

GOVERNANCE IN THE STATE UNIVERSITIES IN SRI LANKA: IN SEARCH FOR A RIGHT MODEL

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Governance in the state Universities in Sri Lanka has changed considerably in the recent past. Government's attempts to make these organizations 'less state' and 'more market', and expose them to competition by establishing private Universities in the country are examples of such changes. There are also criticisms that state universities are subject to politicization and mismanagement right throughout this move, deteriorating their real value for existence. This paper aimed to examine the governance mechanisms prevailing in the state universities to safeguard the interests of various stakeholders, and to investigate the extent to which such governance mechanisms were affected by these types of misconduct and undue influences. By doing so, it intends to find a right model to govern the state Universities in Sri Lanka. The study followed the qualitative research strategy, and applied the field study research method. Data were gathered through interviews of managerial and administrative staff and senior academics in the University system in Sri Lanka, and documentary evidence. Data were analyzed by three interactive processes, namely, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Governance mechanisms were various devices established in Universities to align the interests of the University administrators with those of the stakeholders. Three external governance mechanisms (State regulation, guidance by external stakeholders, competition) and two internal governance mechanisms (academic and managerial self-governance) were identified in this study. The excessive state regulations and government influence in the external governance mechanisms can create a bureaucratic governance system in the Universities. In a bureaucratic governance system, Universities are most likely dedicated to limited goals, organized for maximum efficiency, and regulated according to the principle of 'legal-rationality'. On the other hand, the excessive use of internal governance mechanisms tends to convert University administration into a collegial system of governance. In this system of governance, Universities allow full participation of all members of the academic community, or at least the faculty in its management. Each of these extremes appears to have their own weaknesses. Hence, this paper concluded that a combination of bureaucratic and collegial systems that would best fulfill the stakeholder objectives would be a proper governance arrangement for Universities. The effectiveness of such a hybrid system, however, may depend on the lack of politicization, the strength of an ethical framework and the presence of a performance evaluation system within the state Universities in Sri Lanka.