illustrating the flow and relationship between these elements.

The framework begins with the Universities Law, which serves as the legal and legislative foundation for the governance of Saudi universities. From this basis, the processes of adapting governance commence, incorporating several critical activities: transformation planning, governance awareness, training and qualification, and issuing regulations. These initial steps are designed to prepare the institutional environment for more profound governance changes.

Following this, the framework emphasises enhancing autonomy through several measures. These include university restructuring to streamline operations, establishing Boards of Trustees to bring in diverse governance expertise, promoting disciplined autonomy to balance freedom with accountability, fostering trust in universities, and encouraging decentralisation to distribute decision-making authority.

To ensure that universities operate efficiently under this new autonomy, the framework maximises institutional revenue streams, optimises expenditure efficiency and operations, and improves human resources efficiency through strategic workforce planning and development. Improving transparency within

universities is the next critical step. This is achieved through automating university processes, integrating performance indicators, promoting a robust organisational culture, and implementing a data transparency policy. These measures are designed to make university operations more open and understandable to all stakeholders.

The framework also seeks to improve accountability mechanisms. This involves establishing the UAC, creating audit and governance committees, addressing conflicts of interest, and developing comprehensive accountability mechanisms to ensure responsible governance.

Expanding participation is another vital component of the framework. This includes refining decision-making processes, expanding stakeholder participation, and actively involving stakeholders in governance activities to ensure diverse perspectives and inclusive decision-making.

Lastly, the framework emphasises assuming responsibility through several initiatives: creating duties and task guides, evaluating job performance, promoting ethical leadership, and developing council responsibilities. These steps ensure that all members of the university governance structure are aware of their roles and are held accountable for their actions.

An arrow then points from these elements towards continuous improvement and feedback, highlighting the dynamic and iterative nature of governance that constantly evolves based on feedback and new insights. Ultimately, this continuous improvement process culminates in forming the proposed framework for higher education governance, with the Universities Law providing the enduring regulatory and legislative foundation for this comprehensive framework.

Therefore, the above-mentioned governance framework can be used as a reference model for the improvement of governance practices in universities and the Universities Affairs Council. This framework highlights the key governance principles and provides a map to the remaining work in the process of applying the Universities Law across all university institutions. The Universities Affairs Council can use this framework as a strategic tool to align governance practices with national objectives, while also meeting the needs of governance as they arise. It also helps universities to act as a partner and enabler that can assist in adapting governance processes in specific contexts. This general framework when further refined and elaborated into an executive model can be used by universities to state concrete operations under each of these principles while also foreseeing issues that might arise. Such change makes the framework practical and not only conceptual, making it possible to enhance governance and bring the institutions' practices in line with the national and international standards.

7.5 Summary of the Chapter

The discussion chapter has delved into the implementation of governance in Saudi higher education, framed within the context of the new Universities Law. Four overarching themes have been discussed, each shedding light on distinct processes and challenges encountered while implementing governance reforms.

Theme 1 focused on governance adaptation processes, highlighting the shift towards a mixed governance model integrating academic expertise with stakeholders from diverse sectors. This model emphasises standards for university readiness, transformation planning, and the desire for change and development. Challenges identified include better governance understanding, enhanced qualification and training, procedural ambiguities, timing issues, and resistance to change. The proposed framework under this theme advocates transformation planning, heightened governance awareness, and clear regulations issuance to navigate these challenges effectively.

Theme 2 examined efforts to enhance autonomy and efficiency within Saudi universities. Processes encompassed the establishment of Boards of Trustees, university restructuring initiatives, and strategies to maximise institutional revenue streams and expenditure efficiency. Challenges included discrepancies in understanding autonomy, apprehensions surrounding autonomy delegation, tendencies towards centralisation, setbacks in capital projects, and the imperative of achieving empowerment alongside efficiency. The proposed framework emphasises university restructuring, the establishment of the Board of Trustees, and disciplined autonomy as key pillars to bolster institutional autonomy and operational efficiency.

Theme 3 explored initiatives to improve transparency and accountability across higher education institutions. Processes included establishing the Universities Affairs Council, introducing audit and governance committees, automating university processes, and integrating performance indicators. Challenges identified encompassed conflicts of interest, entrenched organisational cultures, reluctance towards accountability, and information asymmetry. The proposed framework advocates robust governance structures centred on transparency measures, enhanced accountability frameworks, and proactive management of conflicts of interest to foster a culture of transparency and accountability.

Theme 4 focused on fostering responsibility and participation within university governance. Processes included reforms in decision-making processes, expansion of stakeholder participation, promotion of ethical leadership, clarification of duties and tasks, and implementation of job performance evaluation mechanisms. Challenges identified encompassed overlapping responsibilities, inactive stakeholder participation, and persistent issues of favouritism. The proposed framework under this theme underscores the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, clear delineation of responsibilities, and mechanisms to promote active stakeholder engagement and ethical conduct.

In conclusion, the discussion chapter has synthesised the findings across these themes, offering insights into the complex dynamics of governance adaptation in Saudi higher education. The subsequent chapter will delve into the conclusion, where research questions will be answered comprehensively, theoretical and practical contributions will be outlined, implications discussed, limitations acknowledged, and recommendations for future research proposed.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the results were discussed within the context of existing literature, and a proposed framework for the governance of Saudi higher education was presented. This chapter aims to synthesise the research findings, provide comprehensive answers to the research questions, and elucidate the contributions and implications of the study. The chapter is structured into five sections.

The first section introduces the chapter, outlining its purpose and structure. The second section addresses and answers the research questions in detail. The third section presents the theoretical and practical contributions of the study. The fourth section offers recommendations based on the findings. Finally, the fifth section discusses the research's limitations and suggests future research directions.

8.2 Addressing the Research Questions

This study used a qualitative methodology. Data were collected through the examination of documents related to the previous Higher Education Law and the new universities law, as well as through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants from the Universities Affairs Council (UAC) and two universities implementing the new law. The documents were analysed using comparative analysis, while the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

The research aimed to investigate the concept of governance and the theories surrounding it to provide an enhanced understanding and a method for developing governance frameworks. It sought to adopt governance theories in developing a framework suitable for the Saudi context, aligning with the implementation requirements of the new Universities Law. Additionally, the study aimed to compare the previous Saudi Higher Education Law with the new universities law, focusing on their implications for governance. It aimed to examine the procedures and processes of governance application in two Saudi universities to evaluate the current implementation state and identify difficulties and challenges. Finally, the study aimed to explore key stakeholders' perceptions to engage them effectively in developing the most suitable governance framework for the Saudi context.

Four research questions were developed to achieve these aims, and they will be answered below.

Research Question 1: How does the new Universities Law differ from the previous Saudi Higher Education Law, and what are the implications of these differences for governance?

The comparative analysis between the previous Higher Education Law and the new Universities Law in Saudi Arabia revealed similarities and differences, particularly in the governance context. The new Universities Law explicitly referenced governance, marking a significant departure from its predecessor. It introduced several structural changes to enhance governance, such as the establishment of Boards of Trustees and the UAC. These bodies were designed to oversee various university operations, promoting transparency and accountability.

The similarities identified included public policy, leadership appointments, university oversight, and academic decision-making processes. However, key differences emerged in structures and governance, processes and procedures, human resources and employment, financial management and budgeting, academic programme accreditation, and advisory boards. The introduction of the Board of Trustees provided a hierarchical governance structure above the University Council, enhancing oversight and strategic direction. Enhanced transparency and accountability mechanisms were embedded in the new law, including performance measurement indicators and conflict of interest disclosures. Regarding human resources, employees and faculty members at the university were transferred from the government jobs system to annual contractual arrangements, aiming to improve administrative efficiency and align incentives with performance. Financially, the budget system fully supported by the government was changed to a system of partial budget support so that universities work to strengthen their resources and cover the budget deficit with investments. The new Universities Law requires universities to obtain academic and institutional accreditations to ensure higher quality and operational efficiency. Additionally, the law stipulates the need to establish three advisory councils to enhance the participation of internal and external stakeholders.

These differences and their alignment with governance principles provided a foundation for the semi-structured interview questions with leaders from the UAC and the two universities, further clarifying their practical implications.

Research Question 2: What are the procedures and processes involved in implementing governance under the Universities Law?

The investigation into the UAC and the two universities that implemented the new Universities Law revealed several key processes and procedures undertaken for governance implementation.

Initially, a mixed governance model was selected, combining academics who had traditionally governed Saudi universities with stakeholders possessing expertise in the education sector and a group of trustees from the private sector specialising in investment. This mixed model was intended to bring diverse perspectives and expertise to the governance structure.

Following the selection of the governance model, standards were developed to measure the readiness of universities to transition to the new Universities Law. The standards were applied to all Saudi public universities to evaluate financial, administrative and academic capabilities. Based on these evaluations, the two universities with the highest scores were chosen and were the ones on which the study was conducted. These universities demonstrated a strong desire for change and development, with university leaders expressing pride in becoming pioneers in transitioning to the new university law.

