

Shared University Leadership and Collaborative Work Environment at a Selected University in Tangshan, China



Qiu Zhiqi

Emilio Aguinaldo College, Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT: The study examines teacher-respondents' perceptions of the shared University Governance System and its impact on their collaborative work environment in a higher education institution. A quantitative correlational research design was used, with 132 teachers in Tangshan, China, using a structured questionnaire. The results showed an inverse relationship between shared university leadership and collaborative work environment, with an R-value of -0.199 , suggesting an inverse relationship. However, the significance value was 0.022 , suggesting other factors may also influence perceptions about the collaborative work environment.

KEYWORDS: Shared university leadership, Collaborative work environment, Higher education institution, Teacher perceptions

1. INTRODUCTION

The active interplay between shared university leadership and the cultivation of a collaborative work environment has emerged as a subject of growing interest and profound importance. Like those worldwide educational institutions in China undergo transformative shifts, it becomes imperative to explore into the complexities of shared governance and its implications on fostering collaboration within these institutions.

This study undertakes an extensive assessment of the perspectives held by educators at a selected higher education institution in Tangshan, China, regarding the shared University Governance System. Moreover, it seeks to unravel the potential connections between this governance framework and the collaborative work environment prevalent within the university.

Zhao & Wang (2020) define governance structure as the intricate network of relationships among interest groups within an organization. It ensures efficient functioning by strategically distributing authority and implementing effective operational mechanisms. In China, the evolution of governance structures is rooted in corporate management practices, with an ideal framework based on clear roles, entitlements, reciprocal limitations, and property rights.

China's governance has transitioned from a centralized model to a decentralized network governance paradigm, involving peripheral entities like local governments and schools. This shift has increased autonomy and participation for educational stakeholders, but the central state still holds ultimate authority. This study aims to deepen global discourse on network governance in education. (Tao, 2022)

Shared governance is a model in higher education institutions that involves diverse stakeholders, such as board members, faculty leaders, and university presidents, in decision-making. It can shift focus from traditional interests to forward-looking ones, leading to more thoughtful and efficient decision-making processes. Shared governance involves collective accountability among administrative personnel and faculty members in shaping policies that advance educational objectives. However, implementation faces challenges due to internal and external factors like employment length, voting rights, personnel recruitment decisions, curriculum matters, and the extent of shared governance embraced within the institution. (Bahls, 2014; Kennedy et al., 2020)

The current educational landscape is undergoing transformative shifts, with a growing emphasis on collaboration and shared leadership. The concept of teacher professionalism is being redefined, with a renewed emphasis on empowering educators to lead efforts aimed at improvement and fostering a culture of continuous learning. Schools, as communal entities, play a pivotal role in nurturing collaboration among individuals by promoting shared values, offering interpersonal support, and setting collective goals. The establishment of partnerships among educational institutions, local communities, and diverse organizations has emerged as a crucial strategy for effectively addressing the multifaceted needs of students. This holistic perspective on schools underscores the necessity for collaborative endeavors among all individuals and groups involved (Slater, 2020).

Shared university governance, as a collaborative decision-making process among institutional stakeholders, stands as a critical mechanism for promoting democratic practices, ensuring accountability, and fostering shared responsibility in higher education institutions (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

Shared University Leadership and Collaborative Work Environment at a Selected University in Tangshan, China

The study proposes a framework for implementing shared governance in public service, integrating individuals, technologies, and institutions within an ecosystem. This approach differs from traditional hierarchical structures and emphasizes the importance of collaborative leadership. The research highlights the role of goal commitment in reducing transaction costs and the interplay of social and psychological factors in collaborative governance. It contributes to both theoretical and practical aspects of implementing collaborative governance, providing insights for public managers to enhance inter-agency networks. (Bianchi et al., 2021)

Amidst the changing landscape of higher education, characterized by technological advancements, increasing diversity, demands for accountability, and heightened competition, shared governance has gained renewed significance. Effective shared governance can serve as a guiding beacon for institutions navigating these changes, harnessing the diverse perspectives of stakeholders to formulate innovative solutions and strategies (Birnbaum, 2004).

The study conducted by Tao & Liu (2020) probes into the involvement of local Chinese governments in collaborative or shared governance within educational settings, with a specific focus on school turnarounds. Their research identifies and categorizes three distinct modes of interaction: dominant forces, accommodators, and facilitators. It sheds light on the intricate dynamics and power imbalances among participants engaged in educational network governance, contributing significantly to the comprehension of these complexities.

The systems perspective on quality posits that the quality of a product or service hinges on the intricate interplay among various components within the production process. To enhance the overall quality of the higher educational system, it is imperative that quality improvement initiatives effectively cater to the system's specific needs. This necessitates achieving a delicate balance among various functional areas within the system and mitigating the presence of self-serving, competitive profit centers. The success of any educational institution profoundly depends on internal cooperation among all its components (Maguad, 2018).

