

Exploring Local Performance Governance Dynamics within Global Trends: The Cases of Japanese Large-Scale Private Universities

Research Overview

This study examines the linkage between medium-term planning and internal quality assurance in six large-scale Japanese private universities. By analyzing how these institutions align strategic management with academic governance, it identifies local governance models and challenges, contributing to the global discourse on university performance, accountability, and organizational transformation.

Purpose

In Japan, the 2020 revision of the Private School Act mandated the formulation of "Medium-Term Plans," accelerating the integration of university management and academic governance. This policy shift reflects a global trend where aligning strategic planning with internal quality assurance (IQA) is recognized as a critical challenge for enhancing organizational performance (e.g., ESG 2015; QQI 2024).

For large-scale private universities, which often manage complex organizations with numerous faculties and diverse stakeholders, balancing top-down strategic management with bottom-up academic autonomy is particularly difficult. This study aims to clarify the actual state of "Performance Governance" by examining how these large-scale institutions navigate the intersection of financial sustainability and educational quality assurance. By examining six institutions, the research explores the diversity of local adaptations and identifies the structural and cultural factors that hinder or facilitate effective governance in the Japanese context.

Methods

The study employs a qualitative comparative case study design, focusing on six large-scale private universities (defined as having over 10 faculties and 15,000 students). The research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with executive members and administrative staff at three pioneering institutions to develop a preliminary typology of governance models. The second phase expands this investigation to three additional universities to validate and refine these findings.

The analysis focuses on:

1. The structural and operational integration of medium-term plans and IQA cycles.
2. The strategic role of Institutional Research (IR) and the utilization of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in evidence-based decision-making.
3. The degree of "strategic" (forward-looking, flexible) versus "normative" (compliance-oriented, standardized) orientations in governance practices.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary analysis of the case studies reveals three distinct models of performance governance based on the degree of integration and strategic orientation:

1. **Integrated-Strategic Model:** This model demonstrates high alignment between financial planning, educational goals, and IQA. It utilizes a "rolling plan" system and IR-driven data (KPIs/KGIs) to dynamically update goals.
2. **Separated-Normative Model:** Here, IQA and medium-term planning operate under separate organizational structures to manage administrative complexity. While planning focuses on new "challenging" projects, IQA is maintained as a normative base for quality maintenance.
3. **Integrated-Normative Model:** This model prioritizes structural integration and simplicity. It emphasizes faculty understanding and operational efficiency over data-driven granularity, often aligning IQA with external accreditation standards.

The findings suggest that as Japanese universities adopt global management tools like KPIs, they face significant "local" challenges: ensuring continuity during leadership changes, securing specialized IR personnel, and mitigating the heavy administrative burden on faculty members. The discussion argues that successful performance governance requires not just structural alignment, but a cultural shift toward "Academic Governance" that respects educational values while achieving strategic accountability. By comparing these six cases, this study provides a nuanced perspective on how local innovations or dynamics in Japanese universities contribute to the global vision of university governance.

Keywords: Japanese private universities, performance governance, internal quality assurance (IQA), academic governance, institutional research (IR)