To manage the transition, a time plan for the transition was developed under the supervision of the UAC, which helped universities manage and follow up on implementation processes. To enhance the autonomy of universities, a Board of Trustees was established for each university by decision of the Prime Minister.

These boards included members from academia, the private sector, and experienced education and university management stakeholders, along with the university president.

Therefore, the restructuring of the universities was crucial to aligning them with the new governance councils and improving operational efficiency. This involved reducing and merging some departments and positions to optimise spending in preparation for financial independence. Universities also began enhancing their revenue streams by leveraging existing resources, establishing investment companies, and creating endowments to generate financial returns.

To improve accountability and transparency, the UAC was established, the highest authority in Saudi higher education, which plays a pivotal role in holding universities accountable for their performance. Likewise, within universities, audit and governance committees were formed in the boards of trustees, and university operations were automated to reduce errors, improve quality, and enhance transparency. In addition, performance indicators were adopted to evaluate the university's performance, whether by the Board of Trustees or the UAC.

Participation and responsibility were also key components of the governance implementation. This included expanding stakeholder participation through advisory councils. Three councils were created: one international council for external stakeholders and two internal councils for faculty members and students. A tasks and duties manual has been developed, clearly defining the responsibilities of faculty members and employees, which facilitates accountability.

Additionally, job performance evaluation mechanisms were developed, allowing assessments by supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates.

Research Question 3: What are the difficulties and challenges that Saudi higher education faces during the implementation of governance?

While implementing the new universities law, Saudi higher education encountered several significant challenges and difficulties, particularly in adapting to governance principles. One primary challenge was the disparity in understanding the concept of governance among stakeholders. Some stakeholders viewed governance as an opportunity to improve and develop universities, while others saw it as a constraint on universities and a mechanism focused on reducing costs. This misunderstanding stemmed from a lack of qualification and training in governance concepts and principles, as the universities lacked specialists in governance, and neither employees nor faculty members had received adequate training in this area.

Moreover, there was ambiguity in procedures, which further exacerbated the challenges. Several employees requested clarification from university officials regarding implementing the new law but did not receive adequate responses. Likewise, universities approached the UAC with questions but found the answers insufficient. This ambiguity is partly due to the recent issuance of the executive regulations of the Universities Law, which has left universities uncertain about how to interpret and implement the provisions

of the law. As a result, some employees resisted the change, not realising the new law's benefits and accustomed to a different operational culture.

Regarding independence and efficiency, there were misunderstandings about the extent of autonomy granted to universities. Some university officials believed they were receiving complete independence, while the UAC viewed the establishment of the Board of Trustees as empowering the universities and giving them disciplined autonomy. Also among the challenges was the concern of the UAC regarding granting universities independence due to the wrong financial practices carried out by one of the two universities, leading the UAC to adopt a cautious approach to avoid misuse of autonomy. This situation highlighted the centralisation tendency in Saudi higher education, where cultural inclinations towards centralisation conflicted with efforts to grant universities more independence.

Efficiency challenges included stalled capital projects due to budget cuts and the push for spending efficiency. Human resource efficiency also faced issues, some participants saw difficulties in human resource effectiveness and efficiency and claimed to detect bias in the practice now of empowering women, which they saw as being at the expense of men, regardless of capacity. Transparency and accountability posed additional challenges. Conflicts of interest emerged within governance boards, particularly between academics and trustees, complicating decision-making. The organisational culture of Saudi universities, long accustomed to low transparency, further hindered the transition to more open practices, leading to information asymmetry. Also, the new formation of the University Council does not share the membership of anyone from the UAC, which exacerbates the information asymmetry between the universities and the government.

Moreover, fear of accountability stifled initiatives, innovations, and academic creativity. Some participants described a notion that fear of mistakes and consequences kept employees from making suggestions. Participation and responsibility also faced some challenges. Overlapping responsibilities among councils created implementation challenges, and although stakeholder participation in decision-making was expanded, it remained ineffective. Stakeholders were often allowed to attend council meetings but were not permitted to speak, their opinions were not acknowledged, or they were not represented in certain councils.

Finally, issues of favouritism in universities compromise ethical responsibilities. There were instances of preferential treatment in admissions and the exchange of interests, undermining the integrity of the governance process.

Research Question 4: How can the implementation of governance in Saudi higher education be improved?

The governance of Saudi higher education can be improved by implementing a comprehensive framework based on interconnected processes and principles. This framework starts with the Universities Law, which provides the legal and legislative foundation. From this basis, governance adaptation processes begin, incorporating critical activities such as transformation planning, governance awareness, training and

qualification, and issuing regulations to prepare the institutional environment for significant governance changes.

Enhancing autonomy is a key focus, achieved through measures like university restructuring, establishing Boards of Trustees, promoting disciplined autonomy to balance freedom with accountability, fostering trust in universities, and encouraging decentralisation to distribute decision-making authority.

To support efficient university operations under the new autonomy, the framework emphasises maximising institutional revenue streams, optimising expenditure efficiency and operations, and improving human resources efficiency through strategic workforce planning and development.

Improving transparency is also crucial. This involves automating university processes, integrating performance indicators, promoting a robust organisational culture, and implementing a data transparency policy to make operations more open and understandable to stakeholders.

Strengthening accountability mechanisms is another vital component. This includes establishing the UAC, creating audit and governance committees, addressing conflicts of interest, and developing comprehensive accountability mechanisms to ensure responsible governance.

Expanding participation in decision-making processes is emphasised, with efforts to involve a broader range of stakeholders in governance activities to ensure diverse perspectives and inclusive decision-making.

Finally, assuming responsibility is stressed through initiatives like creating duties and task guides, evaluating job performance, promoting ethical leadership, and developing council responsibilities to ensure all members of the university governance structure are aware of their roles and held accountable.

The dynamic framework incorporates continuous improvement and feedback, ensuring that governance evolves based on new insights. Ultimately, this comprehensive framework, grounded in the Universities Law, aims to achieve effective governance in Saudi higher education.

8.3 Research Contributions

The research offers both theoretical and practical contributions to existing knowledge.

8.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

- **Contribution to Theory**

This study contributes to the theoretical literature by examining the application of Agency, Stewardship, and Stakeholder theories within the Saudi setting of higher education governance. The study shows that, although some fundamental principles of these theories are relevant, their application in the context of the highly centralised system, which is, however, in the reform process, requires adjustments to the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 2. Applying these theories in a non-Western country proves that these theories are applicable and flexible to explain the changes taking place in the Saudi context under Vision 2030, where the state is highly centralised, and the role of universities is changing.

The theoretical framework was especially useful in analysing the findings of this study. Agency Theory helped to understand the dynamics of the Ministry of Education's relations with university administrators, and Stewardship Theory offered the idea of leadership in the conditions of the enhanced degree of autonomy. Stakeholder Theory was important in explaining the participation of outside agents, especially those from the corporate world, in the management of universities. These theories, in combination, provided a rich understanding of the dynamics in terms of power and governance that emerged from the study of Saudi higher education and, therefore, provided a comprehensive explanation for the results.

Beyond testing existing theories, this research suggested that the theories and theoretical framework originally adopted do not consider the decentralisation process from state authority in Saudi universities. This research suggests that further advanced theories through the introduction of the concept of 'disciplined autonomy' need to be introduced, which depicts the decentralisation process from state authority in Saudi universities. This idea enriches the theoretical literature on the new governance of higher education institutions. It provides a more grounded understanding of the governance mechanisms specific to the Saudi Arabian context. The enhancement of existing theories, particularly the principal-agent relationship and stakeholder engagement, is another theoretical contribution of this study.

An important contribution of this research is developing the governance framework through the lens of the Agency, Stewardship and Stakeholder theories. This approach enables the development of a deeper and broader perspective on the governance structure in Saudi higher education institutions where state-led reforms, decentralisation and multiple-actor participation are evident. Combining these theoretical approaches allows the study to offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding governance reforms in other centralised educational systems in their transitional processes. This integrated approach is, therefore, a contribution to the theory of higher education governance systems.

- **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study provides a significant and unique contribution to the literature on governance in higher education, specifically within the context of Saudi Arabia. As the first qualitative investigation to explore the implementation of governance through the new university law, this research addresses critical gaps in understanding how governance is adapted and applied within Saudi higher education institutions. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no prior studies have evaluated the practical experience of implementing governance under this new legislative framework. This pioneering research addresses several key recommendations from previous studies and fills notable gaps in the literature.

Previous studies on governance in Saudi higher education have predominantly focused on issues of gender and discrimination, leaving the broader applicability of governance underexplored. Kentab (2018), for instance, examined governance at King Saud University, interviewing 200 staff members to identify factors affecting the newly implemented governance structure and job satisfaction levels. His findings indicated that despite implementing corporate governance, a strategic approach and stakeholder participation were

necessary for effective governance. This study builds on Kentab's insights by providing a deeper, qualitative exploration of governance implementation, emphasising the importance of a strategic approach and broad stakeholder involvement.

