

Governance Practices and Administrative Autonomy in LGU-Managed Higher Education Institutions in Bohol: Toward a Governance Framework for Institutional Development

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Abstract

This study examined governance practices and administrative autonomy in Local Government Unit-managed higher education institutions in Bohol and proposed an Integrated Governance and Administrative Autonomy Framework for institutional development. Anchored on Decentralization Theory, Network Governance Theory, and Berdahl's Autonomy Theory, the research employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design. Data were gathered through an adapted survey questionnaire administered to 157 teaching, administrative, support, and research personnel from nine LGU-managed colleges selected via convenience sampling. Descriptive statistics and Spearman Rank-Order Correlation were used for analysis. Governance practices were very highly implemented overall, with academic governance strongest and decision-making processes comparatively lower. Administrative autonomy was exercised to a great extent, strongest in human resource management and strategic planning but more constrained in financial management. Institutional development was high overall, with academic program development and student support services strongest and facilities and learning resources weakest. Significant strong positive relationships existed between governance practices and institutional development, and between administrative autonomy and institutional development. The findings confirm that effective governance and sufficient autonomy are critical drivers of institutional growth, though participatory decision-making, financial flexibility, and physical resources require strengthening. The study recommends adoption of the proposed Integrated Governance and Administrative Autonomy Framework to balance autonomy with accountability, enhance participatory mechanisms, improve financial coordination with LGUs, and institutionalize continuous monitoring and evaluation. The research advances Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education and Sustainable Development Goal 16 on strong institutions by clarifying how local higher education governance and autonomy support accessible, accountable, and responsive tertiary education. It contributes to institutional, educational, governance, and community sustainability by providing an evidence-based framework that strengthens local colleges' capacity to deliver quality programs, develop human capital, and align with local development priorities.

Keywords: Administrative Autonomy; Governance Practices; Institutional Development; LGU-Managed Higher Education Institutions; Local Universities and Colleges; Province of Bohol; Participatory Governance; Strategic Planning; Transparency and Accountability

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to deliver high quality, efficient, and socially responsive services amid rapid global changes. As demands for accountability, transparency, and performance continue to rise, governance has become a central factor in determining whether institutions succeed or fail in achieving their mandates. Weak governance systems often lead to inefficiencies in decision-making, resource mismanagement, and declining institutional performance, while strong governance structures promote sustainability, quality assurance, and institutional growth. Globally, higher education governance has shifted toward decentralization and performance-based management. However, studies show that many institutions still struggle with balancing autonomy and accountability. UNESCO (2024) reports that while governance reforms aim to improve institutional effectiveness, many developing education systems continue to experience fragmented leadership structures, weak policy implementation, and limited administrative capacity. Asia faces the same problems as other countries. Autonomy models introduced by Asian countries still do not allow institutions to use governance changes to achieve improvements in academic quality. In several higher education systems, institutional leaders report constrained decision-making authority, inconsistent funding mechanisms, and weak alignment between governance policies and institutional development goals. These issues highlight a persistent gap between governance reform intentions and actual institutional outcomes.

The development of access to tertiary education in the Philippines has taken place using various institutional structures, such as State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), Private Higher learning institutions, and Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs). LUCs are funded and managed by local government units (LGUs) under local ordinances, and the key aim is to reduce the inequality of access to education at the municipal levels. Unlike the SUCs which operate under a national charter and are governed by the Higher Education Modernization Act of 1997, LUCs operate within a more decentralized system of governance where administrative control, administrative funding mechanisms and policy orientations are highly joined up with the local political institutions. As such, this systems arrangement places LUCs in the nexus of education administration and city governance, which makes them particularly vulnerable to the changes in political leadership and financial agenda. One of the central issues in the management of LUCs is administrative autonomy which is closely related to governance practices. When higher education institutions follow sound governance rules, they may run their schools well and give their students a decent education. But if autonomy do not have effective governance, the flexibility they give to make decisions could be abused, leading to difficulties inside the organization and bad effects for stakeholders, including students (Nonsiri, 2025).

In Bohol, where several LUCs operate under different LGU governance arrangements, understanding these dynamics is particularly important. The impact of administrative autonomy and practice of governance on institutional advancement is an important issue for college managers, government leaders, and other decision-makers wishing to enhance their understanding of the issues related to improving efficiency and sustainability of local institutions. Therefore, this practice-based study aims to quantitatively examine governance practices and administrative autonomy with the end view of proposing an Integrated Governance and Administrative Autonomy Framework for LGU-Managed Higher Education Institutions which would be beneficial to serve as a guide in improving institutional operations and aligning educational goals with local priorities in the institution.

Recent global academic achievements show that higher education governance is no longer understood just as a formal organizational framework, but it is interpreted as a system affecting the quality of institutions, public accountability, strategic orientation, and socio-economic impacts. Chankseliani et al. (2021) have noted that higher education can make a contribution to local and global development, but at the same time, they stressed that limited academic freedom in universities and low levels of institutional autonomy might prevent the full realization of that contribution.

