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Philosophical Foundations Of Good University Governance In Higher Education

Daryono[1], Yudi Hari Rayanto[2], Nunuk Indarti[3]

[1,2,3]University of PGRI Wiranegara, Pasuruan, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: daryono.jarwo@gmail.com, rayanto75@gmail.com, nunukindarti53@gmail.com

Abstract

Higher education institutions are increasingly confronted with demands for transparency, accountability, efficiency, participation, and institutional responsiveness amid globalization, digitalization, internationalization, and the growing corporatization of higher education. These developments have strengthened the importance of Good University Governance (GUG), but have also raised fundamental questions concerning the normative foundations underlying its principles and practices. This study aims to reconstruct the philosophical foundations of Good University Governance by examining the ethical, democratic, and humanistic values that provide normative justification for university governance. The study employs a qualitative philosophical research approach based on library research. Academic literature, policy documents, and major philosophical works related to university governance, ethics, democracy, and higher education were analyzed through conceptual, hermeneutic, and normative-critical analysis. The theoretical framework synthesizes four philosophical traditions: Aristotelian virtue ethics, Kantian deontological ethics, Deweyan democratic philosophy of education, and Habermasian communicative action theory. The analysis demonstrates that Good University Governance should not be understood merely as an administrative mechanism for improving organizational efficiency and institutional performance. Rather, it constitutes a value-based governance framework grounded in moral responsibility, human dignity, practical wisdom, democratic participation, deliberative communication, and the pursuit of the common good. Aristotelian virtue ethics provides a foundation for integrity and ethical leadership; Kantian ethics grounds accountability in moral responsibility and respect for human dignity; Dewey emphasizes democratic participation and the university as a community of inquiry; while Habermas strengthens the deliberative and communicative basis of institutional legitimacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Universities worldwide are currently facing profound and dynamic transformations driven by globalization, digitalization, the internationalization of higher education, and increasing societal demands for transparency and accountability from public institutions. Universities are no longer seen solely as educational institutions and producers of knowledge, but also as strategic actors contributing to economic development, social innovation, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, university governance (*university governance*) constitutes an essential factor that determines the effectiveness, legitimacy, competitiveness and public trust in higher education institutions (Scott, 2006; Barnett, 2011; Marginson, 2011).

The concept of **Good University Governance** (*Good University Governance – GUG*University governance (UG) has developed as an adaptation of good governance principles applied to the public sector and modern organizations. UG emphasizes the implementation of principles such as transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, fairness, and integrity in university management (World Bank, 1992; UNDP, 1997; OECD, 2012; Risanty & Kesuma, 2019). Numerous studies show that good governance contributes to improved academic quality, more effective resource management, enhanced organizational performance, and increased stakeholder trust in higher education institutions.

However, most research on Good University Governance still focuses primarily on administrative, institutional, regulatory, and organizational dimensions. University governance is generally viewed as a set of organizational mechanisms designed to improve efficiency, effectiveness, service quality, and institutional accountability. This perspective has led to the development of various governance models centered on performance, results measurement, quality control, and institutional reforms (Shattock, 2010; Risanty & Kesuma, 2019). However, this approach tends to neglect more fundamental questions concerning the philosophical underpinnings that normatively justify the very principles of governance.

Universities are indeed distinct from both businesses and public administrations. As institutions dedicated to the development of knowledge, the formation of human character, the protection of academic freedom, and the service of the public interest, they assume a unique moral, intellectual, and social responsibility. Therefore, university governance cannot be reduced to a mere question of administrative efficiency or organizational effectiveness; it must

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also be understood as a practice rooted in ethical, educational, and humanistic values (Barnett, 2011; Marginson, 2011).

From a philosophical perspective, the principles of Good University Governance have a strong normative dimension. Transparency is closely linked to the values of honesty and openness; responsibility refers to moral responsibility; participation reflects the principles of democracy and deliberation; while fairness and integrity are intimately associated with a commitment to the common good (*common good*). Consequently, philosophical research is of major importance in explaining why these principles should be applied and how they fit with the fundamental aims of higher education (World Bank, 1992; UNDP, 1997; OECD, 2012).