Albeshir (2022) recommended studying the impact of the new Universities Law on universities' governance achievements. This study directly addresses this recommendation by analysing how the new law is implemented in two pilot universities and assessing its impact on governance structures and practices. Doing so fills a crucial gap in understanding the practical implications and outcomes of the new legislative framework.

Alsharif (2019) highlighted several areas needing further exploration, including disseminating governance culture in Saudi universities, overcoming challenges to governance practice, and benefiting from proposed governance principles. This study contributes to these areas by:

- Highlighting the processes and efforts undertaken by the pilot universities to cultivate a governance culture and prepare the environment for effective governance practice.
- Identifying specific challenges these universities face in implementing governance and proposing strategies to address these challenges, thus providing practical insights for other institutions.
- Evaluating the applicability and effectiveness of proposed governance principles within the Saudi context, informed by the perspectives of education experts and stakeholders.

Alsharif (2019) also suggested conducting similar studies in other Saudi and private universities. While this study focuses on the two pilot universities, its findings offer a valuable foundation for comparative studies in different types of institutions, both public and private.

Asel (2020) emphasised the need for more studies on higher education governance in English, using multiple research instruments and focusing on the application of governance in achieving Saudi Vision 2030. This study addresses these recommendations by:

- Conducting the research in English, thus contributing to the accessibility and dissemination of knowledge within the international academic community.
- Employing qualitative methodologies, including interviews and document analysis, to provide a rich, nuanced understanding of governance implementation.
- Examining how the new university law supports the goals of Vision 2030, particularly in terms of transformational change and the role of education in fostering this change.

Areiqat et al. (2020) called for applying good governance principles in Arab universities, the need for legislative amendments, and the enhancement of accountability and transparency. This study contributes to this discourse by:

- Investigating how the new university law facilitates the application of governance principles such as autonomy, transparency, accountability, and participation within Saudi universities.
- Highlighting the need for legislative support and adjustments to existing laws to support governance reforms better.
- Discussing the role of decentralisation and the importance of balancing governance principles with quality standards to enhance the competitiveness of higher education institutions.

Overall, this study not only fills existing gaps in the literature but also provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and improving governance practices in Saudi higher education. By addressing the recommendations of previous studies and integrating insights from a wide range of stakeholders, this research offers practical and theoretical advancements crucial for the ongoing development and reform of higher education governance in Saudi Arabia and potentially other similar contexts.

8.3.2 Practical Contributions

The findings of this research make several practical contributions that are particularly valuable to policymakers, higher education leaders, Saudi universities, and university administrators. A key practical contribution is developing a governance framework tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of Saudi universities. This framework serves as a practical guide for implementing governance structures that promote autonomy, efficiency, transparency, accountability, participation, and responsibility.

Additionally, the study identifies specific challenges and difficulties encountered by Saudi universities during the initial phase of implementing the new Universities Law. These insights are crucial for university rectors, the UAC, and other key decision-makers within the Department of Education, as they highlight areas requiring intervention, support, and improvement. By providing practical recommendations to address these challenges, the research offers implementable strategies to enhance the effectiveness of governance practices and supports the improved implementation of the new university law in subsequent stages for other Saudi universities.

Moreover, a detailed comparison between previous and new higher education laws reveals significant governance-related changes and their implications. This comparative analysis equips policymakers with a deeper understanding of legislative transformations and their practical impact on university management.

Thus, the research contributes to ongoing efforts to improve governance in Saudi higher education by offering a theoretically informed and practically applicable framework. It bridges the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that governance reforms are grounded in robust theoretical foundations while being attuned to the practical realities and challenges Saudi universities face. This dual contribution enhances the potential for implementing sustainable and effective governance reforms in alignment with Saudi Vision 2030.

8.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen governance and the implementation of the new university law in Saudi Arabia. These recommendations are directed towards the UAC and the universities themselves.

8.4.1 Recommendations to the UAC

1- Enhancing Understanding of Governance and Autonomy

Improve universities' understanding of the purpose of governance and how the anticipated autonomy will be achieved. This effort aims to unify efforts and reduce the gap between expected and actual autonomy. Increasing awareness of disciplined autonomy currently applied in universities is essential.

2- Issuing Complete Regulations

Ensure that all regulations under the new university law are issued before implementing the law across other universities. Enhance transparency in procedures and operations during the implementation phase, making all procedures clear to all stakeholders.

3- Addressing Information Asymmetry

Develop an electronic mechanism for recording University Council meeting minutes to be approved by the Board of Trustees. This allows the UAC to review and act on decisions before finalising while ensuring university independence is not compromised. Alternative mechanisms deemed appropriate by the UAC to reduce information asymmetry may also be proposed.

4- Reviewing the Powers Matrix

Review and adjust the powers matrix for the UAC, the Board of Trustees, and the University Council to address the challenges of overlapping authorities. Transferring some powers between the councils can grant universities greater decision-making independence.

5- Addressing Conflict of Interest

Mitigate conflicts of interest between the University Council and the Board of Trustees by aligning the perspectives of trustees and academics. Establish specialised committees within the Board of Trustees, such as the Academic Committee and the Investment Committee, to study decisions before they are presented to the Board of Trustees, thereby reducing conflicts.

6- Empowering Universities

Foster trust and empower universities by allowing them to exercise independence, develop internal regulations, and transition from centralisation to decentralisation. This enables universities to practice independence while being held accountable by the UAC.

7- Financial Support and Budgeting

Continue financial support and provide budgets until universities can increase income sources and manage their budgets independently. Set a phased timeline to achieve this goal without affecting the implementation of the capital project.

8- Gradual Implementation

Implement the Universities Law gradually across other universities based on criteria measuring governance readiness.

8.4.2 Recommendations for Universities

1- Raising Awareness

Increase awareness among faculty members, employees, and students about the Universities Law and its role in governance through lectures and courses on principles like transparency, accountability, and participation.

2- Establishing Governance Departments

Create a governance department or office staffed with qualified personnel specialising in committee work, auditing, and governance. This could include the position of a governor to oversee the implementation of the university law and governance practices.

3- Reviewing Accountability Mechanisms

Review and adjust accountability mechanisms to ensure they do not hinder the implementation of the university law. Encourage faculty members to propose initiatives and motivate creativity and innovation without fear of repercussions.

4- Developing Data Transparency Policies

Develop a data transparency policy aligned with global university practices and governance standards, making data accessible to all stakeholders and reducing favouritism.

5- Empowering Leaders

Empower university leaders based on competencies and establish transparent mechanisms for nominating deans and leaders, ensuring equality and equal opportunities for all.

6- Enhancing Stakeholder Participation

Enhance the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes by identifying both internal and external stakeholders, involving them in relevant councils, and ensuring their right to participate and vote effectively.

7- Commitment to Law Implementation

Commit to implementing the Universities Law, enhancing governance principles, collaborating with the Board of Trustees and the UAC, and activating effective communication channels to ensure successful law implementation.

These recommendations aim to ensure that the governance reforms are based on strong theoretical foundations while being consistent with the practical realities and challenges Saudi universities face, thus contributing to the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

8.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the scope of the research was confined to the comparative analysis of the new university law and the previous higher education law within the context of Saudi Arabia, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other national or regional settings. Additionally, the case studies focused on only two Saudi universities that have implemented the new universities law, potentially limiting the applicability of the results to other Saudi universities that have yet to adopt the law. However, these case studies offered valuable insights into the implementation processes and governance challenges, providing a foundation for future studies on other universities.

The study primarily relied on semi-structured interviews with university leaders and members of the UAC. While these interviews provided rich qualitative detail, they may be subject to biases inherent in self-reporting and the perspectives of a limited sample. Moreover, the transition to the new Universities Law is still relatively recent, meaning the long-term impacts and outcomes of these governance changes cannot be fully assessed within the timeframe of this research. Longitudinal studies would be appropriate to track governance transformations over time and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the changes.

Future research should aim to conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effects of the new governance framework and explore comparative studies with other countries undergoing similar reforms. Additionally, expanding the sample size through questionnaires and other methodologies would provide a more robust data set. While this study identified key governance structures, processes, and challenges, it did not extensively explore the impact of these changes on student outcomes and the overall quality of education. Future research should delve into these areas to understand the broader implications of governance reforms on educational quality and student success.

In summary, while the findings of this study are robust within the specific context of Saudi higher education, caution should be exercised when extrapolating them to broader or different contexts. Addressing these limitations through future research will enhance the understanding of governance reforms and their impacts, thereby contributing to more effective policy and practice in higher education governance.