Global empirical studies also show that autonomy is closely linked to institutional performance, although its effects are not always uniform. Studies by Al Gharsi et al. (2024) indicate that the independent functionality of universities in terms of their strategy creation and institutions operation has its favorable impact on the improvement of university performance. Similarly, according to research by Hieu and Niem (2024), autonomy plays a positive role when it comes to institutions in Vietnam in terms of promoting their sustainability and effectiveness at universities. In a lot of countries, institutions have stopped using strict hierarchies and turned to shared governance, where administrators, academics, and other stakeholders share duties. This trend is in line with what is being said in higher education literature on how governance needs to be adaptable and able to alter with changes in society, the economy, globalization, and technology (Muftahu, 2023). However, Painsi et al. (2025) found that the effects of autonomy across European higher education institutions were often minor and, in some cases, contradictory, which suggests that autonomy alone is not enough unless it is supported by capable leadership, internal systems, and organizational readiness. This is important to the present study because it suggests that administrative autonomy should be examined not in isolation but together with governance practices and institutional outcomes.

Governance studies also show that the quality of decision-making and service outcomes is connected to accountability, autonomy, transparency, and academic freedom. According to the investigation about Ethiopian public universities conducted by Atanaw et al. (2025), important principles of governance, such as accountability, autonomy, academics' freedom, transparency, and responsibility were analyzed. The outcomes of the research

highlight the need for the urge to encourage all categories of stakeholders, including administrators, staff, and academic personnel and to involve them in the process of decision-making.

Luo et al. (2024) performed an empirical investigation on institutional structure and governance capacity at universities, utilizing the variables of time, area, and quantity. Utilizing 742 questionnaires from universities in 30 provinces in China, the study identified organizational structure in the dimensions of time, space, and quantity as a significant explanatory variable of university governance competency. The authors additionally revealed statistically significant positive benefits of institutional structure on governance competency, especially in instances where structures enhanced responsiveness, coordination, flexibility, and the efficient utilization of governance components. Le (2022) studied the practice of autonomy at universities in Vietnam. The study showed that autonomy has to be carried out based on a pragmatic and specific plan for every certain local university, particularly those which are directly controlled by provincial authorities. The study utilized data from 30 education-related state agencies and law papers, contending that autonomy is essential for enhancing education quality; nonetheless, its implementation must take into account the specific realities, capacities, and limitations of each local public university.

Globally, improvements in governance systems that aim to ensure autonomy often create organizational resilience and creativity. For instance, findings from research done in Commonwealth countries in Asia shows the reforms in governance and autonomy that lead to better research capacities, quality assurance, and differentiation in terms of higher education institutions (Muftahu, 2023). Governance structures in higher education are very important for deciding on policies, strategies, and the general growth of institutions. Research indicates that the way institutions are governed influences their independence, ability to make decisions, and ability to respond to local and national problems. Recent studies in the Philippines indicate that governance in higher education is influenced by a significant interplay among state policy, decentralization, and institutional control. Saguin (2023) elucidated that Philippine higher education has experienced significant transformations due to increased public expenditure and state participation, hence altering the governance landscape of institutions. The research focused on the wider trend that exists in higher education. However, in connection to LGU-managed institutions, this makes sense because governance structures in the Philippines are subject to a great degree to laws, finances originating from the public sector, and political decisions.

According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2022), colleges and universities play an important role in the Philippine education system. It states that "the education system of the Philippines includes local colleges and universities as part of the public education system," which are funded by local government units (LGUs) and operate without oversight from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Importantly, because of legislative changes such as the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, LUCs are increasingly required to adhere to CHED requirements. Moreover, CHED recognizes LUCs as institutions, ensuring that they are compliant with the regulations. Because of this literature, the study at hand is critical as it allows to place institutions of higher learning governed by LGUs in a hybrid environment of governance as they are funded and developed by the local community but also need to comply with the laws set at the national level.

Local government units have a vital role in the operations of colleges and universities in the Philippines; particularly, LGUs run public higher education institutions (Baldoz, 2022). The greater the influence of LGUs, the more complex the relationship between local governments and top management of colleges and universities (Dayrit, 2020). The integration of both local democratic governance processes and academic administration impacts decision-making within organizations. For example, the work by Valenzuela and Marasigan (2021) explains how political pressure can either facilitate or hinder the work of leaders in LGU-managed institutions. This is relevant, as political pressure will influence all aspects of educational institution management, including curriculum design, hiring and distribution of resources. The authors claim that the autonomy of LGUs is often undermined by the political necessity of local managers (De Guzman & Fajardo, 2021). Thus, it can be concluded that the governance system serves two purposes: it helps local development and is politically controlled (Macatangay, 2022).

