

UNDERSTANDING FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Established trends in higher education governance, including shared governance, institutional autonomy and public accountability, have started to have a long-term impact on the relationship between the state and the institution in the context of post-Soviet countries. Indeed, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, we have observed an eclectic mixture of Western educational discourses geared and adapted to post-Soviet realities. Gradual changes in education governance mechanisms and governing structures of academic institutions in the fledgling countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have been long predicted by various scholars (Anderson & Heyneman, 2005; Altbach, 2007; Heyneman, 2010; McLendon, 2004; Froumin & Salmi, 2007).

Introduction

Many academic institutions in the CIS countries have initiated 'institutional restructuring' measures and reforms prompted by governments coupled with political changes permeated with market ideologies since the 1990s. Higher education institutions in Kazakhstan have been no exception. While there is extensive literature on educational transformations in post-Soviet transitional economies, little scholarly attention has been placed on faculty involvement in shared governance.

In an effort to shed light on faculty participation in institutional governance, not only from the Central Asian perspective but also from the perspective of globalised higher education systems, this article examines faculty perceptions of the current state of higher education governance in Kazakhstan by utilising both quantitative and qualitative data. The study reported on here involved the analysis of statistical, quantitative results from a sample, followed by in-depth interviews to probe and explore these results. The findings discussed here constitute part of a longitudinal study on the higher education governance and management in Kazakhstan (being conducted by the Centre for Educational Policy, Nazarbayev University). The study addresses six variables: first, faculty perceptions of the governance reforms in the higher education sector; second, faculty perceptions of the state of governance at their home institutions; third, faculty perceptions of the management of research in the system of higher education; fourth, faculty perceptions of their personal influence in their institutions; fifth, faculty perceptions of working conditions at their institutions; and sixth, faculty perceptions of the influence exercised by the administrators on them. We believe this set of variables represents the key dimensions of the faculty involvement in governance.

Concerns about the issue of governance, and more specifically, of which governing body in the higher education sector is accountable for managerial decisions, date back to the founding of the American Association of University Professors in 1915. More profoundly, the issue was articulated with the appearance of the 1966 "Statement on Government in Colleges and Universities." This document conceptualised two primary principles. The first calls for the sharing of authority and decision-making participation in all important areas of action in the university. The second principle states that the difference in the weight of

each voice, from one point to the next, should be determined by the responsibility of each constituency for the particular matter at hand (as cited in Jones, 2011, p. 119).

Birnbaum points out that "faculty and administrators fill different roles, encounter and are influenced by different aspects of the environment, and have different backgrounds" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 7). The global tendency to maintain public accountability has led senior Leaders to manage their institutions following an essentially bureaucratic paradigm. As Birnbaum goes on to note, "the increasing numbers and importance of managers at all levels have led to the administered university" (Birnbaum, 1988, p.7). As higher education institutions are complex in their structural nature, the governance issue has been very controversial. Discussing the issue on a global scale, Altbach (2006, p. 13) is adamant that "governance systems are being strained, sometimes to the breaking point. To meet the demands for accountability, universities are becoming 'managerialized', with professional administrators gaining increasing control. The traditional power of the professoriate is being weakened."

In Western educational discourse, the 'golden age' compact of shared governance has experienced a significant decline (Cummings, Locke & Fisher, 2011). As Musselin states, "higher education institutions are more and more involved in the management of their faculty staff, developing new tools and making decisions about position creations, suppression or transformations: their intervention in faculty careers is more and more frequent". Performance reporting and assessment cements a "stronger link between each academic and his/her institution. Academic self-regulation is partly preserved but overall faculty autonomy is reduced and "they must cope with external' constraints" (2005, pp. 143-146).

Many administration theorists note a divide between university administrators and faculty. As Rourke and Brooks state (1964, p. 180), "in a context in which faculty members are less privileged and in which they often feel oppressed beneath the weight of administrative authority, the innovations brought by the new devices of management may widen the gulf between faculty and administration and thus intensify the antagonism, latent and overt, which has traditionally existed between the administrative and the academic cultures" (as cited in Birnbaum, 1988, p. 7). In fact, the administration has been considered by the faculty as more isolated from the essential academic matters and problems important to the institution. Simultaneously, the faculty was considered by the administration as "self-interested, indifferent with controlling expenses, or unwilling to react to legitimate requests for accountability" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 7).