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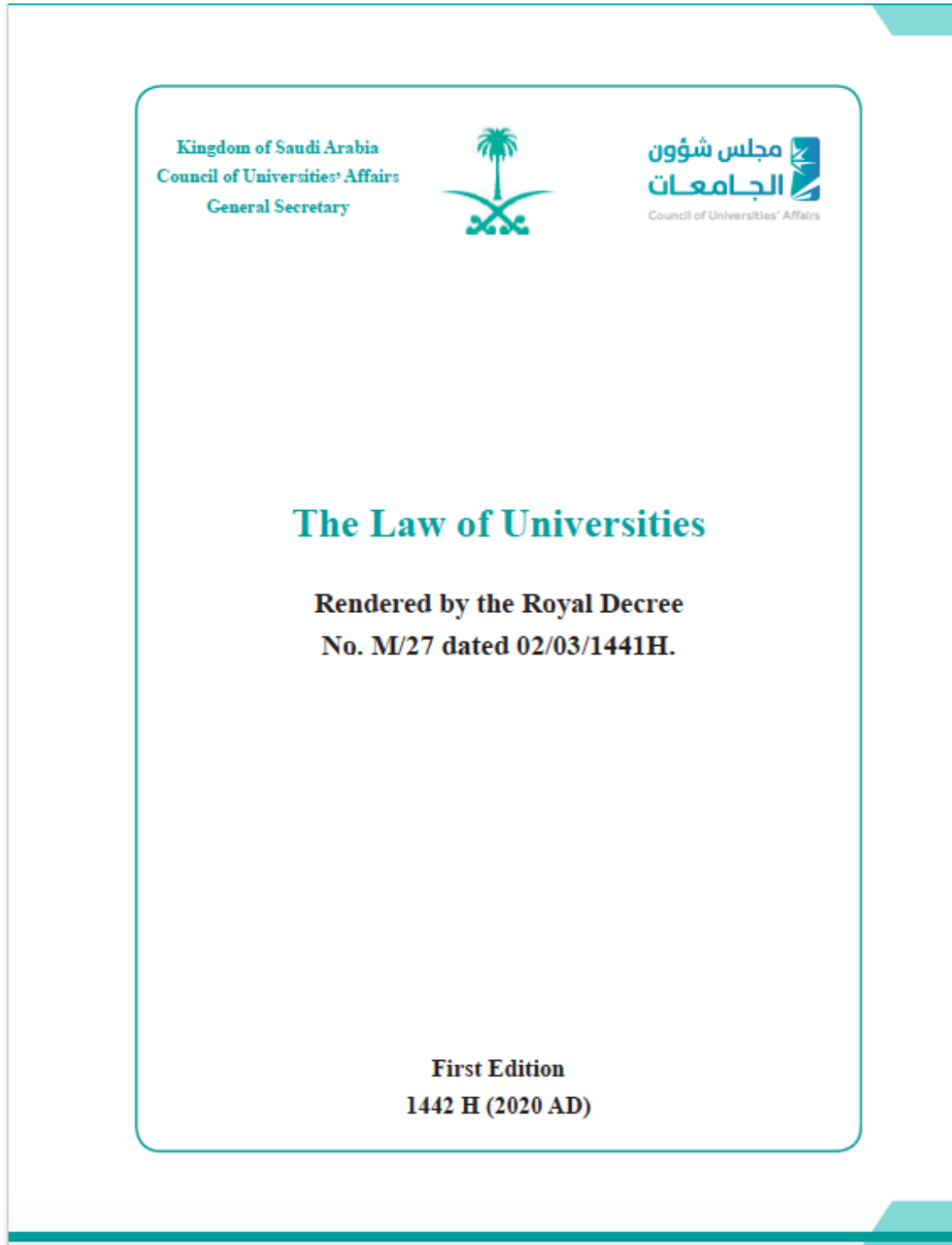
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Appendices

Appendix A



The Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 183 dated 01/03/1441H.

The Council of Ministers,

After reviewing the document No. 6317 dated 30/01/1441H. received from the Royal Court including the letter of the Ministry of Education No. 24723 dated 13/02/1440H. on the draft law of universities,

After reviewing the draft law referred to,

After reviewing the Law of Higher Education and Universities rendered by the Royal Decree No. M/8 on 04/06/1414H.,

After reviewing the Law of Endowments General Authority rendered by the Royal Decree No. M/11 dated 26/02/1437H.

After reviewing the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 409 dated 12/09/1436H.,

After reviewing the minutes No. 1318 dated 10/11/1438H., No. 1287 dated 22/09/1439H., No. 1392 dated 29/07/1440H., No. 2205 dated 25/12/1440H., No. 202 dated 17/02/1441H. and the memoranda No. 503 dated 28/04/1439H., No. 1620 dated 16/12/1439H. and No. 9 dated 09/01/1441H. prepared by the Board of Experts of the Council of Ministers,

After reviewing the two recommendations No. 37-58/39/D dated 14/11/1439H. and No. 11-1/41/D dated 06/01/1441H. and the minutes No. 21/41/M dated 22/02/1441H. prepared by the Council of Economic Affairs and Development,

After reviewing the two decisions of the Shura Council No. 239/61 dated 28/02/1440H. and No. 224/56 dated 19/01/1441H., and

After reviewing the Recommendation of the General Committee of the Council of Ministers No. 1415 dated 01/03/1441H.

Decides the following:

First: to approve the Law of Universities in the attached form.

Second: the Council of Universities Affairs shall practice its tasks and terms of reference set forth in the Law from the date of being published in the official gazette.

Third: the Council of Universities Affairs shall designate at most three universities- in the first stage- to apply the Law to them after being effective and to apply the Law after that to the other universities gradually by the order of the Prime Minister upon suggestion of the Council of Universities Affairs, and the Council shall raise a report to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques every two years on the results of the Law implementation, the positives or difficulties or others, if any, provided that the currently applicable laws and regulations- including the Law of Higher Education and Universities rendered by the Royal Decree No. M/8 on 04/06/1414H. shall continue to apply to the universities which are not covered by the new law until they are covered by it.

Fourth: the Council of Universities Affairs shall practice the powers of the (cancelled) Council of Higher Education set forth in the Law of Higher Education and Universities rendered by the Royal Decree No. M/8 on 04/06/1414H. for the universities which will continue practicing the cancelled Law.

Fifth: as set forth in item (Third) of this Decree, the universities to which the Law of Universities will be applied first shall be granted a transitional period of one year from the Law effective date during which the current university regulations application will continue until the Council of Universities Affairs issues the financial, administrative and academic regulations for universities to be in conformity with the Law provisions and without prejudice to the authority of the boards of trustees to supervise universities. The Council of Universities Affairs has the right to increase the transitional period for those

universities or for some of them provided that the extension period shall not exceed three years from the expiry date of the transitional period of one year.

Sixth: the universities employees to whom the Law of Universities will be applied as set forth in item (third) of this Decree including the teaching staff members and the like, the administrative and technical employees who are on the job at the time of the Law effectiveness shall continue working according to the job regulations to which they are subject. The Council of Universities Affairs shall suggest the necessary alternative and measures to deal with them including transferring them to the Labor Law without prejudice to their acquired financial rights, and a letter shall be raised on that to complete the necessary procedures.

A draft royal decree on that has been prepared and attached to this Decision.

Seventh: the Council of Universities Affairs shall by agreement with the Ministry of Finance define the items of payment from the subsidy provided to the universities to which the new law will be applied.

Eighth: the universities have to comply with their allocations within the limits of the budget decided to them

Ninth: the work of the Temporary Committee setup by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 409 dated 12/09/1436H. shall terminate from the date in which the Council of Universities Affairs assumes its tasks as set forth in item (Second) of this Decision.

Prime Minister

Law of Universities

Chapter 1: Definitions and Objectives

Article 1: Definitions

In this Law, the following terms shall have the meanings assigned thereto:

Law: Law of Universities.

Council of University Affairs: The body entrusted with regulating university affairs and setting their policies and regulations, in accordance with the Law.

Board of Trustees: The body entrusted with the governance and oversight of the university's academic, administrative, and financial performance, in accordance with the Law.

University Council: The body entrusted with managing the university's academic, educational, administrative, and financial affairs and implementing its general policy, in accordance with the Law.

Academic Council: The body entrusted with the university's academic affairs, studies and research, and publication, in accordance with the Law.

College: An academic establishment composed of a group of academic departments falling under a general field of study.

College Council: The body entrusted with managing the college's academic affairs, in accordance with the Law.

Department: An academic unit representing an academic specialization.

Department Council: The body entrusted with managing the department's academic affairs.

Faculty: Full professors, associate professors, and assistant professors; lecturers and teaching assistants shall be deemed faculty members.

Article 2: Objectives

The Law aims to regulate higher education and enhance its academic, research, and societal status at the local, regional, and international levels.

Article 3

A university is a public non-profit academic institution with a financially and administratively independent legal personality, which contributes to the implementation of the State's educational policy, in accordance with the Law.

Article 4

1. Establishment of universities and their branches shall be pursuant to a decision by the Council of Ministers upon a recommendation by the Council of University Affairs.
2. A university consists of colleges, deanships, academic departments, institutes, centers, educational units below university level, and university hospitals.

Article 5

The governance, administration, and management of university affairs shall be undertaken by:

- Board of trustees.
- University council.
- University president.

