



From Agility to Accountability: Lessons for Private Universities from IIT Governance in India

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Abstract

India's higher education landscape has undergone significant restructuring through privatization, expansion, and institutional diversification. Private universities now play a central role in increasing access to higher education, generating regional economic activity, and responding quickly to labour-market demands through professional and interdisciplinary programmes. Many institutions have demonstrated strengths in infrastructure development, international partnerships, digital learning systems, and industry-linked curricula. Yet the rapid rise of the sector has also exposed recurring governance challenges, including concentration of authority, weak internal checks, opaque fee structures, inconsistent faculty governance, leadership instability, concerns over admissions fairness, and uneven accountability to students and society. These issues have intensified policy debates on how private universities can sustain growth while strengthening public credibility.

In contrast, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) represent one of India's most respected governance models in higher education. Established as Institutes of National Importance, IITs combine substantial academic and administrative autonomy with strong statutory oversight, transparent financial systems, merit-based admissions, collegial academic decision-making, and professionally selected leadership. Their institutional design demonstrates how

autonomy can coexist with accountability, innovation, and long-term reputational trust.

This paper investigates how governance principles from the IIT ecosystem can be adapted for India's private university sector. Using a qualitative comparative methodology, the study analyses legislative frameworks, annual reports, accreditation standards, regulatory guidelines, and secondary scholarly literature. It identifies six core governance pillars: independent and competent governing boards, empowered academic senates, transparent financial governance, meritocratic leadership selection, credible and fair student admissions systems, and innovation supported by measurable accountability mechanisms.

Comparative institutional illustrations from Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad, Ashoka University, and O.P. Jindal Global University are used to highlight practical lessons and sectoral contrasts. The paper proposes a hybrid governance framework in which private universities retain entrepreneurial agility while embedding stronger procedural



safeguards and stakeholder oversight. The study concludes that durable institutional excellence depends on balancing speed with due process, market responsiveness with academic integrity, founder vision with institutional checks, and expansion with sustained public trust.

Keywords

Higher education governance; Indian Institutes of Technology; private universities; university accountability; institutional autonomy; admissions governance; leadership selection; academic senates; financial transparency; India.

Introduction

India hosts one of the world's largest and most complex higher education systems, serving millions of learners through a diverse network of central universities, state universities, deemed universities, private universities, colleges, institutes of national importance, and autonomous institutions. According to the University Grants Commission and the Ministry of Education, the sector has expanded rapidly over the past three decades in response to demographic pressure, rising aspirations for professional education, urbanization, and the growing need for a knowledge-driven workforce. India's higher education landscape is no longer a small elite system; it has become a mass system that must accommodate students from varied socio-economic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds.

The rapid growth in student demand has been closely linked to the country's young population and increasing participation rates. The policy emphasis on improving the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), particularly under the National Education Policy 2020, reflects a national commitment to widening access, improving quality, and making higher education more multidisciplinary and globally competitive. NEP 2020 envisions a GER of 50 percent by 2035, a highly ambitious target that requires substantial expansion in institutional capacity, faculty strength, and infrastructure. Public universities and government-funded institutions alone have not been able to absorb this scale of demand. As a result, private participation has become an essential pillar of India's higher education growth story.

The rise of private higher education accelerated after the economic liberalization reforms of the 1990s. As India integrated more deeply into the global economy, new sectors such as information technology, management, biotechnology, finance, communication, and design created demand for specialized talent. Private educational trusts, philanthropic groups, and corporate-backed institutions entered the sector to bridge the gap between student demand and public capacity constraints. Over time, many states enacted legislation enabling the establishment of private universities, while regulators gradually evolved frameworks for accreditation, quality assurance, and professional approvals. Today, private universities operate across disciplines such as engineering, law, management, media studies, liberal arts, medicine, architecture, data science, artificial intelligence, and interdisciplinary studies.

A major reason for the growth and popularity of private universities is their ability to innovate faster than traditional systems. Unlike many public institutions constrained by lengthy administrative procedures, private universities often demonstrate agility in launching new academic programmes aligned with emerging market needs. Courses in business analytics, fintech, digital marketing, game design, sustainability management, cybersecurity, and entrepreneurship have frequently appeared first in private institutions before wider adoption elsewhere. Many private universities also emphasize industry-linked curriculum design through advisory boards, internships, live projects, incubation centres, and corporate collaborations. This responsiveness has made them attractive to students seeking employment-oriented education in a competitive labour market.

Private universities have also invested significantly in physical and technological infrastructure. Modern campuses, smart classrooms, laboratories, student residences, learning management systems, hybrid learning platforms, and digital libraries are now common features in leading private institutions. Several have established international partnerships through dual-degree arrangements, faculty exchange, semester-abroad programmes, and collaborative research initiatives. Employability training—covering communication skills, coding, aptitude



development, placement readiness, and entrepreneurship mentoring—has become another defining feature of the sector. In many cases, these institutions have built strong brands around student experience, campus life, and professional outcomes.

However, the rapid expansion of private higher education has also exposed important governance challenges. In numerous cases, institutional authority remains concentrated in founder-centric or family-dominated management structures, limiting the autonomy of academic leaders and weakening collegial decision-making. Faculty participation in governance may be minimal, with strategic choices driven more by managerial priorities than academic deliberation. High faculty turnover, short-term contracts, and inconsistent research support can affect institutional continuity and quality. Questions have also been raised in some contexts regarding opaque fee structures, aggressive marketing, commercialized admissions practices, and uneven student grievance systems. Reputation can rise quickly through branding campaigns, but it can also decline rapidly when governance crises, leadership conflicts, or quality concerns become public.

Leadership instability is another recurring concern. Frequent changes in vice-chancellors, deans, registrars, or senior administrators can disrupt long-term planning and weaken accountability systems. In the absence of robust internal governance mechanisms, institutional identity may become dependent on charismatic individuals rather than durable structures. Such volatility is especially risky in a sector where trust, academic standards, and long-term reputation are central assets.