Several philosophical traditions offer relevant conceptual foundations for the development of Good University Governance. Aristotle's ethics of virtue emphasizes the importance of integrity and prudence (*prudence and* moral excellence in institutional leadership. Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics provides a normative basis for responsibility, moral duty, and respect for human dignity. Furthermore, John Dewey's democratic philosophy of education and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action offer a conceptual framework for understanding the importance of participation, dialogue, cooperation, and inclusive decision-making within the academic community. These perspectives demonstrate that academic governance is essentially a moral and social practice that cannot be separated from philosophical values (Aristotle, 2009/ca. 350 BCE; Kant, 1785/1993; Dewey, 1916; Habermas, 1984).

Furthermore, the contemporary evolution of higher education is marked by increasing commercialization, the corporatization of universities, intensified global competition, and heightened external demands for institutional accountability. These developments generate several dilemmas, notably between institutional autonomy and state control, between academic freedom and market demands, and between efficient governance and the educational mission of universities. These challenges reinforce the need to develop a philosophical framework capable of informing the normative orientation of university governance so that it remains true to the fundamental values of higher education (Scott, 2006; Shattock, 2010; Barnett, 2011; Marginson, 2011).

METHOD

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach and falls under the category of philosophical **inquiry** (*philosophical research* Philosophical research aims to examine, analyze, and reconstruct the normative concepts that underlie a phenomenon or social practice, in this case the **Good**

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University Governance (*Good University Governance – GUG*) in the context of higher education. This approach was chosen because the study does not seek to carry out empirical measurements, but to explore and develop a conceptual framework to explain the philosophical foundations of university governance (Kattsoff, 2004; Rescher, 2001; Creswell, 2018).

Data sources

The data sources for this research consist of relevant scholarly literature on university governance, philosophy of education, political philosophy, and ethics. The data come from articles published in international peer-reviewed journals, academic books, public policy documents related to higher education, and authoritative philosophical works in the fields of ethics and governance. The literature was selected based on its relevance to the principles of Good University Governance, including transparency, accountability, participation, integrity, equity, and academic autonomy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell, 2018).

Data collection technique

The data was collected using a documentary **search** (*library research*), carried out through a systematic search of indexed scientific publications in academic databases such as **Scopus**, **Web of Science**, **Google Scholar** And **SpringerLink**The publications selected were then chosen according to criteria of scientific quality, relevance and contribution to reflection on the philosophical foundations of university governance (Zed, 2014; Creswell, 2018).

Data analysis technique

The data analysis was carried out in three main stages.

First step: Conceptual analysis (*Conceptual Analysis*)

This step aimed to identify, define and clarify the main constituent concepts of Good University Governance, in order to specify their philosophical meaning and their conceptual relationships (Rescher, 2001; Hare, 1963).

Second step: Hermeneutic analysis (*Hermeneutic Analysis*)

This step aimed to interpret the philosophical significance of governance principles from the perspectives offered by the philosophers and theories used in this research. Hermeneutical analysis allows us to understand philosophical texts within their intellectual context and to identify their implications for contemporary university governance (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1976).

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Third stage: Normative-critical analysis (*Normative-Critical Analysis*)

This final step consisted of rebuilding the relationship between the principles of Good University Governance and the fundamental values of ethics, democracy, justice, responsibility and the public interest (*common good*). This analysis allows for a critical evaluation of the normative legitimacy of governance principles as well as their consistency with the fundamental mission of higher education (Kant, 1785/1993; Habermas, 1984; Hare, 1963).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on a synthesis of three major philosophical traditions:

1. Aristotle's ethics of virtues (*virtue ethics*) ;
2. Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics (*deontological ethics*) ;
3. John Dewey's democratic philosophy of education, enriched by Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action.

This synthesis is used to develop a conceptual model explaining the normative and philosophical foundations of Good University Governance in the context of higher education.

Validity of the research

In order to ensure the scientific rigor and academic validity of this research, several strategies were implemented.

First, a**theoretical triangulation** (*theoretical triangulation*) was achieved by confronting different relevant philosophical perspectives in order to obtain a richer and more balanced understanding of the principles of university governance.

Secondly, a thorough critical analysis of the selected literature was carried out in order to construct a coherent, exhaustive and theoretically sound conceptual framework.