Chapter 2: Council of University Affairs

Article 6

A council named the "Council of University Affairs" shall be established, comprising the following:

1. Minister of Education, Chairman.
2. Vice Minister of Education for Universities, Research, and Innovation, member.

3. Vice Minister of Finance, member.
4. Vice Minister of Civil Service, member.
5. Vice Minister of Labor and Social Development, member.
6. Vice Minister of Economy and Planning, member.
7. President of the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, member.
8. Five university presidents, one of whom shall be a private university president, members.
9. Two experts, members.

The Minister of Education shall nominate the members referred to in paragraphs (8) and (9) who shall be appointed pursuant to an order by the President of the Council of Ministers for a period of three years, renewable once.

Article 7

Notwithstanding other powers assigned thereto under the Law, the Council of University Affairs shall have the following powers:

1. Approve academic policies and strategies.
2. Approve the regulations of private universities and colleges and branches of foreign universities and monitor the implementation thereof.
3. Approve the financial, administrative, and academic regulations of universities.
4. Approve the regulations governing investments and self-generat-

ed revenues of universities.

5. Approve the regulations governing the acceptance of donations, gifts, and bequests, as well as disbursement therefrom.
6. Approve the regulations governing the management of endowments at universities, in coordination with the General Authority for Endowments.
7. Approve the regulations governing academic societies, research chairs, as well as research, innovation, and entrepreneurship centers at universities.
8. Approve the regulations for establishing science museums at universities in coordination with the relevant agencies.
9. Approve the regulations governing student funds at universities.
10. Governance and evaluation of universities' academic, administrative, and financial performance.
11. Approve the rules for the nomination of university presidents.
12. Recommend the approval of the establishment, cancellation, or merger of universities and branches thereof, private colleges, and branches of foreign universities, and submit the same to the Council of Ministers for approval.
13. Approve the establishment, merger, cancellation, or amendment of names of colleges, deanships, institutes, centers, and academic departments.
14. Determine the remunerations and benefits of the chairman, vice-chairman, and members of the board of trustees.

15. Determine the salary and benefits of the university president.
16. Determine the remunerations and benefits of the chairman and members of the university council.
17. Determine the remunerations and benefits of university vice-presidents, college deans and vice-deans, heads of departments, as well as members and secretaries of academic councils.
18. Determine the remunerations and benefits of the General Secretary of the Council of University Affairs.
19. Recommend approval of academic and technical cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding between universities and foreign institutions.
20. Determine the programs and courses for which a university may charge fees, and set the General Rules governing such fees.
21. Approve the university's annual report on activities and achievements, and submit it to the Council of Ministers.
22. Oversee the performance of boards of trustees and ensure the validity of their decisions.
23. Resolve any conflict of powers between the board of trustees and the university council.
24. Review issues referred to it by the Chairman or proposed by any of its members.

The Council may delegate certain powers to any of the boards of trustees according to the regulations approved by the Council of University Affairs. It may form standing or ad hoc committees from

among its members or others to review matters it refers thereto.

Article 8

The Council of University Affairs shall convene upon a call by its Chairman or his designee at least once every four months. The meeting shall only be valid if attended by at least two thirds of the members, including the Chairman or his deputy. Decisions shall be passed by majority vote of attending members; in case of a tie, the chairman of the meeting shall have the casting vote.

The Chairman of the Council may invite others to attend Council meetings in a non-voting capacity.

Article 9

1. The Council of University Affairs shall have a general secretary to be appointed pursuant to an order by the President of the Council of Ministers upon nomination by the Chairman of the Council of University Affairs.
2. An operating program budget shall be allocated to the Secretariat of the Council of University Affairs and shall be approved within the budget of the Ministry of Education.

Article 10

The General Secretariat of the Council of University Affairs shall be responsible for the following:

1. Supporting the Council in performing its duties and responsibilities, conducting its studies, and providing data and information necessary for rendering its decisions, and monitoring the implementation of such decisions.
2. Preparing for meetings of the Council and its committees.
3. Preparing agendas for Council meetings and communicate the same to Council members.
4. Communicating Council decisions to relevant agencies and monitoring their implementation.
5. Coordinating with government agencies on behalf of the Council.
6. Conducting the Council's administrative and financial work.

Chapter 3: Boards of Trustees

Article 11

Each university shall have a board of trustees whose chairman, vice-chairman and members, except for the university president, shall be appointed pursuant to an order by the President of the Council of Ministers upon nomination by the Chairman of the Council of University Affairs for a term of three years, renewable once. The chairman of the board of trustees shall report to the Chairman of the Council of University Affairs with respect to the powers of the board of trustees stipulated under the Law.

Article 12

The university board of trustees shall be composed of the following:

1. Four members with expertise in university education.
2. Three members from the private sector with expertise in finance, investment, and law.
3. University president.
4. Three faculty members nominated by the university council.

The board's chairman and vice chairman shall be from among the members mentioned in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this Article.

Article 13

Subject to the Law as well as the rules and regulations issued by the Council of University Affairs, the university board of trustees shall have the following powers:

1. Approve the university's vision, mission, and objectives, and set its academic, financial, and administrative policies.
2. Approve the university's organizational structure.
3. Assume governance of the university, and ensure realization of its vision, mission, and objectives.
4. Approve the implementation procedures for the university's financial and administrative regulations.
5. Nominate university president.
6. Approve the appointment of university vice-presidents.

7. Recommend the approval of the establishment, merger, cancellation, or amendment of names of colleges, deanships, institutes, centers, and academic departments.
8. Approve the regulations governing the appointment of deans of colleges, deanships, institutes, and centers, and heads of departments.
9. Approve the regulations governing the support of research, innovation, authorship, translation, and publication.
10. Approve the regulations governing the provision of consultation and academic services to the public and private sectors and civil society organizations.
11. Approve the university's annual budget.
12. Approve the university's incorporation of companies or participation therein, or the joining of existing companies as partner or shareholder, in accordance with legal procedures.
13. Appoint one or more external auditors for university accounts.
14. Approve the university's final accounts and submit the same to the Council of University Affairs.
15. Approve titles of academic degrees.
16. Award honorary doctorate degrees.
17. Form the university's international advisory board, determine its powers, and set its work procedures.
18. Review the university's annual report and submit it to the Council of University Affairs.

19. Review matters referred to it by its chairman or proposed by any of its members.

The board may delegate certain powers to its chairman or any other councils in the university, and it may form standing or ad hoc committees from among its members or others to review matters it refers thereto.

Article 14

The university board of trustees shall meet at least once every three months during the academic year, or upon a call by its chairman when necessary. Board meetings shall be valid if attended by at least two-thirds of its members, including its chairman or his deputy. Board decisions shall be passed by majority vote of attending members; in case of a tie, the meeting chairman shall have the casting vote. Board decisions shall become effective 15 days from the date of issuance.

Article 15

1. The board of trustees shall, in coordination with the university president, select a university employee to serve as the board's secretary.
2. If the position of the chairman of the board of trustees, his deputy, or any board member becomes vacant, a replacement shall be appointed for the remainder of the term, in accordance with applicable procedures.

Chapter 4: University Council

Article 16

Each university shall have a council named “University Council” to be chaired by the university president and composed of the following members:

1. University vice-presidents.
2. Deans of university colleges, deanships, and institutes.
3. A maximum of four members with expertise or interest in university education, to be appointed pursuant to a decision by the board of trustees, upon nomination by the university president for a term of two years, renewable once.

Article 17

A university council shall manage the university’s academic, administrative, and financial affairs, and implement its general policy in accordance with the Law as well as the rules and regulations issued by the Council of University Affairs and the board of trustees. It shall, in particular, undertake the following:

1. Propose the university’s vision, mission, and objectives, and set its academic, financial, and administrative policies.
2. Propose the university’s organizational structure.
3. Propose the implementation procedures for the university’s financial and administrative regulations.

4. Approve the implementation procedures for the university's academic regulations.
5. Set the power delegation rules for the various councils at the university.
6. Appoint faculty members.
7. Approve the secondment and assignment of faculty members to the public sector, private sector, or civil society organizations, as well as the contracting therewith.
8. Propose the establishment, merger, cancellation, or amendment of names of colleges, deanships, institutes, centers, and academic departments.
9. Propose titles of academic degrees.
10. Approve academic programs and plans for the academic degrees granted by the university.
11. Approve the regulations for issuing academic periodicals.
12. Approve the training and scholarship plan.
13. Set the particulars of the academic calendar according to the beginning and the end of the academic year.
14. Approve the admission policy and determine the number of students to be admitted in each academic year.
15. Determine the fees for academic programs, diplomas, and courses, including related and supporting services.
16. Approve the student activity plans.

17. Approve the university's social responsibility plan.
18. Award academic degrees to graduates.
19. Propose the recipients of honorary doctorate degrees.
20. Approve academic and technical cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding between the university and local institutions.
21. Propose academic and technical cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding between the university and foreign institutions.
22. Propose the formation of the university's international advisory board and determine its powers.
23. Approve the formation, powers, and work procedures of the university's advisory board of faculty members.
24. Approve the formation, powers, and work procedures of the university's advisory board of students.
25. Propose the university's annual budget.
26. Propose the regulations governing investment, self-generated revenues, and endowment management at the university, in accordance with the regulations issued by the Council of University Affairs.
27. Propose the university's incorporation of companies or participation therein, or the joining of existing companies as partner or shareholder, in accordance with legal procedures.

