

THE APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE OF LAO PDR

Phouvong Aphay¹, Somsak Srisontisuk² and Awuth Ruenpakpoj³

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University ^{1, 2}

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Surat Thani Rajabhat University ³

E-mail: somsi4@kku.ac.th²

Received 29 August 2023; Revised 03 August 2024; Accepted 30 October 2024.



Abstract

This research aims to identify strategies to enhance good governance in university administration in the Lao PDR. The research employed a qualitative approach was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with 28 key informants from the Ministry of Education and Sports, National University of Laos, Suphanouvong University, Savannakhet University, and Champasak University. The collected data was analyzed using content analysis. The results can be summarized into a SMART model for enhancing university governance, comprising five key elements: S: Systematic and equitable human resource development; M: Transparent and fair university management systems; A: Stakeholder access and participation; R: Responsibility and accountability aligned with quality standards; and T: Monitoring of teaching and learning processes and communication channels with the university. This research will be beneficial as a guideline for the administration of all four universities, enabling them to overcome challenges in higher education management.

Key words: University Governance; Universities in Lao PDR's; SMART model

Introduction

Education is crucial for national development, particularly in Laos. Universities play a vital role in producing skilled graduates for the workforce and economic growth (Government of the Lao PDR, 2021). However, Laotian universities face significant challenges. Resource constraints, including inadequate infrastructure and difficulty retaining qualified faculty, hinder the implementation of innovative teaching methods and research (Government of the Lao PDR, 2015). Limited stakeholder engagement creates a disconnect between university goals and societal needs (MOES, 2023). Governance frameworks in Laotian universities lack transparency and effectiveness. Strong governance is essential for accountability, fairness, and institutional sustainability (PMO, 1995, 2002, 2003, 2009). Governance shortcomings can lead to inefficiencies and erode public trust.

While Laotian universities have the potential to drive national development, they face complex challenges (National Assembly, 2021). Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach focusing on enhancing governance systems. Improving transparency, inclusivity, and accountability can create an environment conducive to producing graduates capable of advancing the nation's progress. This forms the basis for research into implementing good governance in Lao PDR universities. Therefore, this is the origin of the research problem to find a way to manage universities in the Lao PDR with good governance.

Research Objectives

The objective of this research intends to propose an approach for enhancing Good Governance within the university governance of Lao PDR.

Literature Review

Lao higher education consists of five public universities, four under MOES and one under MOH. The Ministry/Department of Higher Education manages and coordinates higher education matters nationwide, including planning, policy determination, supervision, and implementation of educational initiatives (PMO, 2008; Government of the Lao PDR, 2015; MOES, 2022).

Since independence in 1975, Laos' education system has undergone significant reforms. The National University of Laos was established in 1996 by merging ten public institutions. In response to socio-economic and labor market needs, Champasack University (2002), Suphanouvong University (2003), and Savannakhet University (2009) were established (Government of the Lao PDR, 2015; Ragkhanto et al., 2018; PMO, 2002, 2003, 2009).

The UN, involved in higher education since 1945, promotes human rights, development, and peace. It advocates for equal access to higher education regardless of race, gender, or economic status (Althonayan et al., 2021; Wang 2022; MOES, 2015). Recent university governance in Laos focuses on autonomy, accountability, and transparency. This new model shows potential for improving education and research quality, though it's too early to determine its effectiveness (UN, 2023; Deolalikar et al., 2015).

“Good governance” is characterized by nine key attributes according to the UN: Participation, Rule of law, Transparency, Responsiveness, Consensus orientation, Equity, Effectiveness and efficiency, Accountability, and Strategic vision. This perspective should consider historical, cultural, and social complexities (UN ESCAP, 2015; UNDP, 2009). These principles form the basis for contemporary discussions on effective governance and development in various contexts.