In contrast, the Indian Institutes of Technology have emerged as one of India's most respected higher education models, recognized nationally and internationally for academic excellence, meritocratic admissions, research capacity, and institutional credibility. Although IITs were established as public institutions under a unique historical and legislative framework, their success cannot be explained by public funding alone. Rather, it rests on governance principles such as operational autonomy, transparent selection processes, strong boards, peer-driven academic culture, rigorous recruitment, accountability, alumni engagement, and sustained commitment to excellence. These principles have helped the IIT system maintain legitimacy and competitiveness over decades.

This paper argues that private universities need not mechanically replicate IIT structures, since private institutions differ in mission, ownership models, student demographics, and financial realities. However, they can meaningfully adapt the governance values that enabled IIT sustainability. Greater academic autonomy combined with transparent accountability, empowered faculty bodies, professional leadership appointments, ethical admissions systems, evidence-based strategic planning, and a culture of merit can significantly strengthen private universities. As India moves toward becoming a global knowledge economy, the future of higher education will depend not merely on expansion, but on credible institutions governed with integrity, competence, and long term Vision

2. Problem Statement

Many private universities are operationally agile but institutionally fragile. Their growth may depend disproportionately on charismatic founders, branding cycles, or short-term market demand rather than durable governance systems.

A particularly sensitive issue concerns student intake governance. Where admissions processes lack transparency, merit filters, scholarship fairness, or auditable procedures, public confidence declines.

The central policy question therefore becomes:

How can private universities combine entrepreneurial flexibility with the credibility, fairness, and accountability associated with IIT governance models?



3. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the governance architecture of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).
2. To examine the student intake and admission mechanisms of IITs.
3. To identify recurring governance challenges in private universities.
4. To compare agility-oriented governance systems with accountability-oriented governance systems.
5. To propose transferable governance reforms for private higher education institutions.
6. To recommend hybrid governance models for future-ready universities.

4. Research Questions

1. Which governance systems explain the sustained credibility of IITs?
2. How does the IIT student selection process contribute to institutional legitimacy?
3. What governance weaknesses affect private universities?
4. Can private institutions combine agility with stronger accountability mechanisms?
5. Which IIT governance practices are realistically transferable to private universities?

5. Literature Review

5.1 Higher Education Governance

Governance in higher education encompasses the formal and informal mechanisms through which institutions are directed, regulated, and held accountable. It includes the distribution of authority among governing boards, administrators, faculty bodies, regulatory agencies, and other stakeholders. Key dimensions involve decision-making processes, leadership appointments, financial oversight, academic autonomy, strategic planning, and quality assurance. Governance structures significantly influence institutional effectiveness, innovation capacity, and public trust.

A foundational contribution to the study of higher education governance was made by Burton R. Clark, who introduced the “triangle of coordination.” This framework explains how higher education systems are shaped by the interaction of three forces: the state, the market, and the academic oligarchy (faculty and scholarly communities). According to Clark, no higher education system is governed solely by one actor; rather, institutional outcomes emerge from the balance among these competing centers of authority. In state-dominated systems, regulation and funding are centralized, whereas market-oriented systems emphasize competition, student demand, and private investment. Academic oligarchies, meanwhile, prioritize peer review, collegial decision-making, and disciplinary authority.

Later scholars expanded this analysis by arguing that governance has shifted globally from traditional bureaucratic control toward “new public management” models emphasizing efficiency, measurable outcomes, and managerial leadership. Guy Neave and Frans A. van Vught observed that governments increasingly steer institutions at a distance through performance indicators, accreditation systems, and funding incentives rather than direct control. This shift has increased institutional autonomy in some areas while simultaneously intensifying accountability pressures.

Good governance is also linked to institutional resilience. Research indicates that universities with transparent boards, professional leadership, participatory decision-making, and clear accountability frameworks tend to perform better in research productivity, student outcomes, and financial sustainability. Weak governance, by contrast, often produces politicization, administrative inefficiency, and erosion of academic standards.



5.2 Rise of Private Higher Education

The expansion of private higher education is one of the most significant global transformations in the modern university sector. Scholars such as Philip G. Altbach and Daniel C. Levy argue that private institutions typically grow where public systems are unable to meet rising demand for access, professional programs, or specialized training. As massification increases enrolment pressures, governments often rely on private providers to absorb unmet demand and diversify educational offerings.

Private institutions are frequently more agile than public universities. They can introduce industry-linked programs, modern management systems, international partnerships, and market-responsive curricula more quickly than heavily regulated public institutions. This flexibility has enabled many private universities to become competitive players in fields such as management, engineering, health sciences, and digital technologies.

However, the literature also highlights recurring governance challenges. Levy notes that many private institutions initially struggle with legitimacy, especially when ownership structures overlap excessively with management functions. Where boards lack independence or academic leaders are selected through patronage rather than merit, institutions may face reputational constraints. Concerns over commercialization, tuition dependence, faculty precarity, and quality assurance are also widely discussed.

Studies from Asia, Latin America, and Africa show that successful private universities are those that move beyond family-controlled or promoter-centric models toward professional governance systems, independent oversight boards, research culture, and transparent academic policies. Thus, the long-term sustainability of private higher education depends not only on entrepreneurial growth but also on institutional credibility.

5.3 Meritocratic Access and Reputation

A substantial body of global literature demonstrates that merit-based admissions systems are central to institutional prestige and long-term excellence. Selective and transparent admissions processes help universities attract highly capable students, which in turn improves classroom quality, graduation outcomes, alumni success, and employer confidence.

Research on elite institutions such as Harvard University, University of Oxford, National University of Singapore, and the Indian Institutes of Technology suggests that admissions credibility strongly contributes to reputation. Where selection is seen as rigorous, fair, and transparent, institutions gain symbolic capital that attracts stronger faculty, research grants, philanthropic donations, and high-performing applicants.