28. Accept donations, gifts, and bequests, and disburse therefrom according to the regulations approved by the Council of University Affairs.
29. Allocate part of the university's lands to university endowments, upon coordination with the General Authority of State Real Property, in accordance with relevant laws and regulations.
30. Establish academic chairs and set their regulations.
31. Appoint one or more comptrollers for university accounts.
32. Review the university's final accounts and submit the same to the board of trustees.
33. Review the university's annual report prior to submission to the board of trustees.
34. Review matters referred to it by its chairman or proposed by any of its members.

The university council may delegate certain powers to its chairman or other councils at the university, provided that the council is notified of the decisions taken. The council may form standing or ad hoc committees from among its members or others to review matters it refers thereto.

Article 18

A university council shall convene upon a call by its chairman at least once every month during the academic year. The chairman may call for a meeting when necessary or upon a written request by at

least one third of its members. Council meetings shall only be valid if attended by at least two-thirds of its members, provided that the chairman or his designee is among them. Council decisions shall be passed by majority vote of attending members; in case of a tie, the meeting chairman shall have the casting vote. Council decisions shall become effective as of the date of approval by the chairman.

Article 19

A university council shall have a general secretary from among faculty members, to be appointed pursuant to a decision by the council, upon the nomination of the chairman, for a term of two years, renewable once.

Chapter 5: The Academic Council

Article 20

An academic council chaired by the university vice-president for academic research shall be established in each university and shall comprise a representative of a rank not lower than associate professor from each college or institute. Members shall be appointed pursuant to a decision by the university council, upon the nomination of the college or institute council and the endorsement of the university president. All members shall be appointed for a term of two years, renewable once. The university council may grant exceptions to the above.

Other members from among full or associate professors may be appointed pursuant to a decision by the university council, provided that their number does not exceed half of the total number of members. Said members shall be appointed for a renewable term of two years. The university council may grant exceptions to the above.

The academic council shall have a secretary from among faculty members, to be appointed pursuant to a decision by the university president, upon the nomination of the chairman of the academic council, for a renewable term of two years.

Article 21

Without prejudice to the provisions of this Law and its regulations and rules, the academic council shall oversee the academic affairs of faculty members as well as those related to academic research, studies, and publication, and shall, in particular, have the following powers:

1. Approve the academic promotion of faculty members.
2. Recommend the appointment of faculty members.
3. Approve faculty members' sabbatical leaves and academic assignments and their external scientific and academic participation.
4. Recommend the approval of the secondment and assignment of faculty members to the public sector, private sector, or civil society organizations, as well as the contracting therewith.

5. Approve the issuance of academic journals and periodicals.
6. Recommend the establishment of academic societies.
7. Propose the regulations governing scholarships and training.

The academic council may delegate certain powers to its chairman, in accordance with the power delegation rules approved by the board of trustees.

The academic council may also form committees from among its members or others to review matters it refers thereto.

Article 22

The academic council shall convene upon a call by its chairman or his designee from among council members at least once every month during the academic year. The chairman may call for a meeting when necessary, or upon a written request by at least one third of council members, or at the request of the university president who may add items to the meeting agenda and chair any meeting he attends. Council meetings shall only be valid if attended by two-thirds of its members, provided that the chairman or his designee is among them.

Article 23

Decisions of the academic council shall be passed by majority vote of attending members; in case of a tie, the chairman shall have the casting vote. Council decisions shall be effective unless contested by the university president within 20 days from the date of receipt.

If contested, they shall be returned with the president's comments to the academic council for reconsideration. If the council maintains its position, the decisions shall be referred to the university council to be reviewed at the first ordinary or extraordinary session. Such decisions may be approved, amended, or cancelled by the university council and its decision shall be final.

Chapter 6: College or Institute Councils

Article 24

The college or institute council shall be chaired by the dean, and shall comprise the following members:

1. Vice-deans, one of whom shall be the secretary of the council.
2. Heads of academic departments.

The university president may, based on the nomination of the college or institute council, add to the membership of the council a maximum of three members from among the college or institute's faculty members, and a maximum of two members from among people with expertise and interest in the college or institute's fields of study for a term of two years, renewable once.

The college or institute council may invite students to attend its meetings to discuss student-related matters.

Article 25

Subject to the provisions of the Law and the regulations and rules issued by the Council of University Affairs, the board of trustees, and the university council, the college or institute council shall be responsible for the college or institute's academic, administrative, and financial affairs. The council may delegate certain powers to the chairman, and may form committees from among members or non-members to review matters it refers thereto.

Article 26

1. The college or institute council shall convene upon a call by its chairman at least once every month during the academic year. Council meetings shall only be valid if attended by at least two-thirds of its members, including the chairman or his designee from among vice-deans. Council decisions shall be passed by majority vote of attending members; in case of a tie, the meeting chairman shall have the casting vote.
2. Council decisions shall be effective unless contested by the university president within 20 days from the date of receipt. If contested, they shall be returned with the president's comments to the college or institute council for reconsideration. If the council maintains its position, the decisions shall be referred to the university council to be reviewed at the first ordinary or extraordinary session. Such decisions may be approved, amended, or cancelled by the university council and its decision shall be final.

Chapter 7: Department Councils

Article 27

Each academic department in a college or institute shall have a council with the head of the department as chairman and its faculty members as members. Faculty members from other departments may, when necessary, be appointed to the council pursuant to a decision by the university president.

The dean shall chair the department council in the absence of the head of the department or upon the vacancy of the position.

Article 28

Subject to the provisions of the Law and the regulations and rules issued by the Council of University Affairs, the board of trustees, and the university council, the department council shall be responsible for the department's academic, financial, and administrative affairs, including determining curricula criteria, ensuring compliance therewith, and reviewing such criteria periodically. The council may delegate certain powers to its chairman, in accordance with the power delegation rules approved by the board of trustees.

The department council may form committees from among members or non-members.

Article 29

1. The department council shall convene upon a call by its chairman at least once every month during the academic year. Council meetings shall only be valid if attended by at least two-thirds of its members, including the chairman or his designee from among members. Council decisions shall be passed by majority vote of attending members; in case of a tie, the meeting chairman shall have the casting vote.
2. Department council decisions shall be effective unless contested by the college or institute dean within seven days from the date of receipt. If contested, they shall be returned to the department council together with dean's comments for reconsideration. If the council maintains its position, such decisions shall be referred to the college or institute council to decide thereon.

Chapter 8: University President and Vice-Presidents

Article 30

The university president shall be appointed pursuant to an order by the President of the Council of Ministers, upon the recommendation of the Chairman of the Council of University Affairs based on the nomination of the board of trustees. The employment contract shall be for a renewable term of three years and shall be subject to the Labor Law.

Article 31

Subject to the powers of the board of trustees and the university council, the university president shall report to the Chairman of the Council of University Affairs in accordance with the Law, and shall be responsible for managing university affairs; he may, in particular, undertake the following:

1. Manage university affairs, including academic, administrative, and financial affairs.
2. Oversee the implementation of the Law and its regulations, university bylaws, decisions of the board of trustees and decisions of councils within the university.
3. Submit the university's annual performance report to the board of trustees after discussing it at the university council. Such report shall include performance indicators, academic research results, community service activities, and any other activities, and shall indicate opportunities and challenges, if any, and recommendations to overcome such challenges, and any other recommendations for improvement and manner of implementation thereof.
4. Nominate university vice-presidents.
5. Represent the university before the judiciary and other agencies, and may assign others to do so.
6. Appoint deans, vice-deans, heads of departments, and directors of scientific and research centers.

The university president may delegate certain powers to any

vice-president or to any person he deems fit, each within his area of specialty, provided that such delegation is made in writing and for a defined period; he may also form committees, when necessary.

Article 32

If the university president holds a public position, or if he is a faculty member, he may retain his position for the duration of his term as university president; such period shall be counted towards his employment for the purpose of periodic increment, promotion, and retirement.

Article 33

A university president shall have one or more vice-presidents from among faculty members to be appointed pursuant to a decision by the board of trustees upon the nomination of the university president, for a term of three years, renewable once. The Council of University Affairs may grant exceptions.

Article 34

The vice-presidents shall assist the university president in managing university affairs and the regulations shall determine their powers. In case of multiple vice-presidents, the university president may delegate one of them to assume his powers in his absence. If the position of the university president becomes vacant, the Chairman of the Council of University Affairs may appoint an acting president from among the vice-presidents or others.

Chapter 9: Deans and Vice-Deans

Article 35

A dean of a college, deanship, or institute shall be appointed pursuant to a decision by the university president, for a renewable term of two years, subject to rules approved by the university's board of trustees.

Article 36

Subject to the provisions of the Law and the regulations and rules issued by the Council of University Affairs, the board of trustees, and the university council, the dean shall be in charge of the academic, educational, administrative, and financial affairs of the college or institute. He shall, at the end of each academic year, submit a progress report to the university president.