Table 1 The success factors for the administration of the Lao University. (n=454)

Components	Average (\bar{x})	Standard
------------	-----------------------	----------

		Deviation (S.D.)
Systematic and Equitable Human Resource Development	4.2304	.63893
Management University System to Transparent and Fair	4.0042	.76484
Access and Participation of Stakeholders	3.7766	.62495
Responsibilities and Assign duties in Accordance with Quality Standards	3.7321	.55528
Teaching Management Monitoring System and Communication Channel	3.5295	.71943

Source: *Aphay, P. (2023)*

Table 1 above based on a synthesis of the five success factor components in the management of Lao University, (Aphay, P. 2023) this summary derives from research encompassing four universities and organizations associated with administration in Laos.

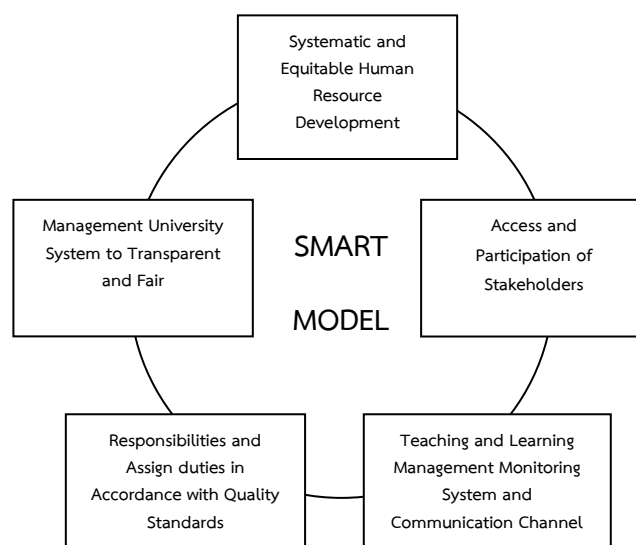


Figure 1 SMART model: The Lao University Governance

Source: *Aphay, P. (2023)*

Research Methodology

This study focuses on the four public universities in Laos under the Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR. Using qualitative research methodology, it involves 28 key informants from internal and external stakeholders, selected through purposive sampling. Internal stakeholders include university presidents, vice presidents, deans, department heads, lecturers, and staff with at least 5 years of experience.

A semi-structured interview format, based on a conceptual framework, guides the research. The study employs Denzin's (2017) triangulation methodology, incorporating four aspects: data, investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation. Interviews are conducted with individuals knowledgeable about university administration.

Data analysis is crucial for deriving insights and identifying research priorities. This process involves distilling field data into a coherent information pool, identifying patterns of associations among data clusters, and conducting content analysis. The analysis follows a structured approach, drawing inductive conclusions and leveraging participants' perspectives

through their imaginative and creative expressions, as described by Denzin (2017). This iterative interplay between data collection and analysis gives significance and coherence to the gathered information. The study aims to provide comprehensive insights into university governance in Laos, contributing to the understanding of higher education administration in the country's specific context.

Research Results

The researcher has utilized the collected information to delineate the concept and categorize it as “SMART”. This definition arises in the context of managing state universities in Lao PDR and encompasses modern curriculum management, including:

S: Systematic and Equitable Human Resource Development

M: Management University System to Transparent and Fair

A: Access and Participation of Stakeholders

R: Responsibilities and Assign duties in Accordance with Quality Standards

T: Teaching and Learning Management Monitoring System and Communication Channel with the University

The qualitative research outcomes are drawn from the synthesis of qualitative data. Through a semi-structured interview process, 28 experts were engaged from four universities and related departments within the Ministry of Education and Sports. The researcher collected and subsequently analyzed the data using content analysis methodologies. The ensuing summary encapsulates the findings concerning the efficacy of university administration in the context of the Lao PDR:

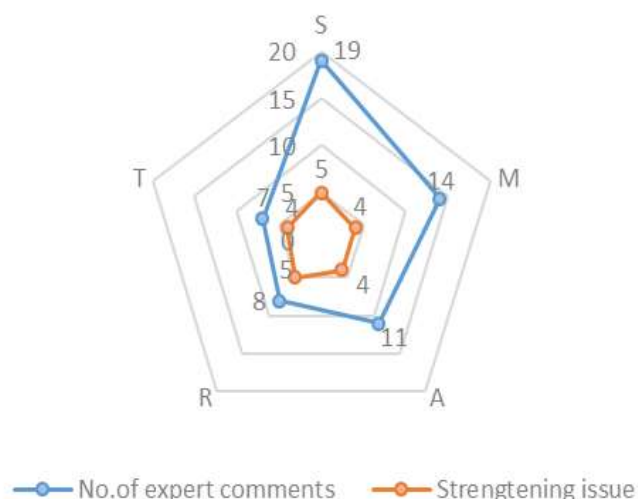


Figure 2 Research results on the SMART model

Source: Analyzed from research data by the author

Table 2 Component S: Systematic and Equitable Human Resource Development

Expertise comments	Strengthening approach
<p><i>“...Systematic and equitable human resource development is crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of the Laos University Management...”;</i></p> <p>A professor at the National University of Laos.</p> <p><i>“...The key to effective human resource development is to focus on the individual needs and aspirations of each staff member...”;</i></p> <p>High ranking of the Savannakhet University.</p> <p><i>“...Equitable human resource development requires a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of the organization....”;</i></p> <p>Interviewer from administration office of the MOES</p>	<p>Recruitment and hiring</p> <p>Training and development</p> <p>Performance management</p> <p>Compensation and benefits</p> <p>Diversity, equity, and inclusion</p>

Table 3 Component M: Management University System to Transparent and Fair

Expertise comments	Strengthening approach
<p><i>“...Transparency and fairness in university management require a commitment to open communication and collaboration. Leaders should listen to the concerns and feedback of staff members, and work together to find solutions that benefit everyone...”</i></p> <p>A professor at the Champasak University.</p> <p><i>“...Creating a transparent and fair management system requires a culture of accountability and ethical leadership...”</i></p> <p>Higher Education administrator at the MOES</p>	<p>Open communication</p> <p>Fair recruitment and promotion processes</p> <p>Performance evaluation</p> <p>Ethical leadership</p>

Table 4 Component A: Access and Participation of Stakeholders

Expertise comments	Strengthening approach
<p><i>“...Access and participation of stakeholders in the university management is critical for ensuring that our programs and services are relevant and responsive to the needs of our communities...”</i></p> <p>Dean of the Faculty at the National University of Laos.</p> <p><i>“...Collaboration and partnership between universities and the private sector is essential for building a skilled and innovative workforce that can contribute to the country's economic growth...”</i></p> <p>Vice President of the Champasak University.</p> <p><i>“...Inclusive policies and practices are essential for ensuring that all stakeholders have access to the benefits of university education...”</i></p> <p>Vice President of the Savannakhet University.</p> <p><i>“...Diversity and equity are essential for promoting a culture of respect and inclusivity in the university environment...”</i></p> <p>Director General of the Department at the MOES</p>	<p>Open communication</p> <p>Collaboration and partnership</p> <p>Inclusive policies and practices</p> <p>Diversity and equity</p>

Table 5 Component R: Responsibilities and Assign duties in Accordance with Quality Standards

Expertise comments	Strengthening approach
<p>“...Clear and well-defined responsibilities and duties are essential for ensuring that staff members are able to effectively contribute to the mission and goals of the university...”</p> <p>Deputy Director General of the Department of Higher Education at the MOES</p> <p>“...Ensuring that staff members are properly trained and equipped to carry out their responsibilities is critical for maintaining quality standards in the university...”</p> <p>Dean of the Faculty at the National University of Laos.</p> <p>“...Inclusivity and diversity are key considerations when assigning duties and responsibilities in the university...”</p> <p>Acting Dean of the Faculty at the Savannakhet University.</p>	<p>Teaching and research</p> <p>Student support</p> <p>Administrative duties</p> <p>Quality assurance</p> <p>Professional development</p>

Table 6 Component T: Teaching and Learning Management Monitoring System and Communication Channel with the University

