

HYBRID GOVERNANCE OF RELIGIOUS-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION WITH LIMITED AUTONOMY AND DUAL MERITOCRACY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MUHAMMADIYAH IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study examines how faith-based higher education institutions navigate the tension between academic autonomy and centralized ideological control within the Muhammadiyah higher education network. It employs a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design. Data consist of university statutes from four Muhammadiyah universities: Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, and Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah Sorong, as well as the central Internal Quality Audit (AMI) rubric. Data were collected through documentation, supported by interviews with university leaders and quality assurance units, as well as limited observations of governance practices. Data sources include both primary and secondary materials. Analysis was conducted using qualitative procedures involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal a hybrid governance configuration in which academic functions are decentralized to support flexibility, while strategic decision-making and resource control remain centrally coordinated. Three key dimensions emerge: constrained autonomy, dual meritocracy, and the bureaucratization of ideological values within quality assurance systems. These results indicate that institutional autonomy is structurally bounded by formalized ideological commitments. The study proposes a multi-polar governance model that integrates academic excellence with organizational identity, enabling coherence across a large and geographically dispersed higher education network.

Keywords

Higher Education Governance, Faith-Based Institutions, Muhammadiyah, Institutional Autonomy, Quality Assurance.



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INTRODUCTION

The governance of higher education institutions has undergone significant transformation in response to globalization, market competition, and increasing demands for accountability (Austin & Jones, 2018) (Maassen & Cloete, 2006). One of the emerging patterns in this transformation is the rise of hybrid governance (King, 2007), in which universities combine elements of state regulation, market orientation, and internal organizational control (De Boer et al., 2007); (Ferlie et al., 2008); (Osborne, 2010). In this context, universities are no longer purely autonomous academic institutions but are increasingly shaped by multiple institutional logics that influence decision-making processes and organizational structures (Scott, 2014); (Jongbloed, 2015). This trend is particularly visible in faith-based higher education systems, where academic governance must also accommodate religious values and ideological commitments (Fitriana, 2019); (Nuryatno, 2019).

In Indonesia, Muhammadiyah represents one of the largest Islamic organizations managing higher education institutions, with more than 160 universities across the country. This extensive network positions Muhammadiyah as a key actor in the national higher education system, particularly in expanding access and promoting value-based education (Rosser, 2018; Azra, 2015). However, the governance of Muhammadiyah universities is characterized by a distinctive hybrid model that integrates institutional autonomy with centralized organizational control. While universities are granted operational independence, strategic authority remains under the influence of the Muhammadiyah central board through structures such as the Majelis Diktilitbang and the Badan Pembina Harian (BPH). This condition reflects what scholars describe as “limited autonomy,” where institutional decision-making is partially constrained by external governance structures (Enders et al., 2013); (T. Christensen, 2011). As a result, universities must continuously negotiate between academic freedom, organizational control, and ideological alignment.

The complexity of this governance model is further intensified by the implementation of dual meritocracy within Muhammadiyah higher education institutions. On the one hand, universities are required to meet global academic standards, including research productivity, accreditation performance, and professional qualifications, as part of the broader trend toward world-class higher education (Altbach, 2016); (Altbach & Salmi, 2011); (Hardjaloka, 2014). On the other hand, they must also ensure adherence to Islamic values through *Al-Islam* and *Kemuhammadiyah* (AIK), which are embedded in recruitment, promotion, and evaluation systems. This dual system reflects the coexistence of academic merit and ideological merit, where performance is assessed not only based

on scholarly achievements but also on religious commitment and organizational loyalty. While such an approach may strengthen institutional identity and moral accountability, it also raises critical concerns regarding fairness, transparency, and professional standards in higher education governance (Bromley & Powell, 2012a).

