

Challenges of governance implementation through the Adoption of the Law of Universities in Saudi Higher Education

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Abstract

In 2020, the Saudi government issued the Law of Universities, which seeks to regulate the Saudi higher education sector and consider universities as non-profit public institutions. To achieve universities' administrative, financial and academic autonomy in accordance with the government's general policy, a number of councils that achieve governance were established. This paper examines the challenges of governance implementation in Saudi universities as an experience and a new concept in the context of Saudi higher education. A qualitative approach was selected, and the case study strategy was adopted for this study. The sample was limited to fifteen people. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with leaders of the Universities Affairs Council, the highest authority in Saudi higher education, and with presidents, vice presidents, deans, and members of the Board of Trustees in the two universities that implemented the law. These are Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal University and King Abdulaziz University. The data were analysed through a thematic analysis. The results indicate that there are challenges faced by Saudi universities in the implementation of governance, most notably lack of autonomy, the conflict between the Board of Trustees and the University Council, resistance to change, the implementation process needs more time, and the delay in issuing the executive regulations of the law by the University Affairs Council, which made universities unable to complete the governance procedures.

Keywords: Autonomy; Board of Trustees; Saudi Universities; Stakeholder; Transparency