Expertise comments	Strengthening approach
<p>“...A teaching and learning management monitoring system is essential for ensuring that faculty members are able to effectively monitor student progress and identify areas for improvement...”</p> <p>Vice President of the National University of Laos.</p> <p>“...Communication channels between faculty members and students are critical for ensuring that students are able to receive the support and guidance they need to succeed...”</p> <p>Vice Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry at the Champasak University.</p> <p>“...Ongoing professional development opportunities are essential for ensuring that faculty members are able to stay up-to-date on the latest teaching and learning best practices...”</p> <p>Vice-Minister of the Prime Minister office, Laos PDR.</p> <p>“...A teaching and learning management monitoring system and effective communication channels between faculty members and students are essential for ensuring that students are able to receive the support they need to succeed...”</p> <p>Acting Director Research affairs Office at the Savannakhet University.</p>	<p>Learning management system (LMS)</p> <p>Assessment and evaluation tools</p> <p>Professional development opportunities</p> <p>Student feedback mechanisms</p>

Strengthen the approach using SMART model

Systematic and equitable human resource development is crucial for Laotian universities. Key elements include open communication, clear policies, fair recruitment and

evaluation, and ethical leadership. These principles foster trust, accountability, and community engagement while improving teaching quality.

Implementing teaching and learning management monitoring systems creates a supportive learning environment for students. This approach enhances overall university performance, staff satisfaction, and student outcomes, aligning with Laos' higher education development goals and contributing to building a knowledge-based society.

Discussion

University governance in Laos is complex and evolving. Traditionally centralized under MOES, there's a recent shift towards increased university autonomy. This led to the establishment of University Councils and a revised Higher Education Law (Government of the Lao PDR, 2015; Deolalikar et al., 2015). The University Council, comprising representatives from MOES, universities, and the private sector, is crucial in strategic planning and ensuring accountability (MOES, 2015). These reforms are significant steps towards university autonomy, aligning with Laos' goal of becoming a knowledge-based society (Government of the Lao PDR, 2018). However, challenges include resource and knowledge deficiencies and historical mistrust between MOES and universities.

University administration in Laos involves MOES as the primary governing body, with individual universities having their own councils (MOES, 2015). Recent focus on improving governance is partly driven by commitment to the ASEAN University Network (AUN) (Duangdara et al., 2023; AUN, 2012). Lao universities face governance challenges, including a shortage of qualified personnel and resources (National Assembly, 2021; MOES, 2023). However, there's increasing commitment to enhancing university governance, with MOES and AUN providing support. Key characteristics of Lao university administration include MOES oversight, individual university councils, and an emerging focus on governance improvement. Challenges persist in terms of qualified personnel and resource allocation.

Conclusion

The higher education system in Laos operates under a centralized structure, with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) at the top. MOES shapes university governance through policy-making, funding, and resource allocation. Each university is governed by a board that sets strategic direction, working with the president who manages daily operations. Within universities, deans or directors lead academic units, overseeing teaching and research activities.

This hierarchical structure reflects the centralized nature of Laos's university administration. While MOES provides overall guidance and policy framework, individual universities maintain some autonomy in overseeing their internal operations and academic

programs. This balance allows for a coordinated approach to higher education while providing room for institution-specific initiatives.

Body of knowledge

Effective university governance in Laos hinges on systematic human resource development and equitable practices. This includes fostering open communication, implementing clear policies, and ensuring unbiased recruitment along with fair evaluations. Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in creating an environment of trust and accountability. By implementing robust teaching and learning management monitoring systems, universities can maintain high-quality education and drive continuous improvement. These practices collectively enhance overall university performance, boost staff satisfaction, and improve student outcomes. Such an approach aligns with Laos' broader goals for higher education development, contributing to the creation of a knowledge-based society that meets the evolving needs of students, staff, and the wider community.

Suggestion

Policy Recommendations

1. Short-term: Universities should adopt SMART model metrics, aligning indicators with their mission and policies. Urgent action is needed to address issues and implement management changes. Conduct rigorous testing within the operational framework to assess the model's practicality.