In the context of higher education governance in Kazakhstan, one should also bear in mind that neither the administrators nor the faculty have had ample opportunity to professionalise as educational managers, in contrast with the 50 years of the study of higher education management and governance in the US academic tradition. As Anderson and Heyneman state, "nowhere in the former Soviet Union was the education sector managed by professionals. Today, the demands for skills and managerial training and background are unprecedented. The shift which one can expect over the next ten years will include an increased emphasis on the empirical comparisons of educational efficiency in Central Asia with that of other parts of the world" (2005, p. 377).

Sample and Data Collection

In order to examine faculty perceptions of the current state of higher education governance in Kazakhstan, we surveyed 303 professors at 28 higher education institutions in 10 different cities of the country. The professors came from both public and private institutions. Along with the survey, we held 50 face-to-face interviews with faculty members, university administrators and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science. The selection process for individuals was based on random sampling so that each individual in the population had an equal opportunity of being selected (Creswell, 2003, p. 156). Though the sample was probabilistic, we took into account academic degrees, teaching experience and age of the individuals.

It would be short-sighted to analyse faculty perceptions of the current state of higher education governance in Kazakhstan without taking into consideration the findings of similar research done on the global scale. Up to the present, the best and most telling research has been the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) project which went to the field in 2007 in 18 countries - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States. According to the CAP findings, the surveyed faculty in all the involved countries believe they are most influential in shaping policies at the departmental level and that they have very little influence at the institutional level. Professors in most countries believe they are the primary decision makers on most academic matters, though there is an interesting variation by country in what is considered academic and what is not. For example, approving a new academic program is thought to be an academic decision in Japan and in much of Europe but a managerial decision in the United States, Korea, and several emerging countries (Cummings et al., 2011, p. 7).

It is worth noting that the key variables used in our survey, faculty perceptions of shared governance, faculty perceptions of facilities and faculty perceptions of decision-making authority have common features with the dependent variables used in the Changing Academic Profession project.

Analysis and Results

It is understood that a substantial full-time cadre of university teachers and researchers can maintain the essential teaching, research, and governance functions of any university. The faculty survey asked professors to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented governance reforms in the higher education system, the state of the governance at their home institutions as well as management mechanisms of the research on a 5-point scale. Figure 1 provides mean scores of a composite scale consisting of a series of questions about satisfaction with higher education governance in Kazakhstan. The scale is scored from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive). Most faculty members gave low evaluation scores of the governance in the whole of the higher education sector. The management conditions for the faculty's engagement with research were also evaluated on a very low scale. The governance at the faculty members' home institutions was evaluated higher to some extent than the other 2 dimensions.