The degree of administrative autonomy in higher education institutes that are governed by LGUs is dependent on political dynamics. The leadership of local government is one of the most important because in many cases their political interests predetermine the freedom of education institutions operations. According to a study conducted by Alarcon (2021), local political figures can weaken the administrative independence by nominating political supporters into the office of leaders, and doing so, they influence the administrative process so that it will be based on the political priorities rather than the academic ones. Further research by Lopez (2020) and Dizon and Sy (2022) indicate how political patronage influences appointment of leadership position, which can either promote or hinder the developmental process of an institution based on the political goodwill of the local leaders. Specifically, Gonzales and Cabrera (2022) suggest that even though decentralization policies were created to enhance independence by giving more power to local authorities, local politics tend to foster a tug-of-war between institutional independence and political leverage.

The political climate and governance models have a huge impact on the growth of higher education institutions run by local government units (LGUs). As stated by Sta. Maria and Panadero (2020), LGU-operated higher education institutions have easy access to political resources; however, the fluctuations in political priorities hamper their autonomy. The political environment in LGUs can lead to changes in leadership that affect the realization of long-term plans (Salazar & Carreon, 2023). Despite these challenges, LGU-administered higher

education institutions enjoy closeness to local leadership and provide tailored educational support, including community scholarship programs and training initiatives, helping the region to develop.

A new report from the Philippines on the implementation of Republic Act No. 10931, the *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act* (2017), also found that state and local colleges are experiencing challenges related to governance and institutional development (Republic Act No. 10931, 2017). The study found that the introduction of free higher education presented both opportunities and challenges, such as insufficient classrooms and facilities, complex funding requests and budget allocations, financial difficulties, delayed disbursements, rising enrollment, school expansion, and enhanced student support services. Research on political influence in decision-making within public higher education institutions illuminates the relationship between local leaders and the aforementioned processes when it comes to the influence of politics in Bohol with respect to the actions of public institutions in addition to the findings of the aforementioned research claiming that political influence plays a key role in the change of leadership, curriculum decisions, and utilization of academic resources. Accounting for such a fact, the study states that the implementation of more comprehensive governance system may reduce the influences of political factors.

There is a number of research done in the area of autonomy declaration by the institutions managed by LGUs. Research on decentralization in local educational institutions demonstrates the attempts made by the authorities of the country to decentralize the local educational institutions although these attempts were not efficient as local politics impacted the local institutions significantly. Research concerning the situation in Bohol indicates that despite the intent of decentralization to achieve the autonomy of institutions from politics, the political pressure, on the contrary, was controlling the academic administrators' decisions in practice causing instability in the leadership level and consequently leading to the negative impact on institution development. Locally governed higher education institutions have considerable potential for institutional growth and development. However, their progress may be hindered by challenges arising from local political influences on institutional administration and decision-making.

The study conducted by Cajes (2024) at the local level is the most relevant Bohol-centric piece of research, examining the strategic framework put in place by six colleges in Bohol to achieve their institutional vision. The main conclusion from this research is that while Bohol colleges' visions are built around concepts of quality and excellence, top-level administrators see the lack of funding to be one of the main obstacles to achieving these goals. Cajes concludes that due to their reliance on resources, local colleges require a certain level of independence and managerial discretion to implement their vision, stressing that local colleges' operations are determined by their relations with LGUs, which makes their governance practices and independence salient.

Research on the political dynamics of locally funded higher education institutions in Bohol remains limited, although existing studies offer valuable insights into the relationship between local politics and institutional governance. Political involvement in public higher education institutions may influence their development, as support from local political leaders can facilitate institutional growth, while changes in political leadership may create instability and challenges. In a study of Bohol Island State University, one of the region's largest locally governed higher education institutions, Estrella and Tabayoyong (2020) found that although local politicians contribute significantly to the university's financing and regulation, their involvement in governance may also constrain institutional autonomy.

Based on the findings and theoretical pieces of information discussed, one can conclude that governance models and political issues affect the autonomy and success of local universities to a great degree. Political support can be helpful in acquiring resources needed for the operation of lower colleges; however, it can also lead to loss of independence, instability, and slow development of the institution in the market in the long run.

This study investigates the governance practices and administrative autonomy in Local Government Unit-managed Higher Education Institutions, aiming to develop a governance framework for institutional development. Theories such as Decentralization Theory, Network Governance Theory, and Berdahl's Autonomy Theory, provide the foundation for understanding how governance and autonomy interact within these institutions. Each theory contributes to the analysis of governance structures, the influence of external forces, and leadership practices, offering a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that drive institutional development in LGU-managed HEIs.

Decentralization Theory (Rondinelli, 1981). The theory describes decentralization as the process of handing over the responsibility for the planning, management, decision-making, and allocation of resources from a national level to local governments or other public organizations. The theory is based on the assumption that local governments will be more effective in introducing reforms when they deal directly with the service provision.