Cultivating positive relationships stands as a fundamental element of effective leadership. To achieve meaningful outcomes, principals must prioritize the establishment and nurturing of relationships with various stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and community members. This emphasis on relationship-building not only enhances the overall effectiveness of the school but also promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership among all parties involved. Principals should, therefore, prioritize working together cohesively, harnessing the significance of fostering positive relationships, receiving professional support, demonstrating sincerity, and engaging in deliberate personal development. These actions, in turn, contribute to the cultivation of a positive school climate (Mohapi & Chombo, 2021).

Research Questions

Generally, this study aims to assess the teacher-respondents' assessment of the shared University Governance System in a selected higher educational institution and explore the potential relationships on their collaborative work environment in the university. Hence, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the assessment of the teacher-respondents on the shared university governance system at a university in terms of:
 - 1.1. inclusivity;
 - 1.2. partnership;
 - 1.3. equity
 - 1.4. accountability;
 - 1.5. ownership?
2. What is the assessment of the teacher-respondents on the collaborative work environment of the university in terms of:
 - 2.1. accountability;
 - 2.2. coordination;
 - 2.3. communication;
 - 2.4. trust;
 - 2.5. transparency?
3. What is significant relationship between the assessment of the teacher-respondents on the shared university governance system and collaborative work environment of the university?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aims to evaluate the teacher-respondents' perceptions of the shared University Governance System and its impact on their collaborative work environment in a selected higher educational institution. A quantitative correlational research design was employed to examine the assessment of the shared university governance system and the collaborative work environment. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the magnitude and orientation of the association between the two constructs. The study was conducted with 132 teachers at a higher education institution in Tangshan, China, using random sampling to ensure statistical precision. The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire that assessed the teacher-respondents' perceptions of the shared university governance system and collaborative work environment. The questionnaire was divided into three sections:

Shared University Leadership and Collaborative Work Environment at a Selected University in Tangshan, China

participant information, the assessment of the shared university governance system, and the assessment of the collaborative work environment.

The questionnaire was thoroughly reviewed by experts in education and governance, and a pilot test was conducted with a small group of teachers to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions. After receiving feedback, any necessary refinements were made to enhance the overall quality of the instrument. The statistical analysis of the data was executed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, and the data obtained from the administered questionnaires was entered into the software for subsequent analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The assessment of Shared University Leadership at a selected university reveals a perception of inclusivity among faculty. The overall mean score is 2.844, indicating a prevailing perception of inclusivity. The highest mean score is 3.21, indicating a proactive approach to faculty input in decision-making processes and clear channels for faculty voice. However, the lowest mean score is 2.02, indicating a lack of recognition or impact on promoting a culture of openness and inclusivity in governance activities.

The highest mean score is 3.12, indicating a shared commitment to cooperative governance between faculty and administrators. The highest mean score is 3.12, indicating mutual respect and trust between the two groups during governance discussions. However, the lowest mean score is 2.25, indicating a perceived gap in policy formulation, suggesting a need for further involvement of faculty in policy formulation. Overall, the university's shared leadership approach is perceived as evident, but there are areas for improvement.

The assessment of teacher-respondents on Shared University Leadership at a selected university reveals that equity is an embedded principle within the university's governance framework. The highest mean score is 3.02, indicating the university's commitment to fairness and impartiality in allocating governance responsibilities among faculty members. However, the lowest mean score is 2.39, indicating a need for more emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

A strong sense of accountability is also evident, with most faculty members recognizing the importance of responsibility, transparency, and due process in governance mechanisms. The university has established procedures to address non-compliance or misconduct, ensuring the integrity of the governance system. However, the lowest mean score is 2.25, indicating a perceived lack of regular or comprehensive review processes.

Ownership is also evident, with a general sentiment that faculty members feel a certain level of ownership in the university's governance structure. The highest mean score is 3.15, indicating active involvement of faculty members in shaping the governance structure and policies, and the shared governance system promoting a collaborative atmosphere. However, the lowest mean score is 2.11, indicating a perceived deficit in acknowledging and celebrating faculty members' contributions to governance processes.

2. The assessment of teacher-respondents on the collaborative work environment of a selected university in terms of accountability, coordination, communication, trust, and transparency is presented in Table 7. The highest mean score of 3.29 indicates that accountability is a fundamental component of the university's collaborative work culture, emphasizing the institution's commitment to responsibility and ownership. However, the lowest mean score of 2.13 suggests that faculty members may not understand the consequences of lapses in responsibility.

Coordination is evident with an overall mean score of 2.836, indicating the university's emphasis on synchronization and harmonization of tasks and roles. However, the lowest mean score of 2.13 suggests that there may be perceived challenges or gaps in coordinating efforts across different departments or functions.

Communication is satisfactory with an average mean score of 2.987, with the highest mean score of 3.43 attributed to the university's promptness in addressing communication barriers. However, the lowest mean score of 2.32 suggests that the university's encouragement of active listening and constructive feedback during collaborative discussions may need enhancement.

Trust is moderately present with a mean value of 2.772, indicating that the university actively works towards fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect among faculty members. However, the lowest mean score of 2.32 suggests a potential gap in the actual emphasis on trust within the university's collaborative framework versus the perceived importance of trust among faculty members.

Transparency is also evident with an overall mean score of 2.972, indicating the university's commitment to transparency in its collaborative endeavors. However, the lowest mean score of 2.36 suggests that there might be inconsistencies or gaps in communicating project goals and objectives to all team members involved.

3. The mean scores for shared university leadership and collaborative work environment are around 2.8674 and 2.9138, respectively. The R-value is -.199, suggesting an inverse relationship. However, the significance value is .022, less than the common alpha level of .05. This suggests that other factors may also influence perceptions about the collaborative work environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

For Shared University Leadership Assessment, the selected university displays a predominant perception of inclusivity in its approach to shared university leadership. While there is an active effort to involve faculty in decision-making processes, areas such as policy formulation and promoting an open governance culture can be further improved. Furthermore, the focus on equity, accountability, and ownership within the governance framework is evident, suggesting a balanced approach to shared leadership.

For Collaborative Work Environment Evaluation, the university underscores the importance of collaboration through evident accountability and communication among its faculty. Despite this, there's a discernible need to address perceived challenges in cross-departmental coordination. Trust and transparency, while present, also have room for improvement to ensure a fully effective collaborative work environment.

The inverse relationship, though statistically significant, is weak, suggesting that as perceptions of shared university leadership become more positive, perceptions of the collaborative work environment might slightly decline, and vice versa. This outcome could indicate potential trade-offs between hierarchical leadership and collaboration. As more emphasis is placed on shared leadership roles, it may inadvertently lead to challenges or complexities in the collaborative processes. Alternatively, when collaborative processes are streamlined and functioning well, there might be a perceived reduced need for shared leadership, leading to higher hierarchical structures. However, given the weak strength of this correlation, it is evident that numerous other variables and factors influence these perceptions and may not be directly captured in this study. Thus, while the university might consider refining both its leadership styles and collaborative methods, diving deeper into the specific causes of this inverse relationship will be crucial for informed decision-making. Future research might want to explore other influencing factors that play pivotal roles in shaping these perceptions.

REFERENCES

- 1) Bahls, S. C. (2014). How to make shared governance work: Some best practices. *AGB*, 22(2). Retrieved from: <https://www.otis.edu/sites/default/files/How%20to%20Make%20Shared%20Governance%20Work%20Some%20Best%20Practices%20-%20AGB.pdf>.
- 2) Bianchi, C., Nasi, G., & Rivenbark, W. C. (2021). Implementing collaborative governance: models, experiences, and challenges. *Public Management Review*, Volume(Issue), 1581-1589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1878777>
- 3) Birnbaum, R. (2004). The end of shared governance: Looking ahead or looking back. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2004(127), 5–22.
- 4) Kennedy, D. R., Harrell, T. K., Lodise, N. M., Mattingly, T. J., Norenberg, J. P., Ragucci, K., Ranelli, P., & Stewart, A. S. (2020). Current status and best practices of shared governance in US pharmacy programs. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(7), ajpe7281. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7281>
- 5) Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. (2004). Meeting today's governance challenges: A synthesis of the literature and examination of a future agenda for scholarship. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(4), 371–399.
- 6) Maguad BA. Managing the system of higher education: competition or collaboration? *Education*. 2018;138(3):229-238
- 7) Mohapi, S. J., & Chombo, S. (2021). Governance collaboration in schools: the perceptions of principals, parents and educators in rural South Africa. *Cogent Education*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.1994723>
- 8) Slater, L. (2020). Collaboration: A framework for school improvement. University of Calgary. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ984546.pdf>
- 9) Tao, Y. (2022). Towards network governance: Educational reforms and governance changes in China (1985–2020). *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 23, 375–388.
- 10) Tao, Y., & Liu, S. (2020). Network governance in education: The experiences and struggles of local governments in Chinese school turnaround. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 40(3), 305-319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2020.1792828>
- 11) Zhao, D. & Wang, L. (2020). School governance structure and its impact on student performance: A comparative study between four provinces of China and the PISA2015 high-scored countries/economies. *Best Evidence in Chinese Education*. 6(2):825-843.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.