The results of this analysis are finally presented in the form of a philosophical **framework, highlighting** the relationship between the principles of Good University Governance and the fundamental values that constitute the mission of higher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Good University Governance as a values-based system, not simply an administrative system

The results of the analysis show that the **Good University Governance** (*Good University Governance – GUG*) cannot be understood solely as an administrative mechanism aimed at improving organizational efficiency and institutional accountability. University governance is

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fundamentally a values-based **governance system** (*value-based governance*), which directs all university activities towards achieving the essential goals of higher education, namely the development of knowledge, the training of the individual, service to society and the pursuit of scientific truth.

From this perspective, the principles of **transparency**, of **responsibility**, of **participation**, d'**integrity**and**justice**are not merely management tools; they also represent moral values that shape academic culture, strengthen institutional legitimacy, and guide governance practices towards the common good.

2. Aristotle's ethics of virtue as a philosophical foundation for Good University Governance

The analysis reveals that Aristotle's virtue ethics provides a solid philosophical foundation for the development of ethical academic leadership. The concepts of arrest(moral excellence) and of*phronesis*(Prudence or practical wisdom) define university leaders as moral actors whose mission goes beyond the mere pursuit of organizational efficiency to aim at the promotion of common **good** (*common good*).

From this perspective, the principle of integrity within Good University Governance constitutes a moral virtue that must be embodied by all members of the university community. Thus, quality governance depends primarily on the moral character and ethical judgment of institutional leaders, rather than solely on the existence of regulations or administrative procedures.

3. Kantian deontological ethics: responsibility, transparency, and moral duty

The results of this research show that the principles of responsibility (*accountability*) and of **transparency** find their philosophical foundations in the deontological ethics of Immanuel Kant. According to this perspective, university governance must be guided by the moral duty to act with honesty, justice and responsibility towards all stakeholders.

From a Kantian point of view, the academic **community** (*academic community*The university must never be considered a mere means to achieve economic or political objectives. On the contrary, it must be recognized as a community of individuals possessing intrinsic dignity, intellectual autonomy, and inalienable moral worth. Consequently, decisions made within the university must respect the principles of justice, academic rights, and the dignity of all members of the university community.

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4. John Dewey's democratic philosophy of education and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action

The research results indicate that the principle of participation, the framework of Good University Governance, the university finds its philosophical legitimacy in the thought of John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas. The university is conceived there as a **democratic community in** which all members are called upon to actively participate in the decision-making processes. Dewey's educational philosophy emphasizes that cooperation, shared learning, and collective experience are the foundations of sustainable and truly democratic institutions. Habermas's theory of communicative action, on the other hand, asserts that the legitimacy of university policies rests on rational dialogue, open deliberation, and the pursuit of consensus free from domination or coercion.

Thus, participation is not just an administrative mechanism; it also constitutes an ethical principle guaranteeing the effective involvement of the entire academic community in the governance of universities.

5. Reconstruction of a philosophical framework for Good University Governance

Based on a synthesis of the various philosophical perspectives mobilized in this research, a philosophical **framework of Good University Governance is** proposed. This framework is structured around three fundamental dimensions.

Philosophical dimension	**Theoretical foundation**	**Principles of Good University Governance Products**
Virtue ethics	Aristotle	Integrity, ethical leadership, institutional excellence
Ethics and professional conduct	Immanuel Kant	Responsibility, transparency, moral duty
Deliberative democracy	John Dewey et Jürgen Habermas	Participation, inclusion, academic autonomy

This framework highlights that Good University Governance is not simply an organizational management system. Above all, it represents an amoral **system of governance**, based on the values of virtue, ethical responsibility, and academic democracy.

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Main findings of the research

This research concludes that the normative legitimacy of Good University Governance rests on three essential philosophical foundations:**moral virtue**, **ethical responsibility** And **deliberative democracy**These results broaden the traditional understanding of university governance, which until now has been mainly focused on administrative, managerial and regulatory dimensions.

Consequently, Good University Governance must be conceived as a values-based **governance system whose** purpose is to promote academic excellence, strengthen public confidence and contribute to the achievement of the common good in higher education.