Pierre Bourdieu emphasized that educational institutions reproduce and distribute forms of social capital. Yet modern meritocratic systems can also enhance upward mobility when access is genuinely open and criteria are transparent. Conversely, opaque or patronage-driven admissions systems often damage institutional legitimacy, reduce public confidence, and discourage talented applicants.

Studies on rankings and employer perceptions also show that student input quality remains a strong predictor of institutional brand value. Universities that consistently recruit talented cohorts build powerful alumni networks and stronger placement outcomes, reinforcing a cycle of prestige.

5.4 Indian Context

The Indian higher education system has undergone rapid expansion through a combination of public universities, deemed universities, institutes of national importance, and a growing private sector. Governance reform has become a major policy concern because expansion has not always been matched by improvements in quality, autonomy, or accountability.

The University Grants Commission has repeatedly emphasized institutional autonomy, accreditation, transparency, and standards-based governance. Regulatory reforms encourage outcome-based education, faculty quality improvement, digitalization, and better financial management.



The National Education Policy 2020 represents a major turning point in higher education governance. It advocates multidisciplinary universities, reduced fragmentation, research intensity, flexible curricula, internationalization, and graded autonomy. The policy also proposes a light-but-tight regulatory architecture, separation of regulation and accreditation functions, and stronger governance through independent boards.

NEP 2020 specifically calls for professionally governed higher education institutions with empowered boards, merit-based leadership appointments, transparent systems, and academic freedom. This is especially relevant for private universities, many of which are transitioning from promoter-led models toward globally benchmarked governance frameworks.

In the Indian context, literature increasingly suggests that future institutional prestige will depend on four interconnected factors: transparent governance, meritocratic admissions, research productivity, and industry relevance. Universities that successfully combine autonomy with accountability are likely to emerge as national and global leaders.

5.5 Synthesis of Literature

The reviewed scholarship collectively indicates that higher education excellence is not determined solely by infrastructure or funding. Governance quality, legitimacy of admissions systems, academic autonomy, and institutional professionalism are equally decisive. Clark's coordination model explains the structural balance of power, while Altbach and Levy illuminate why private institutions expand and how they gain credibility. Global evidence on meritocracy demonstrates that fairness in access directly shapes reputation and talent concentration. In India, UGC reforms and NEP 2020 create a policy environment supportive of transparent, autonomous, and high-performing universities.

Therefore, the literature strongly supports the argument that private universities seeking long-term prestige must institutionalize strong governance, merit-based admissions, professional leadership, and accountability systems.

6. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in four complementary theoretical perspectives that explain how governance structures influence effectiveness, accountability, and long-term sustainability in higher education institutions. Universities operate as complex organizations where academic autonomy, managerial control, stakeholder expectations, and institutional legitimacy must be carefully balanced. Therefore, Agency Theory, Stewardship Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Institutional Theory provide an appropriate analytical lens for examining governance practices in universities.

6.1 Agency Theory

Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling developed Agency Theory to explain the relationship between principals and agents, where principals delegate authority to agents who may pursue self-interest rather than organizational goals. In the university context, governing boards, trustees, or public authorities act as principals, while vice-chancellors, presidents, administrators, and senior managers function as agents. Conflicts may arise when administrators prioritize personal power, prestige, inefficient spending, or short-term gains over institutional mission and educational quality. Governance mechanisms such as independent boards, audit committees, financial disclosure systems, performance reviews, internal controls, and transparent decision-making processes help reduce managerial opportunism and information asymmetry. Through monitoring and accountability, Agency Theory highlights the importance of oversight systems that align institutional behavior with academic objectives, financial responsibility, and public trust.

6.2 Stewardship Theory

Stewardship Theory offers a contrasting view by suggesting that managers and leaders are not always self-interested agents but can act as responsible stewards committed to organizational success. Scholars such as James H. Davis argue that when leaders are trusted and empowered, they are motivated by achievement, reputation, intrinsic satisfaction, and collective goals. In universities, professional academic leaders often



possess deep commitment to teaching, research, student welfare, and institutional reputation. Excessive bureaucratic control may weaken innovation and responsiveness. Therefore, governance systems should combine accountability with strategic autonomy, enabling vice-chancellors, deans, and academic councils to make timely decisions under clearly defined mandates. Stewardship Theory is particularly relevant in higher education where professional norms and ethical commitments shape leadership behavior.

6.3 Stakeholder Theory

R. Edward Freeman proposed that organizations must create value for all stakeholders rather than only for owners or funders. Universities serve a broad network of stakeholders including students, faculty, staff, alumni, employers, governments, accreditation bodies, donors, local communities, and society at large. Each group has legitimate interests regarding affordability, academic quality, employability, research output, inclusion, and social impact. Effective governance therefore requires participatory decision-making, consultation processes, grievance systems, and transparent communication. Stakeholder Theory is especially useful in higher education because universities carry both economic and public service responsibilities.

6.4 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory explains how organizations seek legitimacy by conforming to socially accepted norms, rules, and structures. Scholars such as Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell note that organizations adopt credible procedures, stable routines, quality assurance systems, and governance codes to gain trust and external recognition. Universities often respond to accreditation standards, ranking systems, regulatory requirements, and global best practices. Through such adaptations, institutions enhance legitimacy, stability, and competitiveness. In this study, Institutional Theory helps explain why universities formalize governance systems even beyond immediate efficiency needs.

7. Methodology

This study employs qualitative comparative analysis using:

- Acts and statutes
- Annual reports
- Public governance disclosures
- Admission procedures
- Ranking indicators
- Accreditation reports
- Secondary scholarly literature

The paper compares governance structures rather than measuring causal impact statistically.

8. IIT Governance Architecture

The governance architecture of the Indian Institutes of Technology represents one of the most structured and professionally managed institutional models in Indian higher education. Established under the Indian Institutes of Technology framework, IITs combine academic autonomy with public accountability. Their governance system is designed to ensure strategic direction, transparent leadership, financial discipline, and sustained academic excellence. Unlike privately controlled institutions, IITs function through statutory bodies, committee-based decision-making, and measurable performance standards.