2. Medium-term: Organize a seminar for administrators and faculty to collaboratively review and tailor the SMART model for each university's context. This integration will foster active participation and endorsement, strengthening university operations. Ensure oversight by relevant authorities for effectiveness.

3. Long-term: Fully implement the SMART model across universities, potentially showcasing it at a national symposium. Involve the Department of Advanced Education to establish it as a benchmark for superior university management practices in Laos. Integrate the model into national higher education policies.

4. Develop strategies to cultivate national human capital while aligning education with international standards and the socio-economic context of Lao PDR.

5. Utilize the SMART model's categorized indicators as essential components for effective university strategies in Lao PDR.

Operational Recommendations

1. Conduct a thorough assessment of the SMART model's alignment with each institution's mission and objectives.

2. Establish dedicated bodies within universities to implement the SMART model effectively and oversee its ongoing application.

3. Initiate further research to adapt governance mechanisms to Lao PDR's unique socio-economic context.

4. Develop and implement tailored approaches to enhance instructional and learning quality at each university, using the SMART model as a guiding framework.

5. Create a system for regular evaluation and adjustment of the SMART model implementation to ensure continuous improvement in university management practices.

References

- Althonayan, A., Tarasova, E. E., & Isaenko, E. V. (2021). The Role of Higher Educational Institutions in the Implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In *Globalistics and Globalization Studies* (pp. 217-227).
- Aphay, P. (2023). *The Lao University Governance*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Field of Public Administration, Graduate School, Khon Kaen University.
- AUN. (2012). *AUN Core Member University*. <https://www.aunsec.org/discover-aun/membership>
- Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Transaction publishers.
- Deolalikar, A. B., Jha, S., & Quising, F. (2015). *Governance in Developing Asia: Public Service Delivery and Empowerment*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Duangdara, A., Thamchalai, A., & Phakdinaruenat, S. (2023). Administration Guideline Under Good Governance of Local Government Organizations in Thailand. *Journal of MCU Buddhapanya Review*, 8(2), 175-184.
- Government of the Lao PDR. (2015). *Decree No. 177/Gov. on Higher Education*.
- Government of the Lao PDR. (2018). *Lao People's Democratic Republic: Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. National SDG Secretariat.
- Government of the Lao PDR. (2021). *Decree No. 633/Gov. on Establishment and operation of the Ministry of Education and Sports*.
- Ministry of Education and Sports. (2015). *Agreement No. 46196/MOE on Equivalent Education*.
- Ministry of Education and Sports. (2022). *Education and Sports: Sector Development Plan 2021-2025*.
- Ministry of Education and Sports. (2023). *Summary of the Implementation of the 2022 Development Plan and the 2023 Action Plan*. Education and Sports Management Conference 2022, Luang Prabang Province.
- National Assembly. (2021). *The 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025)*.

- Prime Minister's Office. (1995). *Decree No.50/PM on Establishment of National University of Laos*.
- Prime Minister's Office. (2002). *Decree No.214/PM on Establishment of Champasak University*.
- Prime Minister's Office. (2003). *Decree No.169/PM on Establishment of Souphanouvong University*.
- Prime Minister's Office. (2008). *Decree No.155/PM on Establishment of University of Health Sciences*.
- Prime Minister's Office. (2009). *Decree No.091/PM on Establishment of Savannakhet University*.
- Ragkhanto, S., Analayo, P. S., Sirimedho, P. P., & Jalearnwong, K. (2018). Relations between Human and Environment. In Thailand University Art and Culture Network, *International Conference on Arts and Cultures in Creative Economy 2018* (pp. 286-294). Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi.
- Wang, L. (2022). *The future of higher education: Takeaways from the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference 2022*. UNESCO Bangkok.<https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2009). UNDP on good governance. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 36(10), 1167-1180.
- United Nations. (2023). *The importance of joint development solutions and quality financing in the face of multiple crises*. Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, WFP and UN Women.
- UN ESCAP. (2015). Global and National Leadership in Good Governance. Implementing the 2030 Agenda: *The Challenge of Conflict*, 4(52).