Good University Governance as governance based on values

The results of this research show that the **Good University Governance** (*Good University Governance – GUG*) is not simply a set of administrative mechanisms designed to ensure organizational efficiency. It also constitutes a governance system deeply rooted in moral and philosophical values. This conclusion broadens the traditional understanding of university governance, long influenced by the approach of **New Public Management**, which primarily prioritizes efficiency, productivity and administrative accountability (World Bank, 1992; UNDP, 1997; Shattock, 2010; Risanty & Kesuma, 2019).

In accordance with the concept developed by Ronald Barnett, the university is first and foremost a moral institution entrusted with the responsibility of producing knowledge, educating individuals, and serving society. Therefore, university governance cannot be separated from the values that underpin the very mission of higher education. From this perspective, Good University Governance should be understood as an approach aimed at maintaining a balance between the demands of organizational efficiency and the academic mission of the university (Barnett, 2011; Marginson, 2011).

This research also critiques the growing trend toward the corporatization of higher education, where university success is often assessed primarily based on economic indicators and market competitiveness. When governance is exclusively geared toward administrative performance, the university risks gradually transforming from an academic community into a business-like organization (Scott, 2006; Barnett, 2011; Marginson, 2011).

The relevance of virtue ethics for leadership in higher education

The results show that Aristotle's virtue ethics constitutes an essential foundation for integrity and ethical leadership in university governance. This finding confirms that the quality

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of governance depends not only on institutional systems or regulatory frameworks, but also on the moral character of university leaders (Aristotle, 2009; Shattock, 2010).

From an Aristotelian perspective, effective university governance is not based solely on adherence to procedures; it also requires that leaders develop the*phronesis*(practical wisdom), enabling them to exercise prudent judgment in the face of multiple academic, organizational, and ethical dilemmas. This requirement appears particularly relevant in the current context of higher education, marked by tensions between market imperatives, public policies, and the preservation of academic freedom (Aristotle, 2009; Barnett, 2011).

These results are consistent with previous work demonstrating that the values-based **leadership** (*values-based leadership*) promotes the development of an organizational culture that is integral, sustainable and oriented towards the common good (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1998).

Responsibility as a moral duty

This research shows that the principle of responsibility (*accountability*) in Good University Governance has a broader scope than the simple obligation to be accountable in administrative and financial matters. From a Kantian perspective, responsibility is first and foremost the expression of a moral duty towards all university stakeholders (Kant, 1993; UNDP, 1997; OECD, 2012).

This interpretation broadens the traditional conception of responsibility, which is generally centered on external control. Universities are not only accountable to public authorities or funding bodies; they are also accountable to students, teachers, society, and the international scientific community (World Bank, 1992; OECD, 2012; Marginson, 2011).

Thus, transparency and accountability should not be considered mere bureaucratic tools. They constitute ethical obligations reflecting respect for human dignity and the public's right to reliable, sincere, and truthful information (Kant, 1993; UNDP, 1997).

Participation and deliberative democracy in university governance

The results of this study show that the principle of participation finds its philosophical legitimacy in the works of John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas. The university is not merely a formal organization; it is first and foremost an academic community founded on communication, cooperation, and the exchange of ideas (Dewey, 1916; Habermas, 1984).

According to Dewey, education and democracy are inseparable. Therefore, good university governance must allow for the effective participation of all members of the academic community in decision-making processes (Dewey, 1916).

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For its part, Habermas's theory of communicative action argues that institutional legitimacy is strengthened when decisions result from rational, inclusive dialogue free from domination. From this perspective, participation is not merely an administrative mechanism; it also becomes an ethical foundation and an essential means of building institutional legitimacy (Habermas, 1984; Habermas, 1996).

This conclusion is particularly relevant in a context where higher education systems are experiencing increasing centralisation of decision-making processes, progressively reducing the participation of teachers and students in university governance (Scott, 2006; Shattock, 2010; Barnett, 2011).

Theoretical contribution to the study of Good University Governance

The main theoretical contribution of this research lies in the development of a philosophical framework integrating Aristotle's virtue ethics, Kant's deontological ethics, John Dewey's democratic philosophy of education and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action within a single conceptual model of Good University Governance.

Most previous research considers Good University Governance primarily as an organizational management tool focused on effectiveness, efficiency, and institutional accountability. In contrast, this study demonstrates that the principles of university governance derive their normative legitimacy from much deeper moral and philosophical values.