8.1 Board of Governors

Each IIT is headed by a Board of Governors, the apex governing authority responsible for institutional strategy and long-term oversight. The Board typically includes representatives from government, academia, industry, alumni, and distinguished public figures. It supervises major appointments, approves institutional policies, sanctions infrastructure expansion, reviews annual reports, and monitors long-range development plans. The Board also plays a central role in balancing autonomy with accountability by ensuring that institutional decisions align with national educational priorities and the mission of excellence in teaching, research, and innovation. Through independent governance, the Board helps maintain continuity and strategic stability.

8.2 Senate

The Senate is the principal academic authority within each IIT. It governs all academic matters including curriculum design, examinations, degree regulations, credit systems, academic standards, admissions policies, student progression, and research rules. Composed largely of senior faculty members and academic administrators, the Senate ensures that academic decisions remain in the hands of subject experts rather than external administrators. It regularly reviews emerging disciplines, interdisciplinary programs, research ethics, and quality benchmarks. This structure protects academic freedom while ensuring consistency and rigor across departments and programmes.

8.3 Finance Committee

Financial governance in IITs is managed through structured committees, especially the Finance Committee. This body reviews annual budgets, government grants, audited statements, capital expenditure proposals, procurement plans, infrastructure funding, and endowment utilization. It ensures that public funds are used efficiently and transparently while supporting expansion in laboratories, hostels, research centers, and digital infrastructure. Regular audits and financial controls strengthen credibility and reduce administrative risk.

8.4 Director Selection

Leadership appointments in IITs follow formal search-cum-selection processes rather than promoter discretion or hereditary control. Directors are selected through nationally recognized procedures involving expert committees, eligibility screening, and merit-based evaluation. Candidates are assessed on academic distinction, administrative competence, research leadership, and institutional vision. This process promotes professionalism, neutrality, and leadership legitimacy.

8.5 Performance Accountability

IITs operate under continuous performance accountability and are regularly judged through measurable outcomes. These include admission competitiveness through Joint Entrance Examination selectivity, research publications, patents, industry collaboration, placement outcomes, start-up creation, global and national rankings, alumni achievements, and societal impact. Such metrics create pressure for continuous improvement and reinforce a results-oriented governance culture that sustains the IIT brand nationally and internationally.

9. Student Intake Mechanism in IITs: A Governance Lesson

The student intake mechanism followed by the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) is widely regarded as one of the most credible and transparent admission systems in higher education. It demonstrates how structured governance in admissions can create institutional trust, academic quality, and strong labour market reputation. The IIT model offers valuable lessons not only for public institutions but also for private universities seeking long-term legitimacy and excellence.



9.1 National Standardized Entry System

Admission to undergraduate engineering programmes in IITs takes place through a nationally standardized and competitive process consisting of three major stages: the Joint Entrance Examination Main (JEE Main), the Joint Entrance Examination Advanced (JEE Advanced), and the Joint Seat Allocation Authority (JoSAA). JEE Main serves as the preliminary qualifying examination, while JEE Advanced is the gateway to IIT admission. JoSAA conducts centralized counselling and seat allocation across participating institutions. This multi-agency structure reduces arbitrary decision-making and ensures nationwide uniformity.

9.2 Multi-Layer Screening

The IIT admission system follows a rigorous multi-layer screening mechanism. Lakhs of students appear for JEE Main, but only the top-performing candidates qualify for JEE Advanced. This second-stage examination tests higher-order analytical and problem-solving abilities. Such layered filtering ensures that admitted students have demonstrated both consistency and excellence under standardized conditions.

9.3 Centralized Seat Allocation

Once results are declared, seats are allocated through rank-based centralized counselling managed by JoSAA. Candidates fill choices, ranks determine eligibility, and allotments are generated through transparent software-based systems. Because institutions do not individually control admissions, opportunities for discretion, favoritism, or opaque decision-making are minimized. This strengthens fairness and public confidence.

9.4 Reservation with Merit Framework

The IIT system also integrates constitutionally mandated reservation policies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, Economically Weaker Sections, and Persons with Disabilities. At the same time, entry remains highly competitive within each category. This creates a balance between social justice and meritocratic standards, reflecting the Indian constitutional model of inclusive excellence.

9.5 Publicly Available Data

Another major strength is transparency through public disclosure. Cut-offs, seat matrices, counselling rounds, opening and closing ranks, category-wise data, and vacancy positions are regularly published online. This allows students, parents, policymakers, and researchers to independently verify the process and understand trends.

9.6 Institutional Impact

Because IIT admissions are transparent, selective, and nationally competitive, IIT degrees carry high signalling value in labour markets. Employers interpret IIT admission itself as evidence of discipline, intelligence, and resilience. Thus, admissions governance directly contributes to institutional prestige.

Lessons for Private Universities

Private universities need not replicate the IIT model entirely, but they can adopt its governance principles. These include transparent admission criteria, public seat matrices, entrance tests combined with aptitude assessments and interviews, published merit lists and waitlists, scholarship disclosure, anti-capitation safeguards, and digital audit trails. In essence, admissions governance is reputation governance. Institutions that earn trust at the point of entry build credibility for decades.

10. Governance Challenges in Private Universities

Private universities have become an important pillar of higher education by expanding access, introducing new programmes, and responding quickly to market demand. In many countries, including India, they play a major role in meeting the growing aspirations of students. However, rapid expansion has also created significant governance challenges. Governance determines whether an institution functions as a genuine academic



community or merely as a commercial enterprise. Strong governance promotes quality, accountability, and long-term credibility, while weak governance can damage institutional reputation and student outcomes.