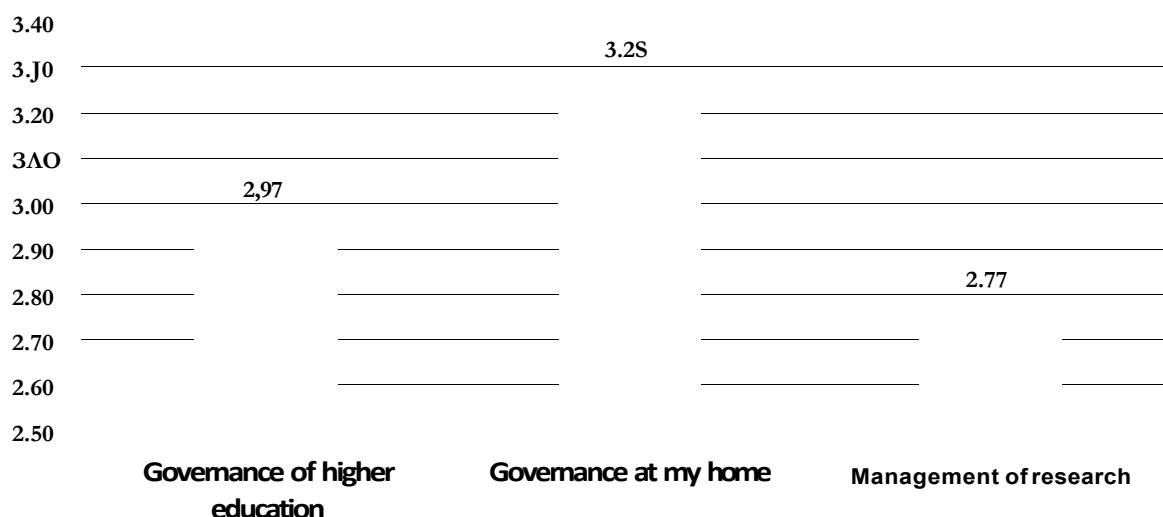


Figure 1: Percentage of faculty members evaluating the effectiveness of the higher education governance in Kazakhstan on a 5-point scale.

Interestingly, faculty members state that they do have their say on the departmental level as they take part in the development of the department strategy which adds to the general strategic plan of the institution. Despite their opportunities for contributing to the departmental strategy design, faculty complain that department chairs do not receive administrators' feedback on the submitted strategy documents, which leaves faculty without any follow-up or update.

The administered model of governance that is deeply embedded in the system of higher education of Kazakhstan is also reflected in the top-down communication processes between the Ministry of Education and Science and academic institutions. The Ministry develops the national mandatory educational standards for all academic institutions, regardless of their status as public or private institutions, and institutional leaders have to administer such that a faculty follows the standards. As one interviewed faculty member states, "I don't agree with most of the standards which are distributed to our institution from the Ministry. They impose too much teaching load on us that we hardly find time to involve in paperwork, let alone engaging with research or institutional decision-making processes".

As can be seen in Figure 2, faculty respondents were asked to evaluate their personal influence and their working conditions. Just about 20% of faculty report that they regard themselves as a key decision-making body whose opinion is considered on the administrative level. The faculty's perception of the quality of their working conditions is also relatively positive.

Around 30% of faculty members indicate low evaluation of their personal influence within the administrative level and higher-level bodies. The administrative constituencies are perceived as independent decision-making bodies. This echoes with the existence of the administered, bureaucratic model of higher education governance that has been entrenched in the higher education system of Kazakhstan due to the command-and-control thinking of governance of the Soviet past.