Article 37

Each college, deanship, or institute shall have one or more vice-deans from among faculty members, nominated by the dean and appointed pursuant to a decision by the university president for a renewable period of two years. The vice-deans shall assist the dean in the discharge of his duties; the most senior of them shall assume the position of the dean in his absence or upon the vacancy of his position; and one of them shall serve as the secretary of the college or institute council.

Chapter 10: Heads of Departments

Article 38

Heads of departments at each college shall be appointed pursuant to a decision by the university president upon the recommendation of college deans for a renewable term of two years.

Article 39

A head of department shall be in charge of managing the department's academic, educational, research, administrative, and financial affairs in accordance with the Law and its regulations and the decisions of the university and college councils. The head of department shall, at the end of each academic year, submit to the college dean a report on the department's work progress.

Chapter 11: Academic Accreditation

Article 40

The university shall seek to obtain institutional accreditation from the Education and Training Evaluation Commission.

Article 41

The university shall seek to obtain program accreditation from the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, or from any international agency approved by the Commission.

Chapter 12: Advisory Boards

Article 42

An international advisory board may be formed at the university pursuant to a decision by the board of trustees. The board of trustees shall determine the powers and work procedures of the international advisory board.

Article 43

A student advisory board shall be formed at the university pursuant to a decision by the university council, to be chaired by one of the university vice-presidents. The university council shall determine the powers and work procedures of the student advisory board.

Article 44

A faculty advisory board shall be formed at the university pursuant to a decision by the university council, to be chaired by the university president or his designee. The university council shall determine the powers and work procedures of the faculty advisory board.

Chapter 13: University Financial Regulations

Article 45

Each university shall have an independent annual budget approved pursuant to a decision by the board of trustees, in accordance with

the General Rules approved by the Council of University Affairs, in coordination with relevant agencies.

Article 46

The General Auditing Bureau shall audit the university's final accounts, in accordance with the auditing rules of public companies and institutions.

Article 47

Without prejudice to the powers of the auditing authority, the board of trustees shall, upon the nomination of the university president, appoint one or more licensed external auditors for the university accounts. Such auditors shall have the rights and duties of external auditors in joint-stock companies.

Article 48

A university may, under the supervision of the endowment management board, establish its own endowments. Such endowments shall have an independent legal personality and shall be managed in accordance with the rules approved by the Council of University Affairs in a manner not contradicting the endowers' terms. The university and university endowments may establish or participate in the establishment of companies, or become a partner or shareholder therein, in accordance with legal procedures.

Article 49

University revenues shall consist of the following:

1. Subsidies allocated by the State, pursuant to the rules governing the university funding program.
2. Fees for academic programs, diplomas, and courses, as well as services rendered by the university.
3. Donations, gifts, grants, bequests, and endowments.
4. Proceeds generated from university's properties, investments, and endowments.
5. Other financial resources approved by the board of trustees, provided that they are consistent with the university's objectives.

The university and university endowments shall open separate accounts with the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority, and they may open other accounts with any licensed bank in the Kingdom for the deposit of revenues. Disbursements therefrom shall be made pursuant to the rules approved by the Council of University Affairs.

Article 50

A university may apply fees to increase its revenues, including the following:

1. Fees for graduate programs, without compromising quality.
2. Fees for diploma programs, and educational and training courses, in accordance with the General Rules set by the Council of University Affairs.

3. Fees from non-Saudi students, excluding students on scholarships granted in accordance with the relevant rules.
4. Fees from internal or external entities in return for scientific research or consultation services, provided that such services are consistent with university's mission and objectives.
5. Funds generated from the investment and development of cash and in-kind revenues, in accordance with the regulations governing investment, self-generated revenues, and endowment management at the university.
6. Fees from government and non-government agencies in return for contracting with faculty members to perform tasks specified in the employment contract, subject to the approval of the faculty member and relevant councils. The faculty member shall continue to perform the minimum academic requirements, including teaching, academic supervision, and attendance of meetings of academic councils.
7. Fees from government and non-government agencies for carrying out studies, consultation services, or other services pursuant to contracts approved by both parties, based on the need for experts from among Saudi faculty members. Such revenues shall be deposited in a separate account and shall be disbursed in accordance with the regulations approved by the board of trustees.

Chapter 14: General and Final Provisions

Article 51

Establishment of university branches outside the Kingdom shall be pursuant to a decision by the Council of Ministers, based on the recommendation of the board of trustees and the endorsement of the Council of University Affairs.

Article 52

Employment of all university employees, including faculty members, administrative personnel, and technicians, shall be in accordance with the Labor Law.

Article 53

The chairman of any of the councils provided for in this Law, or any council member subject to the chairman's approval, may invite any person to attend council meetings in a non-voting capacity.

Article 54

Arabic shall be the language of instruction at the university. Other languages may be used, subject to the approval of the University Council.

Article 55

No member of any of the councils provided for in this Law may attend the council deliberations on any issue relating to him or his relatives up to the second degree.

Article 56

This Law shall be implemented by all the councils provided for herein, and the Council of University Affairs shall ensure proper implementation thereof.

Article 57

This Law shall supersede the Law of the Council of Higher Education and Universities, promulgated by Royal Decree No. (M/8), dated 4/6/1414H and shall repeal all the provisions inconsistent therewith.

Article 58

This Law shall enter into force 180 days following the date of its publication in the Official Gazette.

Appendix B

Saudi higher education governance framework	
Internal aspects	Interview questions
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe the level of autonomy of the university from the Ministry of Education? • What procedures, processes, and structures has the university taken to achieve autonomy? • What administrative and financial tools does the university use to achieve autonomy? • How can the functioning of the university be ensured after achieving autonomy?
Academic freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does a faculty member participate in designing courses' structure, curricula and study programs? How does that happen? • What level of powers does a faculty member have in the classroom, such as the choice of syllabus and the method of evaluating students? • How does a faculty member choose his research topics, and can he publish the results? • How are deans and department heads selected? Does the faculty member have a role in that? • Can a faculty member provide consultations to the private sector and the community? • How does a faculty member participate in the decision-making process within the university?
Stakeholders engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the main stakeholders of the university? Do they participate in the decision-making process? • How is the decision-making process taken in the university, and what are the steps? • What are the criteria by which stakeholders are selected for decision-making participation?
Governance Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the new university law interpreted for faculty members and students? • Are university regulations, admission standards, and educational policies published and how does this action affect the workflow of the university? • How are stakeholders involved in the development of criteria for recruitment, appointment and promotion of faculty and staff members, and are these criteria published? Is the annual report of the chartered

	<p>accountant for the university's budget published and how does this action affect the workflow of the university?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are faculty and staff employees informed of the job description and how would you describe the process of holding those who neglect their work accountable in order to maintain a university job? In the event of a dispute or problem for a faculty member or students, how is it dealt with? • Is there a legal department to resolve disputes? And what is its role?
External aspects	
<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power Distance • Individualism-Collectivism • Masculinity-Femininity • Uncertainty Avoidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about the level of authority in the university in terms of participatory/centralisation? • How would you describe the faculty flexibility and risk tolerance in their decisions and does they tend to avoid risks and respect authority in their decision making? • How would you describe the position of women in academic work, and are they allowed to assume leadership positions?? • Does gender have any effect on recruitment or promotions? • Are there any social pressures the university faces in accepting students or hiring faculty members? • Do you think that there are social and cultural (customs and traditions) challenges that can prevent the implementation of good governance in the context of the university, with mentioning some examples, if any?
Political condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that the economic situation of Saudi Arabia affects the functioning of the university? and how?
Economic condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the political decision in the Kingdom affect the educational policies and governance adaptation in Saudi universities?
Globalisation condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the university seek to achieve high ranks in the global rankings? And how is that done? • Are there any partnerships of the university with international institutions? What effect does this have on the university?

Appendix C

Ethics Application Feedback - Alowaid - 282-4-22



AARM



To: Othman Alowaid (Research Student)

Sun 15/05/2022 16:40

Cc: AARM

Hi Othman,

Thank you for sending all the documentation through.

I have checked all the changes outlined below and can see that all necessary changes have been made.

I am pleased to confirm that you can proceed with your research on behalf of the ABS Research Ethics Committee.

We wish you well with your research and hope it goes well.

Do get in touch if you have any queries or questions.

Many thanks,

Paul.

Appendix D



Investigating the Implementation of Governance through the Adoption of the Law of Universities in Saudi Higher Education

Consent Form

Name of Chief Investigator: Othman Alowaid

Please initial boxes

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet 20220120 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study, without giving a reason and without my legal rights being affected.	
3.	I understand that this study is anonymous and that I am not able to withdraw after submitting my answers.	
4.	I agree to my personal data and data relating to me collected during the study being processed as described in the Participant Information Sheet.	
5.	I agree to my interview being audio recorded and to anonymised direct quotes from me being used in publications resulting from the study.	
6.	I agree to my anonymised data being used by research teams for future research.	
7.	I agree to take part in this study.	