It follows that Good University Governance does not simply answer the question of knowing **comment** Universities must be governed, but also the knowledge base. **Why** certain governance principles must be adopted and **what values** justify its implementation.

Implications for higher education

The results of this research present several important implications for the development of university governance.

1. University governance reforms should take into account not only administrative dimensions, but also ethical and philosophical dimensions.
2. Leadership development in higher education should aim to promote integrity, practical wisdom, and moral responsibility.
3. Accountability systems should be designed as a responsibility to the public and society, not simply as compliance with regulatory requirements.
4. University decision-making processes should be based on the principles of participation, dialogue, deliberation, and academic democracy.

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5. Good university governance should be geared towards promoting public **good** (*public good*), academic excellence and institutional sustainability.

Ultimately, this research confirms that the normative legitimacy of Good University Governance stems from the integration of the values of moral virtue, ethical responsibility, and deliberative democracy. Truly effective university governance cannot therefore be built solely on legal rules or administrative mechanisms; it must rest on a solid philosophical foundation, capable of preserving the university's identity as an academic institution serving the public good, the production of knowledge, and the development of humanity.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to examine and reconstruct the **Philosophical foundations of Good University Governance** (*Good University Governance – GUG*) in the context of higher education. The results of the analysis show that Good University Governance cannot be understood solely as an administrative mechanism aimed at efficiency, effectiveness, and organizational compliance. Rather, it must be considered as a values-based **governance system endowed** with normative and moral legitimacy. Therefore, the quality of university governance depends not only on institutional structures and management procedures, but also on the philosophical values that guide governance practices.

This study demonstrates that the fundamental principles of Good University Governance are rooted in three major intellectual traditions. First, Aristotle's virtue ethics forms the basis for integrity, ethical leadership, and the pursuit of institutional excellence. Second, Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics provides the normative basis for responsibility, transparency, and moral duty in higher education. Third, John Dewey's democratic philosophy of education and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action offer a philosophical justification for the principles of participation, inclusion, dialogue, and democratic decision-making within the academic community.

Based on a synthesis of these three perspectives, this research proposes a **Conceptual framework of the Philosophical Foundations of Good University Governance** (*Philosophical Foundations of Good University Governance*), in which moral **virtue** (*virtue*), **ethical responsibility** (*responsibility*) And **deliberative democracy** (*deliberative democracy*) are identified as the three fundamental pillars of university governance. This framework shows that Good University Governance is essentially a governance system aimed at promoting public trust, academic excellence, institutional legitimacy, and the public **good** (*public good*).

The main theoretical contribution of this research lies in filling a significant gap in the

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existing literature, which has thus far focused primarily on the managerial and institutional dimensions of university governance. Unlike previous work, this study offers a philosophical perspective that explains the normative foundations justifying the application of the principles of Good University Governance in higher education. It thus contributes to broadening the scope of studies on university governance, moving it from a simple administrative instrument to a deeper understanding as an ethical, philosophical, and values-oriented practice.

On a practical level, the results of this research imply that reforms to university governance should not be limited to the requirements of efficiency and administrative accountability, but should also integrate moral, democratic, and humanistic dimensions. Universities that implement Good University Governance comprehensively will not only be better able to improve their organizational performance, but also to preserve their identity as academic institutions dedicated to the advancement of knowledge, the development of the individual, and service to the public good.

Recommendations for future research

Because this research is primarily conceptual and normative in nature, its conclusions call for further empirical validation. Future research could develop tools to empirically assess the relationships between the philosophical foundations of Good University Governance and the governance practices observed in different higher education institutions.

Furthermore, future studies could enrich the proposed conceptual framework by incorporating non-Western philosophical perspectives, particularly governance values derived from the Islamic intellectual tradition. Such an approach would contribute to the development of a more contextualized, culturally relevant, and inclusive model of Good University Governance within the global context of higher education.

It would also be desirable to conduct comparative studies between universities from different countries and cultural contexts to examine how philosophical values are interpreted and implemented in university governance practices. Such research would allow for a better distinction between the universal and contextual dimensions of Good University Governance.

Finally, this study recommends the development of interdisciplinary research combining philosophy, governance science, educational science, and organizational science. Such an integrative approach would foster the development of a holistic model of university governance, capable of being not only organizationally effective, but also ethically responsible, democratically legitimate, and socially relevant.

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