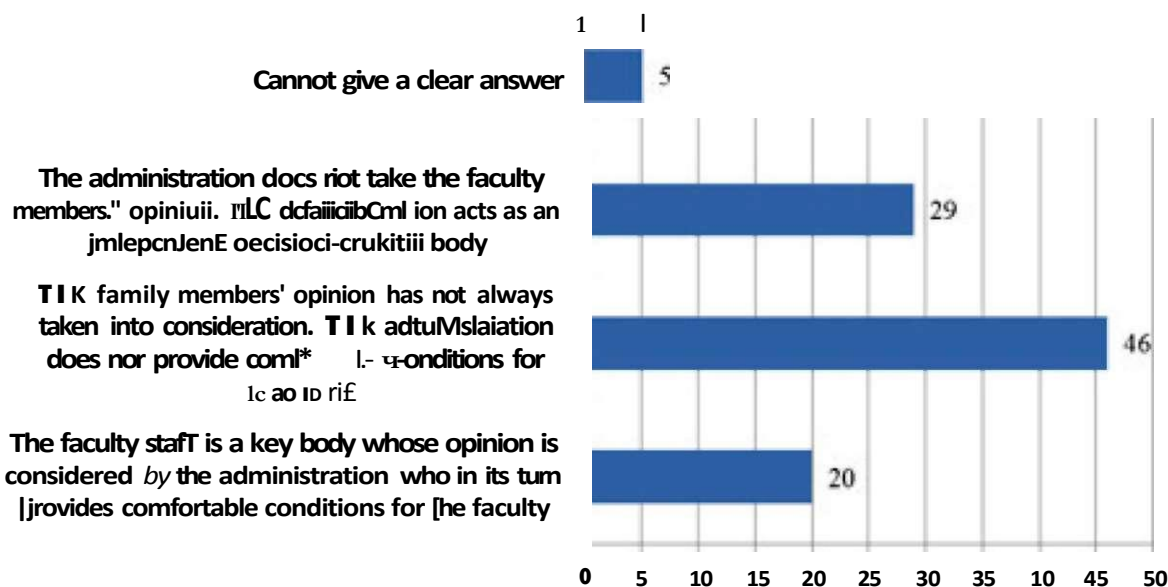


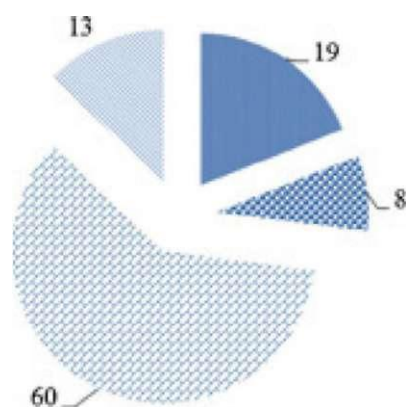
Figure 2: Percentage of faculty members who report on their personal influence and working conditions in their institutions

A significant number of the surveyed faculty confirm that their personal influence is diminished as the administration does not consider their opinions. Moreover, the efficiency of support processes with working conditions is not likely to meet faculty's expectations. This has been demonstratively signaled by a response rate of 46,5%.

Another dimension of faculty involvement in institutional governance is the actions of faculty members when they do not agree with the decisions made by the administrator. According to Figure 3, a response rate of 60% shows that a faculty is typically disengaged with the decision-making processes as they believe that attempting to change the senior administrator's decision is a waste of time. Though the faculty has a decision-making authority within their departments, making decisions on the higher-level of administration, say, in selecting key administrators, choosing new faculty members or determining budget priorities is not a common practice. Within the analysis of the interview data, we learnt that the new faculty are recommended to the Dean by an established faculty panel. The Rector makes a final decision on new faculty appointment. Regarding faculty promotion, the department chair is usually nominated by the faculty, approved by the Dean and appointed by the Rector. Deans are recommended by Vice Rectors. Alternatively, the candidates can approach the administration themselves. This means that the faculty recommendations can be entirely disregarded. The Rector can make his final decision on dean's appointment. The appointment of prospective Vice Rectors has to be confirmed with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

We take the notion of shared governance as "the set of practices under which college faculty and staff participate in significant decisions concerning the operation of their institutions" (American Federation of Teachers, 2006, p.4, as cited in Jones 2011). As Birnbaum points out, "the structures and processes of shared governance identify the rights of the faculty to participate in making important decisions, thereby certifying their status and importance (2004, p. 14). Given the survey results, the level of shared governance in academic

institutions of Kazakhstan is relatively low. Most faculty respondents pointed out the fact that the institutional governance process is of a more administered model. The Rector can make appointments at his own discretion, without the faculty being involved.



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Do not undertake anything as any
protests **against the administration**
are just **a waste** of time

Cannot give a clear answer

Figure 3: Percentage of faculty members who report on the influence exercised by the administrators affecting their work

The interviews held with faculty and higher education leaders in Kazakhstani academic institutions confirm this perception.. For example, in answering the question 'do the faculty take part in selecting key administrators including deans and rectors?', the Vice Rector of one national university stated that this is the Rector's prerogative. In the respondent's words, faculty should engage more with academic affairs rather than making decisions on the administrative level. There is good reason to believe that some top administrators find the top-down appointments more effective due to efficient decision-making processes that bypass the faculty's decision-making processes. However, as Kerr reports, "faculty involvement in shared governance may slow down the decision-making process, but it also assures more thorough discussion and provides the institution with a sense of order and stability" (Kerr, 1963).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined faculty perceptions of the current state of higher education governance in Kazakhstan. The purpose was to analyse the faculty's opinions and attitudes towards governance in their institutions. Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings. The first is that faculty was mostly unsatisfied with their level of involvement in governance, particularly in terms of the ways in which they communicate with upper management. Faculty would like to see proper feedback mechanisms in their communication channels with Vice Rectors and Rectors. Interestingly, the majority of faculty respondents claim that contemporary governance systems cannot respond appropriately to new social and academic realities. Most faculty members take their inactiveness for granted as they do not feel that their decisions will have an impact on institutional governance. However, the research has shown that faculty members are involved at the departmental level and feel comfortable about that.

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