Ideally, the integration of limited autonomy and dual meritocracy should produce a governance system that balances institutional accountability with value-based integrity (Brewer et al., 2015); (Demmke, 2024); (Johnson et al., 2026). However, this balance is not always easy to achieve. Limited autonomy may enhance organizational coherence but can potentially restrict innovation and responsiveness, especially in a competitive global environment (S. M. Christensen, 2015). Similarly, dual meritocracy may promote ethical values but risks creating ambiguity in performance evaluation if not supported by clear and measurable indicators. These challenges highlight a fundamental academic problem: how to design a governance model that harmonizes autonomy, meritocracy, and ideological control without compromising academic excellence. Despite extensive studies on higher education governance, most existing research tends to examine autonomy, governance, or meritocracy separately, rather than as an integrated system (De Boer et al., 2007); (Enders et al., 2013).

To address this gap, this study conducts a comparative qualitative document analysis of governance frameworks (statutes) from four Muhammadiyah universities: Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS), Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta (UMJ), Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya (UM Surabaya), and Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah (UNIMUDA) Sorong. These institutions represent diverse geographical and sociological contexts, ranging from established educational centers in Java to developing institutions in Eastern Indonesia. The analysis is complemented by the examination of the AMI Rubric issued by the Majelis Diktilitbang as a central quality assurance instrument that standardizes governance practices across Muhammadiyah universities.

Previous studies have provided valuable insights into higher education governance and meritocracy. De Boer et al. (2007) and Ferlie et al. (2008) emphasize the shift toward hybrid governance in modern universities. Enders et al. (2013) highlight the implications of limited autonomy on institutional performance, while Christensen (2011) questions the effectiveness of increased autonomy in improving governance outcomes. Bromley and Powell (2012) further show that organizational practices often experience “decoupling,” where formal structures do not always

align with actual implementation. However, these studies do not specifically address how hybrid governance operates within faith-based higher education systems that incorporate strong ideological dimensions. Moreover, research on Islamic higher education (Nuryatno, 2019); (Fitriana, 2019); (Irna Prayetno, 2025) tends to focus on historical and sociological aspects rather than governance mechanisms.

Based on this review, a significant research gap can be identified. There is limited scholarly attention to how hybrid governance, limited autonomy, and dual meritocracy interact simultaneously within formal institutional frameworks, particularly in large-scale faith-based higher education networks such as Muhammadiyah. Furthermore, the use of institutional statutes as primary data for analyzing governance structures remains underexplored. Therefore, this study offers three main contributions: (1) developing an integrated conceptual model of hybrid governance that connects autonomy and ideological control, (2) elaborating the concept of dual meritocracy within formal governance structures, and (3) providing empirical evidence through comparative document analysis across multiple Muhammadiyah universities.

Specifically, this study aims to analyze how governance structures in Muhammadiyah universities construct power relations between institutional actors, balance academic and ideological meritocracy, and translate religious values into measurable quality assurance indicators. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of higher education governance studies by offering an integrated analytical framework that connects hybrid governance, limited autonomy, and dual meritocracy. Practically, this study provides strategic insights for policymakers in designing governance systems that are both accountable and adaptive, particularly in translating ideological values into auditable institutional mechanisms within faith-based higher education systems.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach focusing on “Hybrid Governance in Faith-Based Higher Education: Limited Autonomy and Dual Meritocracy in Muhammadiyah Universities.” The research data consist of governance-related information, including institutional authority structures, human resource policies, and quality assurance mechanisms derived from official documents such as university statutes (*Statuta*) of Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS), Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta (UMJ), Universitas

Muhammadiyah Surabaya (UM Surabaya), and Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah (UNIMUDA) Sorong, as well as the Internal Quality Audit Rubric (AMI) issued by the Majelis Diktilitbang Muhammadiyah. Additional data were obtained from interviews, observations, and supporting institutional documents to enrich contextual understanding.

Data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including university leaders (rectors or vice-rectors), members of the Board of Trustees (BPH), and quality assurance unit staff, to explore governance practices and ideological implementation. Observations were carried out from January to March 2025 at the selected Muhammadiyah universities to examine institutional practices related to governance processes, academic activities, and the implementation of AIK values within the campus environment. Documentation involved collecting and analyzing formal institutional documents such as statutes, internal regulations, and quality assurance reports. The data sources, therefore, include both primary data (interviews and observations) and secondary data (official documents and institutional reports).

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive-analytical method following the framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher performed a critical analysis of governance structures, power relations, and meritocracy practices using relevant theoretical frameworks on hybrid governance and institutional theory. Furthermore, the findings were compared and contextualized with previous studies to identify patterns, discrepancies, and the unique characteristics of Muhammadiyah higher education governance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings are derived from systematic thematic coding and cross-case comparison of institutional statutes. This section presents the findings organized into three interrelated dimensions: (1) power structure and constrained autonomy, (2) value-based human resource governance, and (3) the institutionalization of ideology through formal governance mechanisms. Together, these dimensions reveal a distinctive hybrid governance configuration characterized by the dynamic balance between academic decentralization and ideological centralization. A comprehensive summary of these cross-case findings is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Cross-Case Thematic Comparison Hybrid Governance in Religious-Based Higher Education: Limited Autonomy and Dual Meritocracy of the University of Muhammadiyah in Indonesia

No	Dimension	Central Standard	UMS	UMJ	UM Surabaya	UNIMUDA
1	Authority of BPH	Mandatory central proxy	Strong executive control	Strong executive control	Strong strategic influence	Predominantly supervisory
2	Rector Selection Mechanism	Central prerogative	Semi-centralized	Multi-layered filtering	Multi-layered filtering	Highly centralized
3	Authority of the Academic Senate	Strictly academic domain only	Strictly normative	Normative with political influence	Normative with political influence	Strictly normative
4	Ideological Recruitment Criteria	Mandatory AIK & NBM	Highly restrictive	Highly restrictive	Highly restrictive	Context-adaptive
5	Employment Stratification	Promote cadre dominance	Dual-track system	Dual-track system	Dual-track with structural privilege	Hybrid/integrative
6	Dismissal Authority	Centralized sanctions	BPH-controlled	BPH-controlled	BPH-controlled	Layered mechanism
7	Caturdharma Framework	Mandatory	Fully integrated	Fully integrated	Fully integrated	Adaptively integrated
8	AIK Institutional Structures	Required unit	Strong independent unit	Strong independent unit	Strong independent unit	Proportional unit
9	AIK in Quality Assurance	Mandatory evaluation	Highly quantified	Highly quantified	Highly quantified	Moderately quantified

Source: Authors' thematic coding based on university statutes and AMI documents (2026).

Constrained Autonomy and Power Structure

The results of the analysis of the four statutes show that there is a relatively uniform pattern of governance, where the autonomy of the institution at the university level remains within the clear limits of the central authority of Muhammadiyah. This pattern can be seen especially in the power relationship between the Daily Supervisory Board (BPH), the rector, and the senate. BPH is consistently positioned as the main actor who has control over strategic aspects, especially in financial management and human resource decision-making. At UMS and UMJ, this role is seen to be very strong, including direct executive control, while at UM Surabaya, the influence is more prominent in the strategic direction. In contrast, at UNIMUDA Sorong, the role of BPH tends to be more supervisory than direct intervention.

On the other hand, academic authority is delegated to the university senate, but with strict limits. In all cases, the senate functions as a normative institution that regulates academic policies, curriculum, and internal quality standards. However, the Senate does not have the authority to make strategic decisions or manage institutional resources. In UMS and UNIMUDA, the role of the senate is relatively limited to normative academic functions, while in UMJ and UM Surabaya, there are indications of wider involvement in the decision-making process, although it remains within structural limits.

The tension between autonomy and central control is most evident in the chancellor election mechanism. Although there is room for the senate to conduct the initial selection and selection of candidates, the final decision remains with the central authority of Muhammadiyah. UMS shows a semi-decentralized pattern, where local processes still have a significant role to play before the final decision. Meanwhile, UMJ and UM Surabaya implemented a layered mechanism that involved an additional screening process at the regional level. At UNIMUDA, the selection process tends to be more centralized with limited local discretionary space. This pattern suggests that institutional leadership is controlled through a selection mechanism that combines academic considerations and organizational alignment.

Dual Meritocracy in Human Resource Governance

The findings of the study show that human resource governance at the four universities is not only based on academic qualifications, but also integrates ideological aspects as part of the assessment process. At the recruitment stage, UMS, UMJ, and UM Surabaya consistently set strict requirements related to attachment to Muhammadiyah, such as the ownership of the Muhammadiyah Standard Number (NBM), passing the AIK selection, and involvement in organizational activities. This shows that the selection process not only assesses professional competence, but also the suitability of values with the organization.

In contrast to the three universities, UNIMUDA Sorong shows a more adaptive approach to the local context. The ideological requirements remain, but they are formulated in a more flexible manner by emphasizing commitment to the values of Muhammadiyah without the need for formal attachment from the beginning. This approach reflects an adjustment to more diverse social conditions, without eliminating the identity of the institution.

The staffing structure at the four universities also shows a layered pattern. UMS and UMJ implement a two-track system that distinguishes between permanent employees of the Association

and non-permanent employees. UM Surabaya adopts a similar pattern, but with additional structural privileges for employees who occupy strategic positions. Meanwhile, UNIMUDA developed a more integrative model, with less rigid boundaries between employee categories. These differences show variations in how access to structural positions is regulated.

In addition, the authority to dismiss employees tends to be centralized. At UMS, UMJ, and UM Surabaya, the decision to dismiss employees remains under the control of BPH, so the rector does not have full authority in this matter. Instead, UNIMUDA implements a layered mechanism involving more than one level of authority before a final decision is taken. This shows that human resource management is not entirely at the university level, but remains connected to the central structure.

Ideological Institutionalization through Quality Assurance

The results of the analysis show that ideological values in Muhammadiyah are systematically institutionalized through policy frameworks and organizational mechanisms. One of the most tangible forms is the integration of AIK as part of the Caturdharma, which officially complements the Tridharma of the college. The four universities consistently include AIK as a mandatory element in academic and non-academic activities, so that all institutional activities have a structured value dimension.

The strengthening of these values is also seen through the establishment of a special unit responsible for the implementation of the AIK program. UMS, UMJ, and UM Surabaya have units that stand independently and function actively in managing ideological programs at the university level. Meanwhile, UNIMUDA still has a similar structure, but with a more proportionate approach and integrated with other units. This suggests that although the institutional structure is relatively uniform, there is variation in the level of reinforcement and the approach to implementation.

Furthermore, AIK values do not only stop at the normative level, but are also integrated into the internal quality assurance system. At UMS, UMJ, and UM Surabaya, these values are translated into measurable indicators and become part of the evaluation of institutional performance. Meanwhile, at UNIMUDA, the integration is still carried out, but with a more moderate level of quantification. Thus, the entire university shows that ideological values have not only become a symbolic identity, but have been operationalized in a structured evaluation system.

Discussion

The discussion of hybrid governance in Muhammadiyah higher education shows that the concept of institutional autonomy cannot be understood singularly as full decentralization. The findings of this study show that autonomy is actually constructed within clear boundaries through the distribution of authority between central and local actors. From an organizational perspective, this can be understood through a framework of limited rationality that emphasizes that decision-making within an organization is always within the boundaries of certain structures and controls, as described in *Organizations*. These findings suggest that limiting autonomy is not a weakness, but rather an organizational strategy to maintain consistency of direction and institutional stability.

In an institutional framework, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities* asserts that organizations are shaped by the interaction between regulations, norms, and culture. The findings of this study show that the governance of Muhammadiyah is greatly influenced by the normative dimension, where ideological values are the basis for determining the structure and practice of the organization. This is in line with research showing that religious-based educational institutions tend to maintain central control to maintain value legitimacy (Glanzer & others, 2011); (Wilhoit & Dettoni, 2017); (James, 2017); (J. A. Carpenter & others, 2016); (R. E. Carpenter et al., 2023). Thus, autonomy in this context is not value-free, but is constructed within a strong ideological framework.

When compared to higher education governance studies in general, these findings indicate an important shift. Previous research emphasized that increased autonomy correlates with improved institutional performance (Estermann & Nokkala, 2011); (Pruvot & Estermann, 2017). However, in the context of Muhammadiyah, the findings show that central control is maintained to maintain organizational harmony. Other studies have also shown that in non-Western higher education systems, autonomy is often limited and contextually negotiated (Mok & Jiang, 2017); (Welch, 2012). Therefore, these findings reinforce the argument that the concept of autonomy is contextual and cannot be universally generalized.

In the human resource dimension, the findings on dual meritocracy show that the assessment system is not only based on academic achievement, but also on the conformity of values. From the perspective of classical meritocracy as described in *The Rise of Meritocracy*, merit is understood as the result of individual abilities and efforts. However, in this context, merit is extended to two interrelated dimensions, namely academic competence and ideological loyalty. This shows that the

meritocratic system in value-based organizations has different characteristics compared to secular institutions.

These findings are in line with research on value-based human resource management that shows that organizations with strong identities tend to integrate value across the entire staffing cycle (Boxall & Purcell, 2016); (Paauwe, 2009). In addition, other studies have also shown that in faith-based organizations, organizational loyalty is often an important factor in promotion and leadership (Parboteeah & others, 2009); (Tracey, 2012). However, this research makes a new contribution by showing that such integration is not only cultural, but also formally institutionalized in structures and regulations.

In the aspect of institutionalization of values, the findings of the study show that AIK values have been systematically integrated into the governance framework through Caturdharma and the quality assurance system. From the perspective of modern governance, the New Public Governance explains that public organizations are increasingly relying on performance-based evaluation systems. These findings show that Muhammadiyah adopts this approach by including ideological values as part of performance indicators. Thus, grades not only serve as norms, but also as a measurable evaluation tool.

When compared to previous research, this approach represents an important transformation in the way values are institutionalized. Previous studies have shown that organizational values often experience a separation between formal structures and actual practices (Amis et al., 2002); (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, in this context, values are integrated directly into the formal system, thus reducing the distance between norms and practices. This shows that religious-based institutions have the capacity to internalize values more systematically than secular organizations.

Furthermore, these findings are also related to the concept of hybridity in organizational governance. Studies of hybrid organizations show that modern institutions often incorporate a variety of different logics, such as the logic of markets, countries, and communities (Battilana & Lee, 2014); (Pache & Santos, 2013). In the context of Muhammadiyah, this hybridity can be seen from the combination of global academic logic and religious ideological logic. This shows that governance is no longer single, but rather the result of the interaction of various interests and values.

Based on the overall findings, the author argues that Muhammadiyah's governance reflects a hybrid model that is multipolar, where authority is strategically distributed between central and local actors. These findings challenge the classic dichotomy between centralization and

decentralization by showing that the two can run simultaneously in a single system. As an antithesis to the dominant view, this study shows that too broad autonomy without value control has the potential to weaken institutional identity, while too strong control can stifle innovation. Therefore, a balance between limited autonomy and ideological control is key in maintaining the sustainability and relevance of religious-based higher education in the midst of global dynamics.