In this study, the first major component of the theory, transfer of planning and management responsibility, is directly linked to the variable governance practices. In the case of LGU-managed Higher Education Institutions, governance practices are related to how administration and local officials take part in the planning process, policy implementation, and decision-making. Although decentralization is meant to give more independence to the local units, the issue of availability of resources remains. This paper will briefly discuss innovative approaches to the process, including the coordination between national and local levels of government (Labatete & Orejuilla, 2025). The imperative transfer of powers, functions and responsibilities and accountability to the local governments have been a key element to the promotion of citizen participation and stronger democratization. In addition, the scholarly evidence shows that although decentralization increases the local administrative capacity, it might not

necessarily lead to new efficiencies in governance because of structural and administrative vulnerabilities. The theoretical approaches explain its underlying assumptions, effects in service provision by the government, and the problems that it generates. The theory of decentralization is based on fiscal federalism where the different levels of government are expected to have an equal contribution of finances; this process will help the local government to run their own errands hence better governance and service delivery. The concept of self-government is also fundamental because it gives the local government the ability to make decisions that have direct impacts on their communities. Other scholars such as Irwani (2025) opine that decentralization gives the local governments more leeway to make decisions that suit their interests and make them much more efficient and responsive. This decentralization of power also brings about intergovernmental competition which encourages the local governments to improve their services in the quest to gain more resources and help.

Decentralization is thought to improve the delivery of public services by making decisions closer to the people who are affected by them. It can help local governments manage service delivery by focusing on local needs, strengthening accountability, and encouraging citizen engagement. The results from Labatete and Orejuilla (2025) also show how LGUs in the Philippines have developed ways to address governance problems. Nonetheless, decentralization is not without complications. It can enable public services to function well and become more effective, but it may also widen disparities among regions. Less-developed regions may struggle to provide the same level of services when they have fewer people or financial resources. Other obstacles include limited local independence, the risk of corruption, and difficulties coordinating political decisions across regions (Halil, 2024). Research on challenges in public management showed that Philippine local governments faced local governance issues more positively than expected despite experiencing major financial and governance problems. Labatete and Orejuilla (2025) claim that the efforts made by local government units suggest that they are determined to provide better services. The findings indicate that educational establishments have a considerable impact on the development of public management. By introducing innovations in public management training and improving collaboration with practitioners, educational institutions will improve the training of future public administrators according to changing requirements of decentralization. The connection between decentralization and governance outcomes is also complicated. A study discovered that while decentralization may enhance governance and institutional development, its impact on economic growth is ambiguous. Decentralization can make government work better and provide better public services, but if there are not enough resources or good coordination, it might hurt the economy. The report stresses the importance of ongoing changes in local government to make sure that the goals of decentralization are properly met (Canare, 2021). Network Governance Theory provides an additional understanding of the relations of power and decision-making process. In Rhodes (1997) governance was envisioned to be a system of organization whereby organizations, actors and institutions interact and come together to solve a social policy. He points out that the theory highlights the complexity of governance structures whereby power legal rests with a number of actors, as opposed to the concentration of power in the state institutions. It also emphasizes the need to closely examine the distribution of authority as well as the interactions between the stakeholders in the process of governance.

In relation to the study variables, Network Governance Theory is closely connected to administrative autonomy and institutional development. The distribution of power among actors determines the extent of autonomy that HEIs can exercise in academic and administrative decisions, depending on how much authority is shared or constrained by LGUs and other stakeholders. In addition, the nature of coordination in these governance networks plays an important role in institutional development since good cooperation and relationships among the stakeholders mean better decision-making, resource allocation, and responsiveness of institutions. In fact, the theory demonstrates the way governance connections define autonomy and results of institutions. A study in the area of higher education indicates that governance techniques impact institution outcomes. Atanaw et al. (2025) show that university governance mechanisms such as openness, accountability, and participation have a positive effect on changes in academic quality and performance of institutions, which agrees with Rhodes' argument about collaborative governance being able to increase responsiveness of institutions. Studies of governance mechanisms used in academia confirm that the institutions developing such systems are more effective when it comes to the needs of both internal and external stakeholders (Baxter & Maringe, 2022). By giving colleges and universities the power to make their own decisions about resource allocation, staff hiring, and academic programming, autonomy reduces reliance on external authorities. This means that institutions become more effective and innovative (Delgado & Perez, 2023). The concept of proper governance also rings true here. According to governance theory, adaptable governance forms can be more responsive to environmental changes (Irwani, 2025). In addition, comparative education studies show that autonomy usually results in better research output and academic services (Erdogan & Bere, 2024). Research by Canare (2021) has shown that while there is a link between decentralization and effective governance and resulting positive effects on institutional development, the link to practicing good governance and achieving better economic results remains unproven (Canare, 2021). Despite these ambiguous findings, it can be argued that the independence and efficiency help institutions to grow stronger, although its economic effects may vary.

However, researchers identified a number of obstacles in effective governance work. Halil (2024) states that decentralization can exacerbate regional inequalities in relation to resources and localized skills. This limitation concurs with findings showing that for effective affect government strategies must be complemented by capacity-building efforts to reach relevant goals (Mahmoodi & Tavakoli, 2022). Scholars started highlighting the

significance of stakeholders' involvement in governance. Nkosi (2023) points out that governance models that employ the support of staff, students, and community actors promote co-ownership of the goals. Tugadu and Samson (2025) also found that during the existence of a higher education governance system that actively works with its stakeholders, institutions show better innovativeness and developments. Other studies confirmed the correlation between governance approaches and the effectiveness of organizations. Lee and Kim (2024) state that transparency in governance systems allows institutions to be accountable and to avoid bureaucratic hurdles. This finding complies with governance theory, which shows that governance must be about networks and transparency (Lee & Kim, 2024). Chen et al. (2025) conducted an extensive review of the literature emphasizing that multi-actor governance models help educational systems to adapt to policy changes, decrease decision-making obstacles and improve the quality-of-service delivery. It proves Rhodes' idea that it's the interactions between the stakeholders with identical goals which determine the effectiveness of governance. The research conducted shows that colleges and universities with empowered governance councils and decentralized boards of decision-makers provide better services to their students and achieve employee satisfaction. It evidences how vital autonomy is in the process of institutional development.

The study will use the theory of network governance to explore how the HEIs under local government management cope with the intricacies of running relationships between political leaders and educators, ensuring that their governance is consistent with both educational demands and the needs of the local governments. Berdahl's Autonomy Theory by Robert Berdahl (1971), offers the framework for evaluating the level of independence of universities run by Local Government Units. Berdahl asserted that autonomy is vital for the college as it enables institutions to take independently from society in such fields as education, finance, governance of faculty and so on. Autonomy stops being an obstacle to effective functioning in the field of education as it provides an opportunity to exercise academic freedom and to take independent decisions in such manners as education, hiring of the staff and the system of governance. However, for LGUs, autonomy is limited by local authorities and funding. In the field of LGUs run educational institutions, Berdahl's Autonomy Theory becomes relevant as it helps define whether institutions have independence or not influenced by local authorities. Autonomy and accountability become two opposing trends, which should be realized in practice - institutions need to find balance between independent decision making and obeying the orders issued by the LGUs. Regarding the institutional development variable in this research, it can be inferred that the level of autonomy is positively related to institutional development due to the following reasons: the existence of autonomy promotes institutional growth and development and improves academic quality as well as governance. At the same time, its absence may create barriers to development of the institution affecting its performance.

Research shows that autonomy in universities is beyond the simple delegation of functions from the state to the higher educational institution and denotes ecological governance and inclusion of financial viability, social equity, and technology management (Truong & Tran, 2025). The new literature consistently supports the idea of autonomy improving the performance of an institution. According to Rodríguez and Pérez (2024), institutions exhibiting a high level of autonomy in academic matters have shown better results in research output and the quality of academic programs. Their research shows that autonomy in the process of drafting academic policies allows institutions of higher education to meet the changing demands of education and improve institutional results. Likewise, as mentioned by Jamaludin and Hassan (2022), institutions of higher education employing decentralized decision-making approach perform better in terms of meeting the requirements of students and fulfilling needs of the community. This is in line with Berdahl's belief that autonomy enables organizations to adapt their governance procedures to their needs and avoid being over subjected to external regulations. According to the authors, the decentralized framework leads to more active involvement of universities' faculty and more accountable operations of institutions.

Autonomy is important in higher education, particularly in personnel management. Institutions with greater independence in hiring and promoting professors may be more likely to demonstrate higher faculty satisfaction and retention. Faculty morale may suffer when staff are not empowered to participate meaningfully in decisions. Autonomous universities may also be better positioned to create and implement innovative curricula in response to labor-market demands. Flexible governance can facilitate the adoption of new academic programs, increasing institutional relevance and competitiveness. However, autonomy alone does not guarantee success; it must be combined with appropriate governance mechanisms. Singh and Banerjee (2026) claimed that autonomy without established accountability systems can lead to administrative fragmentation and unpredictable institutional behavior. Their research highlighted the importance of fair governance systems based on transparency, stakeholder engagement, and performance assessment. This contributes to Berdahl's idea of governance design, which aims to create independent institutions rather than restrict them.

The study by Okafor and Adeyemi (2022) analyzed universities in sub-Saharan Africa and concluded that institutions that enjoyed greater autonomy from the government had better success in their planning and implementation of development initiatives. They also argued that increase in autonomy will introduce larger differences between various universities if no attention is paid to capacity building. Finally, the research into higher education policy and change establishes the connection between autonomy and great objectives of transforming government work. Tebogo and Mokoena (2023) argued that autonomy should be integrated into the process of wide reforms in governance so that institutions become more flexible and achieve sustainable development. Collectively, these findings support Berdahl's theories and suggest that autonomy is key for

improved governance and progress of institutions of education. Universities are more innovative, responsive to local demands, and focused on long-term development opportunities if they are allowed to exercise their autonomy in matters of academic affairs, financing, and human resources. In conclusion, through the application of Decentralization Theory, Network Governance Theory, and Bendahl's Autonomy Theory this research achieves to create a relevant theoretical model for the study variables in the context of the governance practices and administrative independence of LGU-managed higher education institutions. These theoretical frameworks provide valuable information on governance practices, leadership, and external constraints that influence the institutions' autonomy and success in their development. The governance mechanisms and political processes in the context of LGU-managed higher education institutions in the Philippines are based on the combination of constitutional provisions, statutory regulations, and policy documents issued by the Commission on Higher Education. This section presents constitutional and statutory framework for LGU-managed institutions followed by discussion of the latest CHED Memorandum Orders that affect their governance and development.

The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines of 1987. The Constitution provides the national constitutional framework relevant to the governance of local government unit (LGU)-managed higher education institutions (HEIs). Article XIV, Section 1 directs the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to take appropriate steps to make education accessible to all (1987 Constitution, art. XIV, § 1). Article X, Section 2 establishes that territorial and political subdivisions shall enjoy local autonomy (1987 Constitution, art. X, § 2). These provisions provide a constitutional context for examining the relationship between national education policy and local governance in LGU-managed HEIs. However, the specific authority of LGUs to establish and operate local colleges and universities should also be discussed with reference to applicable legislation, including the Local Government Code of 1991, and relevant higher education regulations. The relevance of these provisions lies in understanding the relationship between local governance and national educational policy. This idea has been confirmed by research showing that governance frameworks based on local autonomy allow institutions to develop and implement educational programs that meet the needs of the local community (Labatete & Orejuilla, 2025). Article X, Section 2 of the 1987 Constitution also establishes the principle of local autonomy, which is relevant to decision-making by local government units (1987 Constitution, art. X, § 2).

According to the above-mentioned provisions, education is considered a priority for public policy and a constitutional right, which should be promoted and protected by the State (1987 Constitution, art. XIV, § 1; Atienza & Go, 2023). This means that they view studies of school systems as an opportunity for the state to satisfy its constitutional obligation to offer high-quality and easily accessible education through good government practices and sovereignty. Studies of education policy in the Philippines argue that the constitutional recognition of the right to education leads to accountability and reform in educational institutions in terms of administration and governance (1987 Constitution, art. XIV, § 1; Sanchez-Danday, 2021). Therefore, these studies treat governance and autonomy not only as administrative aspects but also as means to fulfill the constitutional duty of education access and quality that is relevant to your concerns about growing institutions of higher education. The studies on local governance of the Philippines show that the decentralization and autonomy lead to the improved quality of coordination, citizen participation, and accountability in all the spheres; yet the decentralization is challenged by the problem of diversity in capabilities and resources. This result is important for your research since it creates a need to consider not only the legal dimension of autonomy but also the extent to which it is applied in institutional governance. Thus, the constitutional recognition of the right to quality education provides a legal basis for examining educational access and quality in institutions under local governments (1987 Constitution, art. XIV, § 1).

The Local Government Code of 1991 provides the legal foundation for local autonomy and decentralization in the Philippines, granting local government units powers, responsibilities, and resources to support local governance and community development (Republic Act No. 7160, 1991, sec. 2). Therefore, local government units have the right to establish their own educational institutions; in other words, local government units are given the possibility of opening universities or colleges and administering them. The law states that local government units can create educational institutions if the newly established institutions meet the requirements for accreditation set out by relevant national agencies such as CHED. The Local Government Code aims at transferring some power to local authorities so that local government units can administer the allocated resources in relation to educational institutions of their area (Tugadu & Samson, 2025). Decentralization of power through local autonomy makes it possible for local authorities to realize tailored educational policies, which considerably increases the efficiency of different processes within the universities, including improving the quality of faculty as well as student services. Bautista (2021) emphasizes that financial autonomy of educational institutions plays a critical role because by using their autonomy in managing budgetary resources, the universities can make the right decisions with regard to their academic facilities and recruitment of faculty, which means that the process of growth is ensured. Thus, many research studies conducted in the area of governance have proven that institutions enjoying greater autonomy can easily develop new academic programs, retain faculty members, and manage systems of support to the students. Nkosi (2023) conducted a research study to investigate the impact of financial autonomy on the sustainability of educational institutions and made the conclusion that institutions with a high degree of budgetary autonomy are likely to direct more resources to their developments. The rationale for setting up LUCs indicates that local higher education establishments can democratize access to education since they are

convenient for people who cannot afford educational services otherwise. The LGUs must guarantee that the LUCs that they set will provide students with either quality education or cash programs that correspond to the standards set by the Commission on Higher Education. The LGU must ensure it has enough meant to support the work of the university, such as maintenance of higher education facilities and resources for staff development and programs offered (Jesus & Catchuela, 2026). The latest CHED Memorandum Orders also contain information about the key policies and regulations related to the operation of the local institutions of higher education. For instance, CHED Memorandum Order #18 defines the policies, guidelines, and regulations for the legal recognition of LUCs. This order also lays down the requirements for any LGU that wants to open its own higher education institution. As a matter of fact, the restrictions imposed by the law cover all issues linked to the staffing and financial aspects of the higher education institution and how it is governed. Moreover, the Memorandum requires LUCs to adhere to the standards set by the national accreditation system to be granted the right to issue diplomas (Baxter & Maringe, 2022). The research conducted by Rodríguez and Pérez (2024) confirmed that financial independence of higher education institutions like LUCs increases their effectiveness regarding the use of available resources, management of infrastructure, and development of sustainable academic programs that correspond to the requirements put forward in the CHED memorandum.

Lastly, a study conducted about the way universities operate showed that with increased freedom, local academics can better tailor their educational programs to the needs of the hiring market. Research findings indicate that governance systems that take into consideration the local demands and needs are more productive in terms of development (Jamaludin & Hassan, 2022). To summarize, these legal instruments define the relationship between the local autonomy and national control and offer a general idea of how dynamics of politics define the administration of the institutions. Despite the growing body of literature on educational governance, there remains limited empirical evidence on how governance practices directly influence institutional development at the local level, particularly in Local Universities and Colleges. Most existing studies focus on national or policy-level governance frameworks, with less attention given to how governance is experienced and implemented within individual institutions and how it translates into measurable institutional outcomes. In Bohol, where several LUCs operate under different LGU governance arrangements, understanding these dynamics is particularly important. The impact of administrative autonomy and practice of governance on institutional advancement is an important issue for college managers, government leaders, and other decision-makers wishing to enhance their understanding of the issues related to improving efficiency and sustainability of local institutions.

Therefore, this practice-based study aims to quantitatively examine governance practices and administrative autonomy with the end view of proposing an Integrated Governance and Administrative Autonomy Framework for LGU-Managed Higher Education Institutions which would be beneficial to serve as a guide in improving institutional operations and aligning educational goals with local priorities in the institution. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by examining how governance practices and administrative autonomy in LGU-managed higher education institutions can improve access, quality, relevance, and institutional performance of tertiary education at the local level. It further aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) through its focus on transparency, accountability, participatory decision-making, and effective governance structures that strengthen institutional integrity and public trust. SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) is relevant because the hybrid governance environment of LGU-managed HEIs requires coordinated action among local governments, national agencies such as CHED, institutional leaders, faculty, and communities. Elements of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) are also engaged through the institutions' roles in developing local human resources and supporting community-based development.

The research contributes to educational sustainability by identifying governance and autonomy conditions that support continuous improvement of academic programs, faculty capacity, student services, and institutional quality in locally managed higher education settings. It advances institutional sustainability by clarifying how balanced autonomy and accountable governance enable LGU-managed colleges to respond to local needs while complying with national standards. The study also supports policy and governance sustainability through evidence that can inform frameworks linking local political-administrative systems with higher education performance. Socio-economic and community sustainability are addressed because strengthened local colleges expand affordable tertiary access, build local human capital, and align educational offerings with community development priorities.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design. This design was suitable because it enabled the researcher to document the current state of administrative autonomy, governance practices, and institutional development in LGU-managed higher education institutions, as well as to ascertain whether there were any significant relationships among these variables. The researcher employed a correlational statistic to quantify the degree of association between two or more variables, without modifying them. Similarly, survey research was suitable for the collection of quantitative data from respondents through questionnaires to describe the conditions, attitudes, or trends within a population. The quantitative data collected were statistically analyzed to address the research questions and evaluate the hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The descriptive aspect of the design is suited most especially in presenting the profile of the respondents and determine the status of governance practices, the extent of administrative autonomy, and the level of institutional development of LGU-managed colleges. Survey research is commonly used when the objective is to obtain information from a sample through their responses to predetermined questions, particularly when describing the characteristics, perceptions, or practices of a relatively large group in a systematic manner (Ponto, 2015).

The correlational aspect further seeks to test whether significant relationships exist between administrative autonomy and institutional development, and between governance practices and institutional development. Correlational research is used when the researcher intends to measure variables and determine the strength and direction of their statistical relationship without inferring direct cause-and-effect. Thus, while the study identified significant associations among the variables, it will not claim causality.