10.1 Founder Concentration

One of the most common challenges in private universities is founder concentration. Many institutions are established by individuals, trusts, or corporate groups whose promoters continue to dominate key decisions. While founders often provide vision and capital, excessive control can weaken institutional autonomy. Academic appointments, programme approvals, fee structures, and strategic priorities may depend more on promoter preferences than on professional processes. When governance becomes personality-driven, the institution may struggle to build durable systems.

10.2 Symbolic Academic Councils

Most universities formally establish bodies such as Boards of Management, Academic Councils, Finance Committees, and Boards of Studies. However, in some cases these committees function only symbolically. Meetings may be infrequent, agendas predetermined, and decisions merely ratified rather than debated. When statutory bodies lack real authority, academic governance becomes superficial. Curriculum reforms, faculty promotions, examination standards, and policy oversight require meaningful participation from qualified academics, not ceremonial structures.

10.3 Opaque Finance

Financial transparency is another major concern. Students and parents often pay substantial tuition fees, yet fee utilization may remain unclear. Questions may arise regarding how much revenue is invested in laboratories, libraries, faculty salaries, student support, research, and infrastructure. Reserve funds may be accumulated without public explanation, or spending priorities may not align with academic needs. Opaque finance weakens trust among stakeholders and may invite regulatory scrutiny. Sound governance requires audited accounts, transparent budgeting, and responsible reinvestment in educational quality.

10.4 Leadership Instability

Frequent turnover among vice-chancellors, registrars, deans, and senior administrators can disrupt continuity. Universities require stable leadership to implement long-term strategies, accreditation plans, research culture, and academic reforms. If leadership changes repeatedly due to internal conflicts, promoter interference, or unclear authority structures, institutional momentum is lost. Faculty morale may decline, and students may experience policy inconsistency. Strong succession planning and clearly defined governance roles are essential for continuity.

10.5 Admission Commercialization

Another challenge is the commercialization of admissions. In highly competitive markets, pressure to fill seats may override quality thresholds. Institutions may lower entry standards, overexpand programmes, or prioritize revenue generation above student preparedness. This can create classrooms with uneven academic readiness and weaken learning outcomes. Ethical admissions systems must balance access with standards through transparent criteria, merit processes, and student support mechanisms.

10.6 Branding Over Scholarship

Many private universities invest heavily in advertising, rankings promotion, celebrity events, and visual branding. While visibility is important, problems arise when marketing expenditure exceeds investment in faculty development, research grants, laboratories, and libraries. Reputation built mainly through branding is fragile, whereas reputation built through scholarship is sustainable. Universities ultimately gain legitimacy through teaching quality, research output, graduate success, and intellectual contribution.



Private universities can be dynamic and innovative institutions, but their success depends on governance maturity. Reducing founder concentration, empowering academic councils, ensuring financial transparency, stabilizing leadership, protecting admission integrity, and prioritizing scholarship over marketing are essential reforms. Institutions that address these governance challenges can achieve both commercial sustainability and academic excellence.

11. Comparative Case Studies: Governance Models in Higher Education

Higher education institutions differ in age, mission, ownership, and academic orientation, yet successful universities often share one common feature: effective governance. Governance influences how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, how faculty participate, and how institutions respond to change. A comparative study of selected Indian institutions—public and private—shows that strong governance systems can produce excellence, innovation, and global credibility. The following cases offer useful lessons for emerging universities.

Case 1: IIT Bombay

Indian Institute of Technology Bombay is among India's most respected engineering institutions and has built a strong reputation for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Established in 1958, it benefits from a mature governance structure involving a Board of Governors, academic senate, faculty committees, and transparent administrative systems. The institution has developed advanced laboratories, interdisciplinary centres, and one of India's leading start-up ecosystems through initiatives such as SINE (Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship). Its global alumni network contributes mentorship, philanthropy, and industry partnerships.

Lesson: Robust systems enable innovation. When governance is stable and processes are credible, institutions can focus on creativity, research, and enterprise rather than internal uncertainty.

Case 2: IIT Madras

Indian Institute of Technology Madras has emerged as a national leader in academic excellence, digital education, and entrepreneurship. Founded in 1959, it combines strong faculty governance with administrative efficiency. Faculty members play a significant role in curriculum design, academic standards, and research planning. At the same time, the institute has demonstrated agility by launching large-scale online learning initiatives and supporting start-ups through the IIT Madras Research Park and incubation ecosystem.

Its ability to balance collegial decision-making with rapid execution is a major governance strength.

Lesson: Academic participation and agility can coexist. Inclusive governance does not have to slow innovation when systems are well designed.

Case 3: IIT Hyderabad

Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad is a younger IIT established in 2008, yet it has gained rapid visibility in research, design, AI, and international collaboration. Despite its relatively recent origin, the institution has built legitimacy through transparent governance, strategic recruitment, global partnerships, and forward-looking academic planning. It demonstrates that institutional reputation need not depend only on age or legacy.

The university has also invested early in modern campus infrastructure and interdisciplinary programmes.

Lesson: Governance legitimacy can be built early. New institutions that establish credibility from the beginning can rise quickly.

Case 4: Ashoka University

Ashoka University represents a distinctive private university model centered on liberal arts education, philanthropy, and values-based governance. Established through collective philanthropic support, it emphasizes



independent boards, academic freedom, interdisciplinary learning, and merit-based admissions with financial aid. Its governance model has helped build trust among students, faculty, and society.

The institution has also expanded the conversation around liberal arts and social sciences in India.

Lesson: Values-led boards improve trust. Governance rooted in mission and public purpose strengthens legitimacy.

Case 5: O.P. Jindal Global University

O.P. Jindal Global University has become known for internationalization, multidisciplinary expansion, and professional management systems. It has invested in global faculty recruitment, international partnerships, accreditation, and structured administrative processes. As it scaled across law, business, public policy, and other disciplines, managerial professionalism supported growth without losing strategic direction.

Lesson: Governance professionalism supports scale. Expanding institutions need systems, not just ambition.