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Othman Alowaid

Name of Person receiving consent.

Date

Signature

If you wish to receive a lay summary of the research project upon its completion, please provide an email address to which the summary can be sent.

Email address:

Appendix E



Investigating the Implementation of Governance through the Adoption of the Law of Universities in Saudi Higher Education Participant Information Sheet

Invitation

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study forming part of a PhD project for Othman Alowaid

Before you decide if you would like to participate, take time to read the following information carefully and, if you wish, discuss it with others such as your family, friends or colleagues.

Please ask a member of the research team, whose contact details can be found at the end of this information sheet, if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information before you make your decision.

What is the purpose of the study?

To develop an appropriate and applicable governance framework for Saudi universities considering the context characteristics of Saudi Arabia.

This will be done by interviewing the key stakeholders in higher education and taking their viewpoints.

Why have I been invited?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you are a key stakeholder in the university and your viewpoint and experience are important to achieving the research objectives by answering research questions.

Key stakeholders were selected based on the following criteria for each category:

- Faculty member

Have a leadership position at the university

- Administrative employee

Have a role in implementing governance at the university

- Student

Have a role in the Student Union

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to join the study, you will be contacted to determine the appropriate time for you to conduct the interview. One interview will be at a convenient location at the university and the interview will take 45 to 60 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

If you do decide to participate, you will be asked to sign and date a consent form. You would still be free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. A code will be attached to all the data you provide to maintain anonymity. Analysis of your data will be undertaken using coded data. If we need to collect personal data (such as a name and contact details) we will only use this for the purposes outlined in this participant information sheet e.g. to contact you to arrange an interview.

The data we collect will be stored in a secure document stored electronically on a secure encrypted mobile device, password-protected computer server, or secure cloud storage device.

To ensure the quality of the research Aston University may need to access your data to check that the data has been recorded accurately e.g. for the purposes of audit. If this is required your personal data will be treated as confidential by the individuals accessing your data.

How will the conversation during the interview be recorded and the information I provide managed?

With your permission, we will audio record the interview and take notes.

The recording will be typed into a document (transcribed) by a member of the research team/transcriber approved by Aston University. This process will involve removing any information which could be used to identify individuals e.g. names, locations etc.

Audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as the transcripts have been checked for accuracy.

We will ensure that anything you have told us that is included in the reporting of the study will be anonymous.

You of course are free not to answer any questions that are asked without giving a reason.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

If you participate, you will contribute to the development of a proposed framework for the governance of Saudi higher education, based on the experience of stakeholders, and you will have a national role in the development of higher education.

What are the possible risks and burdens of taking part?

A possible inconvenience is the time the participants need to give up for interviews. The questions that the researcher is going to ask are not likely to cause significant distress. No risks are anticipated the study and the participation will be voluntary and there will be no obligation or force on participants beyond the time required to complete the interview.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals and/or presented at conferences. If the results of the study are published, your identity will remain anonymous. A lay summary of the results of the study can be forwarded to you when the study has been completed. Should you wish to receive a copy, please provide your email address on the consent form or contact a member of the research team.

The results of the study will also be used in Othman Alowaid PhD thesis

Expenses and payments

No expenses or payments are required from the research participants.

Who is funding the research?

The study is being funded by Aston University and Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University (Researcher's University)

Who is organising this study and how is my data being used?

Aston University is organising this study and acting as data controller for the study. Research data will be used only for the purposes of the study or related uses identified in this Information Sheet or Appendix A.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study was given a favorable ethical opinion by the Aston University Research Ethics Committees (RECs).

What if I have a concern about my participation in the study?

If you have any concerns about your participation in this study, please speak to the research team and they will do their best to answer your questions. Contact details can be found at the end of this information sheet.

If the research team are unable to address your concerns or you wish to make a complaint about how the study is being conducted you should contact the Aston University Research Integrity Office at research_governance@aston.ac.uk or via the University switchboard on +44 (0)121 204 3000.

Research Team

Researcher: Othman Alowaid

Email: [student ID no. redacted][@aston.ac.uk](mailto:[redacted]@aston.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Dr Matthew Hall

Email: m.j.hall@aston.ac.uk

Associate Supervisor: Professor Helen Higson

Email: h.e.higson@aston.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet. If you have any questions regarding the study please don't hesitate to ask one of the research team.

Appendix F



Appendix H

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ministry of Education
Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal
University
Office of the Vice President for
Research & Higher Studies



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
جامعة الإمام عبد الرحمن بن فيصل
وكالة الجامعة للدراسات
العلمية والبحث العلمي

اللجنة الدائمة لأخلاقيات البحث على المخطوفاة الحية
Institutional Review Board
NCBE Registration No.: HAP-05-D-003

IRB Number	IRB -2022-23-195	أرب - ٢٠٢٢-٢٣-١٩٥
Project Title	Investigating the Implementation of Governance through the Adoption of the Law of Universities in Saudi Higher Education	
Principal Investigator	Othman Alowaid	
College / Center	Deanship of Admissions and Registration	Department Deanship of Admissions and Registration
Approval Date	08/05/2022	

The application was reviewed and approved at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University IRB through an Expedited Review on Sunday, May 8, 2022.

Approval is given for three months from the date of approval. Projects, which have not commenced within two months of the original approval, must be re-submitted to the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the validation period, you will be required to request an extension from the IRB Committee.

On completion of the research, the Principal Investigator is required to advise the Institutional Review Board if any changes are made to the protocol, a revised protocol must be submitted to the Institutional Review Board for reconsideration.

Approval is given on the understanding that the "Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice" are adhered to. Where required, a signed written consent form must be obtained from each participant in the study group.

Chairman of the Institutional Review Board

Professor Badr Abdulrahman Aljandan



cc. - Dean
Deanship of Scientific Research
- Director General
King Fahd Hospital of the University
- Director
Center for Research and Medical Consultations
- Supervisor General for Quality and Safety
King Fahd Hospital of the University
- Director
Monitoring Office for Research and Research Ethics
- Director
Pharmacy @ KHU

Appendix J

<p>KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA Ministry of Education KING ABDULAZIZ UNIVERSITY (035) ☎ : 80200 Jeddah 21589 ☎ : (+966) 12 6952015 Fax : (+966) 12 6952441 http://gsr.kau.edu.sa</p>		<p>المملكة العربية السعودية وزارة التعليم جامعة الملك عبد العزيز (٠٣٥) ☎ : ٨٠٢٠٠ جدة ٢١٥٨٩ ☎ : (+٩٦٦) ١٢ ٦٩٥٢٠١٥ فاكس : (+٩٦٦) ١٢ ٦٩٥٢٤٤١ E-mail: research@kau.edu.sa</p>
<p>مكتب وكيل الجامعة للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي Office of the Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research</p>		

سعادة نائب رئيس جامعة الإمام عبد الرحمن بن فيصل للبحث العلمي والابتكار حفظه الله

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ، ، ،

جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز تهدي سعادتكم أطيب تحياتها وتقديرها، ونشير إلى خطاب سعادتكم رقم ٤٣٠١١٢٠٣٥٨ وتاريخ ١٤٤٣/١٠/٢٩هـ بشأن الباحث / عثمان بن محمد العويد أحد طلاب جامعتكم الموقرة والذي يقوم بإجراء بحث وذلك استكمالاً لمتطلبات الدراسة، ولديه الرغبة في تطبيق أدوات دراسته (إجراء مقابلات) على عينة من القيادات والمسؤولين بجامعة الملك عبد العزيز.

في هذا السياق نفيد سعادتكم بأنه لا مانع من قيام الباحث بتطبيق دراسته وجمع البيانات اللازمة لبحثه، علماً بأن ضوابط توزيع الاستبيانات بجامعة الملك عبد العزيز مرفوعة على الرابط التالي:

<https://graduatestudies.kau.edu.sa/Pages-astbanat.aspx>

سنتقبلوا سعادتكم وأقر التحية والتقدير ، ، ،

وكيل الجامعة
للدراستات العليا والبحث العلمي



أ.د. أمين بن يوسف محمد نومان


 واردة : 73074 / 45/1
 التاريخ : 1443/11/10 هـ
 المرفقات : بدون


الرقم : ٤٤ ١١ ٦٦٦ Ref. : التاريخ : ١٤٤٣/١١/٩ Date : المرفقات : Encl. :

Appendix K

معايير ومؤشرات اختيار الجامعات التي سيطبق عليها نظام الجامعات الجديد

عدد المجالات والمعايير والمؤشرات: (٣ مجالات، ٢٣ معيار، و ٧٤ مؤشر)

م	المجال	عدد المعايير	عدد المؤشرات
١	المجال الأكاديمي	٦	١٨
٢	المجال الإداري	١٠	٣٨
٣	المجال المالي	٧	١٨
المجموع	٣ مجالات	٢٣ معياراً	٧٤ مؤشراً

يتم تحديد أولوية تطبيق النظام الجديد تبعاً لتحقيق الجامعة أعلى نسبة من النقاط في المجالات الثلاثة التالية:

