

Ethics in Good Governance: A Study in the Context of the Administration of Public Universities in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to examine the role of ethics in establishing good governance. This study explores the importance of ethical principles in the governance of public universities, focusing on transparency, accountability, fairness, and the development of an ethical culture. But we know that the role of ethics in governance is very crucial, especially within the administration of public universities, where the intersection of education, management, and social responsibility creates a unique challenge for governance. The research analyzes how these ethical values influence decision-making processes, resource allocation and policy implementation within higher educational institutions. Pedagogically, it examines the implications of ethical governance on academic freedom, curriculum design, and student development, considering the extent to which ethical frameworks contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and responsive educational environment. Through a comparative analysis of governance models in selected public universities, the study investigates how the integration of ethical principles enhance the overall quality of leadership and administration, impacting faculty performance and student outcomes. Moreover, this research highlights the challenges of implementing ethical governance, including political interference, financial constraints, and lack of institutional autonomy. It argues that a well-defined ethical pedagogy, which promotes critical thinking, integrity, and responsible leadership, is essential to fostering ethical governance in public universities. Recommendations are made for institutional reforms that prioritize ethics in governance training for administrators, faculty, and students. By embedding ethical considerations into university governance structures and educational practices, public universities can better fulfill their societal role and contribute to national development.

Introduction

Ethics is the foundation of good governance, especially for institutions like public universities, which play a crucial role in a nation's intellectual, social and economic progress. However, the administration of public universities in Bangladesh faces various challenges on the path to ethical governance. These challenges include political interference, lack of accountability, bureaucratic inefficiency, absence of ethical training and resistance to reform. These issues not only diminish public trust but also hinder universities from fulfilling their core objectives of education, research and social development. In this context, administrative ethics has emerged as a vital framework to ensure that public universities function effectively by promoting justice, transparency and accountability. Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightens policy making; a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of the government accountable for its action; and a strong civil society participating in the public affairs; and all behaving under rule of law.¹ According to the World Bank, the core principles of good governance are transparency, accountability and participation, which are supported by strong ethical standards.² 'Good governance involves the self-organizing and interorganizational networks characterized by

interdependence, resource-exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state³. Henk Addink, in his book *Good Governance: Concept and Context*, described Good governance as the third cornerstone of a modern state alongside the concepts of the rule of law and democracy.⁴ Similarly, John Graham, Bruce Amos and Tim Plumptre, in their report *Principles for Good Governance in the 21st Century*, identified eight key characteristics of good governance: participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and adherence to the rule of law.⁵ Good governance is the exercise of economic, political, administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It encompasses mechanisms, process and institutions through which citizens' groups articulate their interests exercise their legal rights, meet their legal obligations.⁶

Administrative ethics forms the moral basis of decision-making in public administration. In Bangladesh's public universities, good governance depends on ethically guided leadership that serves the public interest. *Rosenbloom and Goldman* argue that administrative ethics provides public administrators with the moral compass needed to navigate complex governance challenges, ensuring that decisions are not only legally correct but also morally sound.⁷ This study explores ethical challenges in university governance, revealing how political interference and lack of accountability often undermine merit-based decisions and erode public trust. It argues that administrative ethics is essential not only in theory but also in practice, especially amid the political and financial pressures faced by universities. By examining perspectives of faculty, students, staff and retired administrators, the study highlights the need to strengthen ethical standards through reduced political influence, improved accountability and ethical training initiatives.

Literature Review

Administrative Ethics and Good Governance

Despite the above discussion, we can still say that 'Good governance means the effective management of a country's social and economic resource in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable equitable'⁸ 'Good governance is the exercise of economic, political, administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It encompasses mechanisms, process and institutions through which citizens' groups articulate their interests exercise their legal rights, meet their legal obligations.'⁹ Good governance refers to the effective, equitable and accountable management of public institutions, as outlined by the *World Bank*. Ethical administration is one of the central pillars of good governance, ensuring that public institutions act in the best interests of society.¹⁰ According to *Rosenbloom and Goldman*, administrative ethics provide a framework for public administrators to operate transparently and accountably, while maintaining a commitment to public service.¹¹

The Role of Ethics in Good Governance in the Administration of Public Universities in Bangladesh

The interrelationship between ethics and good governance is a crucial topic in contemporary public administration, particularly in the governance of higher education institutions. Public universities in Bangladesh are increasingly under scrutiny regarding their governance structures, making it essential to examine the role of ethics in promoting transparency, accountability and overall institutional integrity. Good governance is generally defined as the effective, accountable and ethical management of public resources and decision-making processes. Ethical principles such as transparency, accountability and justice are considered fundamental components of good governance. These principles ensure that governance processes serve the public interest rather than being influenced by personal or political agendas. Ethical governance is not merely about compliance with rules; rather, it involves fostering a culture of responsibility and fairness. Such a culture enhances trust among institutions and their stakeholders, which is particularly vital for public universities, where the expectations of students, faculty and society converge.

Challenges of Ethical Governance in Public Universities

Political Interference in University Administration

One of the biggest challenges to ethical governance in Bangladesh's public universities is political interference. The appointment of university officials, such as vice-chancellors and other senior administrators, is often influenced by political connections rather than merit. This process undermines institutional autonomy and makes it difficult for administrators to make decisions

based on ethical considerations. When politically affiliated individuals occupy leadership positions, university governance becomes susceptible to external political agendas, weakening the institution's commitment to ethical standards. Political interference also extends to student politics, where political parties often control student unions and influence decisions related to academic and administrative policies. Politically motivated decisions, such as admissions and faculty recruitment, compromise fairness and transparency in university governance. Krettek and others said, 'External members' domination of university councils further reinforces corporate governance practices and further subordinates academic governance'¹², while government-appointed or-related external members might increase the possibility of external political interference.¹³ To minimize this kind of interference, since 2010, Australian universities have banned current members of parliament and legislative assemblies from being members of university governing bodies¹⁴. This situation poses a direct threat to good governance, as decisions are no longer made in the best interests of the institution or its stakeholders but rather to serve political objectives.

Lack of Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability in Public Institutions and Universities Accountability in public institutions generally means continuous reliability and transparency in resolution. In the social sciences discourse, the concept of accountability has become a widely discussed topic and has gained popularity over the past few decades. Particularly in the public sphere, such as in universities, it is used with great significance. According to Melvin Dubnick's discourse analysis, accountability is a multi-layered and normative concept, where various definitions and descriptions are integrated. Another major challenge to ethical governance in Bangladesh's public universities is the lack of a strong accountability framework. Effective governance requires clear policies and procedures that compel administrators to be accountable for their actions. However, public universities in Bangladesh often suffer from a lack of institutional capacity to enforce accountability, leading to widespread mismanagement and corruption. Accountability has the potential to strengthen democracy, increase oversight, ensure greater justice, and enhance efficiency. Universities receive funding from public sources, and in some countries, such as the United States, they also receive significant private donations. As a result, there is considerable pressure to maintain financial transparency. The public has the right to know how universities are spending their funds, necessitating the establishment of various institutions and mechanisms to ensure financial accountability. Since the late twentieth century, conventional notions of university autonomy and academic freedom have been challenged by new management trends, which have been used to reform public sectors globally.¹⁵ In Hong Kong, this issue has taken the form of a debate over how to balance public universities' accountability to government funders with the protection of institutional autonomy against external, particularly political, interference.¹⁶

There has been growing government and public interest in institutionalizing and strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of universities to society¹⁷, shifting the concept of university autonomy from one stressing professional autonomy and public trust in the institution, to one emphasizing performativity and subordinating the institution to regulatory frameworks and monitoring and assessment processes prescribed by governments and funding agencies.¹⁸ Without accountability, administrators have little incentive to adhere to ethical guidelines or correct unethical behavior. The absence of accountability is further exacerbated by weak oversight from external bodies, such as the University Grants Commission (UGC). Although the UGC is responsible for overseeing universities to ensure adherence to national regulations and ethical standards, its limited resources and lack of authority over university governance render it ineffective. Consequently, unethical practices such as financial mismanagement and favoritism often escape scrutiny, contributing to a culture of impunity within public universities.

Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Corruption

The bureaucratic structure of Bangladesh's public universities often creates inefficiencies that hinder ethical governance. Complex administrative processes, a lack of clear decision-making, and slow policy implementation make it difficult to maintain transparency and integrity in university operations. According to Trowler and Knight, political actors, when involved in university

decision-making processes, often prioritize their own interests over the educational mission of institutions.¹⁹ This form of interference is commonly seen in the appointment or election of university leaders, where political affiliations or connections can outweigh professional qualifications and academic achievements.

Many believe that bureaucratic delays often create opportunities for corruption, where administrators abuse their power for personal gain. One form of corruption in university administration is nepotism and political bias. The lack of transparency in appointments, promotions and administrative decision-making creates opportunities for corruption (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2022). University governance corruption not only impacts financial resources but also damages academic standards and student outcomes. Bureaucratic inefficiency is closely tied to a patronage system, where university officials prioritize loyalty over merit in administrative appointments. This patronage system weakens meritocracy and hinders the development of a professional and ethical administrative culture. In such an environment, administrators are more likely to engage in unethical practices, as they are not selected based on their commitment to ethical governance.

Insufficient Ethical Training for Administrators

A major challenge for ethical governance in Bangladesh's public universities is the lack of ethical training for administrators. To effectively implement an ethical governance system, administrators need a strong understanding of ethical principles and the ability to apply them in complex situations. However, most university administrators in Bangladesh have not received formal training on ethics or good governance, which limits their capacity to make ethically sound decisions. The absence of ethical training programs in public universities further exacerbates unethical behavior, as administrators are often unaware of the ethical implications of their actions. However, James F. Keenan emphasizes that creating and supporting a culture of professional ethical discourse, mandating ethical training, and requiring ethical accountability ought not to be seen, then, as inimical to the interests of the church or her mission, but rather constitutive of it.²⁰ As Yale University's Wayne Meeks notes in *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*: "Making morals means making community"²¹. Some argue that without proper ethical guidance, even well-intentioned administrators may unintentionally engage in actions that violate ethical standards.

Building citizen trust through transparent process and accountability and democratic dialogue is vital and been accepted in many countries. In France and Norway there has been increased attention to clarify and reinforce citizens' legal rights. The citizen is finally back as the source of inspiration for new policy developments in many European and North American countries. Human dimension involves substantial investment on public servants mostly in the area of training. Along with training emphasis is on effective knowledge management and fast-track mobility for the best and the brightest in the public service.²² Therefore, it is essential to establish comprehensive ethical training programs for administrators in Bangladesh's public universities to foster a culture of ethical governance.

Resistance to Ethical Reforms

Finally, resistance to ethical reform is a significant obstacle that hinders the improvement of governance in public universities. Many senior administrators and professors benefit from the existing system, as factors like political patronage, lack of accountability and bureaucratic inefficiency allow them to remain in positions of power without being held to high ethical standards. As noted by Berdahl, academic integrity is closely linked to the perception that decisions are made based on merit, not political favoritism. When political considerations override qualifications, it sends a damaging signal to faculty and students that merit is secondary to political allegiance, thus discouraging academic excellence and professionalism.²³

This resistance becomes even more intense due to the lack of political will at the national level to implement comprehensive governance reforms in higher education. Altbach argues that political interference diminishes this autonomy, transforming universities into extensions of the political sphere. In such environments, academic leaders may feel pressured to conform to political

ideologies, thereby limiting their ability to make decisions that are in the best interests of the institution. These compromises the university's ability to serve as an independent and objective body focused on knowledge production and dissemination.²⁴ As a result, ethical reforms are delayed or weakened, making it difficult to address the root causes of unethical governance in public universities.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection. A survey was conducted to analyze the role of ethics in establishing good governance in the administration of Bangladesh's public universities. A total of 570 participants, including teachers, students, officials and staff, took part in the survey. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 senior university administrators to gain deeper insights into their perspectives on administrative ethics and governance. The survey focused on measuring transparency, accountability and ethical decision-making in university administration, while the interviews provided an opportunity to explore the challenges and ethical dilemmas faced by administrators in greater depth.

Results

1. Role of Ethics

The first question asked, *"Do you think ethics plays a role in establishing good governance in public university administration?"* A significant 92.63% of respondents answered *yes*, strongly indicating that ethics is widely recognized as crucial for good governance.

2. Importance of Ethics

Regarding the question, *"How much importance is given to ethics in administrative activities of public universities?"*, 38.25% of respondents answered *low*, and 15.26% answered *very low*, highlighting that the majority believe ethics is not given adequate priority in university administration.

3. Reflection of Ethical Principles in Administrative Policies

In response to *"Do you think ethical principles of good governance are properly reflected in the administrative policies of public universities?"*, 41.05% answered *no* and 51.75% answered *partially*, indicating that ethical principles are still not effectively implemented.

4. Ethical Behavior of Administrative Officials

When asked, *"How visible is the tendency of administrative officials to adhere to ethical standards?"*, 49.30% of respondents answered *low*, and 19.30% answered *very low*, reflecting a significant lack of ethical behavior among administrative officials.

5. Ethical and Transparent Decision-Making

On the question, *"Do you think administrative decisions are made based on ethics and transparency?"*, 35.96% answered *no*, while 55.61% answered *partially*, indicating a notable deficiency or limitation in ethical decision-making.

6. Major Barriers to Good Governance

When asked about the main obstacles to implementing good governance, respondents identified:

- Corruption – 71.75%
- Political influence – 78.77%
- Lack of transparency – 51.05%
- Lack of accountability – 71.93%
- Lack of ethical education – 45.96%

7. Accountability

On the question, *"Do you think public university administrative officials and staff work responsibly?"*, 41.93% answered *no*, highlighting a lack of responsibility among administrators.

8. Ethics and Administrative Standards

In response to *"To what extent do you believe the public university administration follows ethical standards?"*, 43.68% answered *low*, indicating a significant lack of ethics in university administration.

9. Need for Ethical Training

When asked, *"Do you think training is necessary to improve the ethical standards of teachers, officials, and staff?"*, 89.12% of respondents answered *yes*, strongly emphasizing the importance of administrative ethical training.

10. Need for an Ethical Training Institution

Lastly, in response to *"Do you feel the need for an institution dedicated to ethical training?"*, 77.72% of respondents answered *yes*, confirming the necessity of establishing an ethical training institution.

Review and Recommendations

The research findings clearly demonstrate a significant gap between the understanding of ethics in public university administration and its effective implementation. Participants acknowledged the crucial role of ethics; however, various challenges, including political influence, corruption, lack of transparency and lack of accountability, hinder progress in establishing administrative ethics and good governance. To address these issues, we propose the following recommendations:

1. **Enhancing Institutional Autonomy:** Public universities should be granted greater autonomy to protect them from political influence, allowing administrators to make decisions based on ethical principles.
2. **Ethical Training Programs:** Universities must implement mandatory ethical training programs for administrative personnel to ensure awareness and commitment to good governance and ethical practices.
3. **Establishing Accountability and Transparency:** An independent accountability body should be formed to ensure that university administration adheres to ethical standards.
4. **Reducing Political Influence:** Effective laws and policies should be adopted to minimize political interference in university administration, thereby strengthening the foundation of good governance.

Conclusion

This research provides an in-depth analysis of the importance and necessity of ethical governance in the administration of public universities in Bangladesh. These institutions are not merely centers of higher education; they are vital pillars shaping the nation's future. Ethical governance within these institutions is a crucial element of overall good governance. The findings reveal a deep-rooted crisis within the administrative structure of public universities, stemming from a lack of ethics and poor governance. A notable 92.63% of participants agreed that ethical administration is essential for effective governance. However, the study also highlights significant obstacles—such as political interference, corruption, lack of transparency, and inadequate accountability. These issues pose serious challenges to the promotion of ethical standards in university governance. Therefore, ethical reform must not be confined to administrative policies alone. A broader transformation is required—across education, culture, and societal consciousness. Through collective efforts from administrators, faculty, students, and policymakers, it is possible to build a transparent, accountable, and ethically sound administrative system. If the recommendations of this study are effectively implemented—such as reducing political influence, ensuring transparency, offering ethical training, and strengthening policy frameworks—public universities in Bangladesh can become exemplary models of national development guided by the principles of ethical governance.

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