These case studies show that there is no single model of success. Public institutions like the IITs and private universities such as Ashoka and Jindal follow different paths, yet all demonstrate that governance quality shapes academic outcomes. Whether through faculty participation, philanthropy, professional management, or transparent systems, strong governance remains the foundation of institutional excellence.

12. Comparative Governance Matrix

Governance architecture plays a decisive role in determining the quality, credibility, and sustainability of universities. Across higher education systems, institutions differ widely in ownership structures, academic decision-making processes, financial accountability, leadership selection, admissions frameworks, strategic planning, and innovation capacity. A comparative governance analysis between weak private university models and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) highlights the importance of institutional design. It also suggests the need for a recommended hybrid model that combines autonomy, accountability, and adaptability.

In many weak private university models, ownership is concentrated in the hands of promoters or founding groups. Decision-making is often centralized, with limited checks and balances. By contrast, IITs operate under statutory public governance structures established through Acts of Parliament, with Boards of Governors, senates, and regulatory oversight. A recommended hybrid model would replace concentrated control with independent governing boards that include academics, industry leaders, alumni, and public-interest members. Such boards can preserve entrepreneurial flexibility while ensuring institutional accountability.

Academic governance reveals another important contrast. Weak private institutions often remain management-led, where administrative leadership controls curriculum, appointments, and academic priorities. IITs follow senate-led systems in which faculty play a central role in curriculum reform, research policy, examinations, and standards. A stronger future-oriented model would adopt shared governance, where professional management and academic bodies collaborate, balancing efficiency with scholarly autonomy.

Financial governance also distinguishes high-performing institutions. In weaker models, fee utilization, reserves, and expenditure priorities may remain opaque. IITs are subject to audited scrutiny, public accountability, and structured budgeting processes. The recommended hybrid approach is a public financial dashboard that discloses major indicators such as tuition revenue, scholarships, research spending, infrastructure investment, and audited statements. Transparency builds trust among students, regulators, and society.

Leadership selection is equally significant. Some weak private universities rely on internal or promoter-driven appointments. IITs generally use search committees and formal selection processes for directors and senior leaders. A hybrid system should combine independent search committees with final approval by empowered governing boards, ensuring merit-based and strategic appointments.



Admissions governance strongly affects institutional reputation. Sales-driven enrolment models prioritize seat filling over academic standards, while IIT admissions remain merit-driven through nationally competitive examinations. The recommended model is transparent merit with inclusion, combining clear criteria, aptitude assessment, scholarships, and diversity commitments.

Strategic planning in weaker systems is often short-term and reactive. IITs typically operate with long-term institutional goals aligned to national priorities. A hybrid model should adopt rolling five-year strategic plans reviewed annually. This preserves continuity while enabling flexibility.

Finally, innovation in weaker institutions may be ad hoc and personality-dependent. IITs increasingly use structured innovation ecosystems through incubators, research parks, and technology transfer offices. The recommended approach is a sandbox model, where universities create controlled spaces for piloting new programmes, technologies, and governance reforms before full implementation.

In conclusion, the comparative governance matrix demonstrates that institutional success depends not merely on ownership type but on governance quality. A hybrid model drawing from IIT strengths and private-sector agility offers the most promising pathway for future universities.

. 13. Proposed Hybrid Governance Model

The future of higher education requires governance systems that combine academic integrity, professional management, transparency, and innovation. Traditional public models often provide legitimacy and procedural strength, while private models may offer speed, flexibility, and entrepreneurial energy. However, neither model is sufficient on its own. A proposed hybrid governance model seeks to combine the best features of both systems to create universities that are credible, efficient, inclusive, and globally competitive. This framework is built around seven core pillars.

Pillar 1: Independent Governing Board

The foundation of the hybrid model is an independent governing board. At least 50 percent of board members should be external to the institution and selected for expertise in academia, law, finance, public policy, and industry. Such diversity reduces concentration of power and improves strategic decision-making. Independent boards can provide oversight, long-term vision, and institutional continuity while protecting the university from excessive internal or promoter influence.

Pillar 2: Empowered Academic Senate

Academic matters should remain under the authority of an empowered academic senate led primarily by faculty members. This body should oversee curriculum design, academic standards, examination systems, research policy, and quality assurance. Faculty participation is essential because academic excellence depends on scholarly judgment rather than purely managerial priorities. A senate-led structure also promotes collegiality, intellectual freedom, and institutional ownership among faculty.

Pillar 3: Transparent Admissions Governance

Admissions are the gateway to institutional reputation. Therefore, governance in this area must be transparent and fair. Universities should publicly disclose admission criteria, eligibility standards, entrance procedures, scholarship opportunities, and waitlist rules. Standardized and documented processes reduce discretion and build trust. Institutions should also publish diversity metrics related to gender, geography, socio-economic background, and inclusion goals. Transparent admissions strengthen both legitimacy and student quality.

Pillar 4: Transparent Finance Governance

Financial accountability is equally critical. Universities should publish annual audited summaries and clear fee-utilization disclosures showing how student payments are invested in teaching, laboratories, libraries, research, student welfare, and infrastructure. Transparent finance governance reassures students, parents, regulators, and



donors that resources are being used responsibly. It also encourages efficient planning and discourages misallocation of funds.

Pillar 5: Meritocratic Leadership Selection

Leadership quality strongly influences institutional culture. Vice-chancellors, registrars, deans, and senior administrators should be selected through structured search committees rather than informal nomination systems. Search committees should define role criteria, evaluate candidates objectively, and recommend appointments based on merit, vision, integrity, and administrative capability. Meritocratic selection creates confidence among stakeholders and supports long-term institutional stability.

Pillar 6: Data-Based Accountability

Modern universities should be governed through measurable outcomes rather than assumptions. Annual public dashboards should include metrics such as placements, graduate outcomes, student retention, research output, faculty strength, student satisfaction, diversity indicators, and accreditation performance. Data-based accountability enables evidence-driven reforms and allows stakeholders to assess institutional progress objectively.

Pillar 7: Innovation Sandbox

Universities must remain adaptive in a rapidly changing world. An innovation sandbox allows institutions to test new programmes, digital platforms, interdisciplinary models, and policy reforms within a controlled, time-bound review framework. Pilot projects can be evaluated before wider implementation, reducing risk while encouraging experimentation.

Conclusion

The proposed hybrid governance model combines accountability with autonomy, academic values with managerial efficiency, and stability with innovation. By institutionalizing independent oversight, faculty authority, transparent processes, merit-based leadership, measurable outcomes, and controlled experimentation, universities can build sustainable excellence. This model offers a practical pathway for higher education institutions seeking credibility and competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century

14. Policy Implications

The governance quality of universities has become a central policy concern in contemporary higher education. As private institutions expand in size, influence, and enrolment share, governments and regulators must ensure that growth is matched by accountability, transparency, and academic integrity. Sound policy frameworks can create incentives for responsible governance while protecting students and public trust. The following policy implications emerge from comparative analysis of higher education governance systems.

1. State Private University Acts Should Mandate Independent Boards

Many private universities are established through State Private University Acts. These laws should move beyond basic licensing provisions and require independent governing boards as a statutory norm. Boards should include external members with expertise in academia, law, finance, industry, and public policy. Independent boards reduce excessive promoter concentration, improve oversight, and strengthen strategic continuity. Mandatory board independence would align private universities with modern governance standards followed globally.

2. Regulators Should Require Admissions Disclosures

Admissions processes directly affect fairness, institutional reputation, and student quality. Regulators should require all universities to publicly disclose admission criteria, eligibility norms, entrance procedures, scholarship policies, waitlist rules, refund policies, and diversity statistics. Such disclosures reduce information asymmetry between institutions and applicants. Transparent admissions systems also discourage arbitrary practices, hidden



preferences, or commercialization of enrolment decisions. Students and families deserve clear and comparable information before making high-stakes choices.

3. Accreditation Systems Should Assess Governance Quality

Accreditation frameworks often focus on infrastructure, faculty numbers, curriculum, and outcomes. While these are important, governance quality should receive greater weight in assessment systems. Accrediting agencies should examine board functioning, academic senate effectiveness, financial controls, conflict-of-interest safeguards, leadership appointment processes, and stakeholder grievance mechanisms. Universities with stronger governance are more likely to sustain quality over time. Therefore, governance should be treated as a core quality indicator rather than a peripheral issue.

4. Fee Transparency Norms Should Improve

Rising tuition fees have made affordability and accountability major policy concerns. Universities should be required to disclose how fee income is utilized across teaching, research, infrastructure, student services, scholarships, and reserves. Annual audited summaries should be publicly accessible in clear formats. Fee transparency improves trust among students and parents while encouraging institutions to justify pricing through demonstrated educational value. It can also support evidence-based policy on affordability and financial aid.

5. Trustee and Board Training Should Be Institutionalized

Many trustees and board members enter university governance with strong business or philanthropic experience but limited understanding of higher education regulation, academic culture, and fiduciary responsibilities. Structured orientation and periodic governance training should therefore be institutionalized. Training programmes can cover ethics, strategic planning, academic freedom, financial oversight, risk management, and quality assurance. Well-prepared boards make better decisions and are less likely to interfere in operational or academic matters.

Policy reform in higher education must increasingly focus on governance capacity. Independent boards, transparent admissions, governance-based accreditation, fee accountability, and trained trustees can significantly improve institutional performance. As private universities become major actors in national education systems, governance reform is no longer optional—it is essential for legitimacy, quality, and public confidence.

15. Implications for University Leaders

The contemporary higher education environment is becoming increasingly competitive, transparent, and performance-driven. Universities are no longer judged only by buildings, enrolment numbers, or promotional visibility. Instead, students, parents, regulators, employers, and society evaluate institutions through governance quality, academic credibility, graduate outcomes, and ethical conduct. This shift carries important implications for university leaders, especially founders, trustees, vice-chancellors, and senior administrators.

One of the most significant lessons is that founders need not surrender their vision; rather, they must institutionalize it. Many successful universities begin with the passion, philanthropy, or entrepreneurial drive of visionary founders. However, personal vision alone cannot sustain a complex institution over decades. Long-term success requires translating that vision into systems, policies, values, and structures that can survive leadership transitions. Institutions become stronger when they are governed by principles rather than personalities.

Transparent Systems as a Source of Legitimacy

Leadership legitimacy increasingly depends on transparent systems. Universities must demonstrate fairness in admissions, consistency in academic processes, clarity in financial management, and accountability in decision-making. Transparent governance reduces suspicion, builds trust, and attracts stronger students and faculty.



Leaders who rely only on authority or branding may achieve short-term visibility, but institutions with clear systems earn durable respect.

Academic Credibility as Strategic Capital

University leaders must recognize that academic credibility is their most valuable asset. Rankings campaigns, marketing events, and public relations cannot substitute for strong faculty, rigorous curriculum, meaningful research, and student learning outcomes. Leaders should therefore prioritize faculty recruitment, academic freedom, research support, library resources, laboratories, and quality assurance systems. Institutions known for scholarship gain stronger reputations in the long run than those known only for advertising.

Stable Governance and Continuity

Frequent leadership changes, internal conflicts, or unclear reporting structures weaken universities. Stable governance enables continuity in strategic planning, accreditation preparation, campus development, and research growth. Leaders should build clear delegation systems, succession planning mechanisms, and cooperative relationships between boards, management, and academic bodies. Stability does not mean rigidity; it means predictable and professional institutional functioning.

Fair Admissions and Institutional Reputation

Admissions are often the first direct interaction between the university and society. If admissions are perceived as opaque, commercialized, or inconsistent, trust declines immediately. Leaders must therefore ensure fair, merit-based, and transparent admissions systems supported by scholarships, documented criteria, and ethical communication. High-quality intake strengthens classroom performance, graduate outcomes, and employer confidence.

Trustworthy Finance and Stakeholder Confidence

Students and families increasingly expect accountability for the fees they pay. University leaders should embrace financial transparency by disclosing audited summaries, scholarship spending, infrastructure investments, and student service allocations. Trustworthy finance not only satisfies stakeholders but also improves internal discipline and strategic resource use.

The role of university leadership is evolving from command-and-control administration to stewardship of institutional trust. Founders and senior leaders who embed their vision into transparent systems, protect academic credibility, maintain governance stability, ensure fair admissions, and uphold trustworthy finance will build universities that endure. In the modern era, legitimacy is earned less through authority and more through governance excellence.

16. Implications for Students and Society

The expansion of higher education has given students more choices than ever before. Universities now compete not only on academic programmes but also on reputation, employability outcomes, affordability, and trustworthiness. As a result, students and society increasingly evaluate institutions through the lens of governance quality. Governance is no longer an internal administrative matter; it has become a public issue that directly affects educational value and social confidence.

Today's students are more informed and selective when choosing universities. They increasingly assess **degree credibility**, asking whether the qualification will be respected by employers, professional bodies, and other academic institutions. A degree from a university with strong governance carries greater value because it signals



quality standards, transparent processes, and institutional reliability. Where governance is weak, doubts may arise about academic rigour and credibility.

Another major concern is **placement quality**. Students invest substantial time and financial resources in higher education, expecting meaningful career opportunities. They therefore examine placement records, employer reputation, internship support, and alumni outcomes. Good governance supports employability by ensuring updated curricula, industry engagement, skill development systems, and honest reporting of placement data. Institutions with weak governance may exaggerate outcomes or fail to prepare students adequately.

Admission fairness has also become increasingly important. Students and families expect clear eligibility criteria, merit-based selection, transparent counselling systems, and equal opportunity. If admissions appear arbitrary, commercialized, or influenced by hidden discretion, trust declines immediately. Fair admissions not only protect applicants but also improve classroom quality by ensuring that selection standards are credible.

Students also pay close attention to **fee transparency**. Rising tuition costs have made families more sensitive to how fees are structured and utilized. They want clarity regarding tuition, hostel charges, examination fees, scholarships, refunds, and additional costs. Good governance requires clear disclosure and responsible financial practices. Transparent fee systems reduce conflict and help families make informed decisions.

Another key expectation is **grievance redressal**. Students need accessible mechanisms to resolve concerns related to academics, harassment, discrimination, examinations, housing, or administration. Effective grievance systems reflect institutional maturity and respect for student rights. When complaints are ignored or handled arbitrarily, confidence in the university declines sharply.

Finally, students and society evaluate the **long-term reputation** of institutions. Reputation is not built through advertising alone; it emerges from years of consistent governance, graduate success, research output, ethical conduct, and stakeholder trust. Families increasingly recognize that institutional reputation influences future opportunities.

Good governance therefore serves as a protective framework for students. It shields them from arbitrary decisions, hidden practices, unstable leadership, misleading claims, and poor accountability. For society, well-governed universities produce competent graduates, support innovation, uphold fairness, and strengthen social mobility.

In conclusion, governance quality has become central to educational choice and public trust. Students seek not only a degree but a dependable institution. Universities that prioritize transparency, fairness, accountability, and student welfare will earn confidence in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

17. Limitations

This paper relies primarily on secondary sources and interpretive comparison. Future studies may incorporate interviews, surveys, and governance datasets.

18. Future Research Directions

1. Governance quality and rankings correlation
2. Student perceptions of admissions fairness
3. India–Singapore–UK governance comparisons
4. Governance and employability outcomes



19. Conclusion

The future trajectory of Indian higher education will be shaped in substantial measure by the rise and maturation of private universities. Their contributions in expanding access, mobilizing capital, introducing new disciplines, responding quickly to labour-market demand, and building globally visible brands are significant national assets. In a country with vast demographic aspirations and growing demand for quality education, private institutions will remain indispensable partners in the higher education ecosystem. Yet expansion without governance maturity carries serious risks. Agility without accountability can generate short-term growth, but it cannot sustain long-term legitimacy.

The central lesson from the IIT model is often misunderstood. Its success does not rest primarily on bureaucracy or state ownership, but on disciplined autonomy. The IIT system demonstrates that institutions can be innovative, globally competitive, and academically dynamic when autonomy is anchored in transparent rules, meritocratic processes, credible oversight, and professional leadership. Governance, therefore, should not be viewed as a constraint on excellence; it is the enabling architecture of excellence.

Perhaps the most powerful institutional lesson lies in student intake systems. IITs built public trust not only through research productivity and faculty distinction, but through admissions processes that are nationally competitive, transparent, auditable, and socially respected. In higher education, the legitimacy of entry strongly influences the legitimacy of the degree. Where admissions are trusted, academic reputation deepens. Where admissions are opaque, institutional credibility weakens regardless of infrastructure or marketing strength.

Private universities need not replicate IIT structures mechanically. Institutional diversity is both necessary and desirable. However, they must adopt the core principles that make high-performing universities durable: governing boards that genuinely govern, academic senates that deliberate with authority, admissions systems that inspire confidence, financial systems that communicate trust, and leadership appointments based on competence rather than proximity or patronage. These are not procedural luxuries; they are strategic necessities.

India now stands at an inflection point. The next generation of globally respected universities may not emerge solely from legacy public institutions or from capital-rich private campuses, but from institutions that successfully combine entrepreneurial energy with institutional discipline, managerial efficiency with academic freedom, and innovation with accountability. Those universities will attract talent, earn stakeholder confidence, and contribute meaningfully to national development and global knowledge production.

The real transformation before Indian higher education is therefore not public versus private, nor tradition versus disruption. It is the movement from personality-driven expansion to system-driven excellence, from opacity to trust, and from agility alone to accountable autonomy. That is the decisive shift—from agility to accountability—and it will define the universities that lead India in the decades ahead.

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