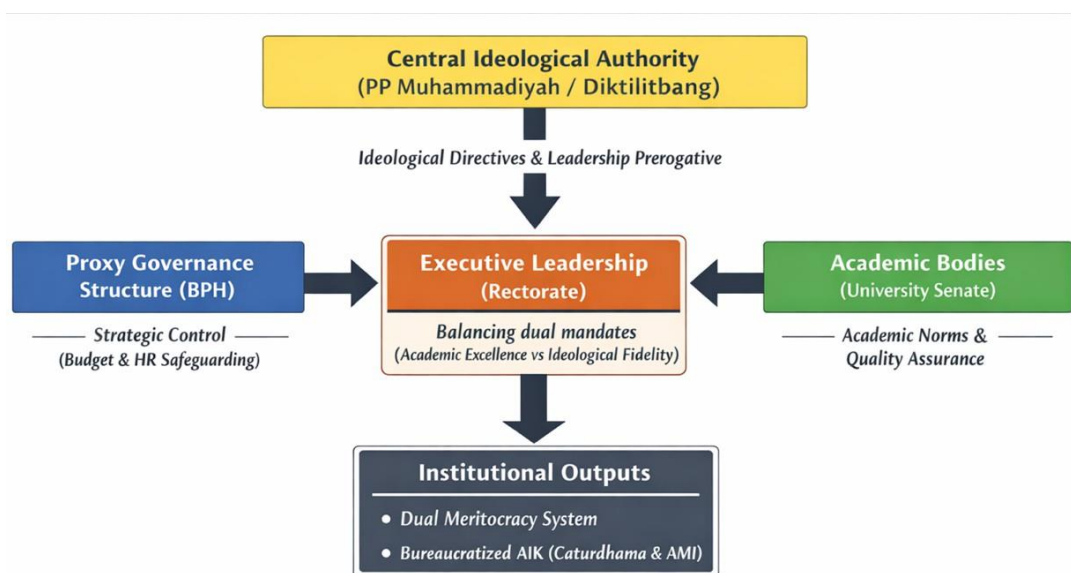


Figure 1. The Multi-Polar Hybrid Governance Model in Muhammadiyah Higher Education.

The patterns suggest the presence of a multi-polar governance structure, in which authority is strategically distributed across four interdependent domains:

- Central Muhammadiyah Authority, which defines the doctrinal direction, safeguards the founding identity, and holds ultimate executive decision-making power.
- Proxy Governance Structures (BPH), which operationalize organizational oversight directly at the campus level, functioning as institutional umbrellas over resource allocation and human resource safeguarding.
- Academic Bodies (University Senates), which retain highly bounded autonomy over academic norms, curriculum design, and knowledge production.
- Executive Leadership (Rectorate), which functions as an intermediary agent constantly navigating and balancing the competing demands of global academic standards and organizational directives.

Rather than operating in a strict top-down hierarchy, these elements interact dynamically, creating a system of controlled decentralization (Mookherjee, 2006); (Badran & Badran, 2020). This

model advances contemporary governance theory by offering a robust alternative to binary frameworks that position centralization and decentralization as mutually exclusive opposing forces. It demonstrates how these dynamics can be simultaneously institutionalized to produce organizational stability and ideological continuity. The theoretical implications of this multi-polar model provide broader insights for understanding governance in other faith-based higher education networks globally, particularly in the Global South, where balancing modernization with identity preservation remains a critical challenge.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that governance in Muhammadiyah higher education institutions is characterized by a hybrid configuration in which institutional autonomy operates within clearly defined structural boundaries. Academic authority is decentralized through university senates to support educational functions, while strategic decision-making, financial control, and human resource authority remain closely coordinated by the central Muhammadiyah structure through the BPH. This arrangement demonstrates that autonomy is not exercised as full independence, but as a controlled and conditional space that ensures institutional alignment with organizational values.

Furthermore, the study finds that governance is reinforced through a dual meritocracy system that integrates academic competence with ideological alignment, alongside the systematic institutionalization of values through formal structures and quality assurance mechanisms. The proposed multi-polar governance model highlights the dynamic interaction between central authority, proxy governance, academic bodies, and executive leadership in maintaining both academic performance and organizational coherence. Overall, the findings indicate that faith-based higher education institutions are able to integrate global academic standards with value-based commitments through a structured and adaptive governance framework.

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