The study utilized the Input–Process–Output framework to thoroughly examine the relationship between governance practices, administrative autonomy, and institutional development. The input phase consisted of the profile of the respondents, including their position and years in service, together with the key variables of administrative autonomy, governance practices, and institutional development. The process involved administration of the survey questionnaire, data gathering, consolidation, presentation, analysis, and interpretation. The main output was the development of an Integrated Governance and Administrative Autonomy Framework for Institutional Development.

2.2 Locale of the Study

This research was undertaken in the province of Bohol, a famous island province located in Central Visayas that resonates with commitment to education, tourism, and community development. Bohol consists of urban municipalities and rural districts which makes the province to offer different educational opportunities and different levels of access to higher education. The provincial and local governments have made it possible for the establishment of local colleges in their bid to enable students, especially those from the distance areas, to access higher education at a lower cost. These higher education institutions were established with the aim of developing local human resource and supporting local community-based development programs.

The research environment includes local colleges that are part of the Association of Local Colleges and Universities (ALCU) in Bohol. These institutions are Trinidad Municipal College, Talibon Polytechnic College, Ubay Community College, Collegio De Getafe, Danao Technological College, Inabanga College of Arts and Sciences, Collegio De Loboc, Carmen Municipal College, and Buenavista Community College. Each college operates under its respective local government unit, creating diverse contexts in leadership approaches, institutional priorities, and autonomy.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were the 157 teaching, administrative, support, and research personnel of the participating Local Government Unit-managed colleges in Bohol. The choice of the respondents was due to their direct involvement in governance, management, academic activities, and everyday functioning of the institutions. Their role in this regard provides them with the necessary reference points about institutional policies, decision processes, administrative functions, and organizational development. Therefore, it can be stated that the perspectives of the respondents are beneficial in studying the different aspects of the link between governance actions, administration independence, and institutional development in colleges run by Local Government Unit in the province. Teaching personnel comprised the largest group at 117 respondents, followed by administrative or management personnel at 23, support personnel at 16, and research personnel at 1.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study utilized convenience sampling in selecting the respondents. Although all personnel from the participating institutions were invited to participate, only those who were available, accessible, and willing to answer the survey questionnaire were included as actual respondents.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized an adapted questionnaire as the primary instrument for gathering the necessary data. The questionnaire was prepared through the incorporation and contextualizing of the applicable elements and indicators from established higher education sources. The items measuring governance practices and institutional development were adapted from the Institutional Performance Questionnaire developed by Alvi et al. (2020). The original questionnaire measures institutional performance through indicators concerning mission and goals, planning and evaluation, organization and governance, integrity, faculty, students, institutional resources, academic programs and curricula, public disclosure and transparency, assessment and quality assurance, and student-support services. For the present study, selected indicators relating to decision-making, stakeholder participation, transparency, accountability, institutional planning, resource management, quality assurance, academic programs, and support services were organized according to the governance-practices and institutional-development dimensions established in the study.

The indicators measuring administrative autonomy were adapted from the conceptual framework and autonomy indicators presented in University Autonomy in Europe IV: The Scorecard 2023 by Bennetot Pruvot et al. (2023).

The framework evaluates institutional autonomy in terms of organizational planning, financial, staffing/human resource management, and academic autonomy. These four dimensions were retained in the present study because they corresponded to the areas in which Local Government Unit-managed higher education institutions exercise decision-making authority within LGU, government, and CHED requirements.

The selected items and indicators were contextualized to reflect the conditions of Local Government Unit-managed colleges in Bohol. References to foreign regulatory bodies, institutional arrangements, and terminologies that were not applicable to the Philippine setting were replaced with corresponding institutional terms. The adapted instrument gathered the respondents' assessments of the level of governance practices, extent of administrative autonomy, and degree of institutional development among the participating institutions. Moreover, the instrument consists of four parts.

Part I collects the profile of the respondents, including their position and years in service, highest educational attainment and seminars attended, which helped in describing the demographic and professional background of the participants. Part II focuses on governance practices and examines the level of implementation to which academic governance, decision-making processes, and transparency and accountability mechanisms are implemented within the colleges. Part III assesses the extent of administrative autonomy across four dimensions: academic decision-making, financial management, human resource management, and strategic planning. Part IV evaluates institutional development in terms of academic program development, faculty and staff development, facilities and learning resources, and student support services.

All items in Parts II, III, and IV of the questionnaires utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 to quantify the degree of governance implementation, autonomy, and development. To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in educational management and public administration. The adapted questionnaire was appropriate for this study because it allowed systematic collection of comparable data from respondents who are directly involved in governance and institutional management. The ethical administration of the instrument was ensured by including an informed consent statement, guaranteeing confidentiality, and clarifying that participation is voluntary. The resulting data provide empirical evidence on how administrative autonomy and governance practices relate to and potentially predict institutional development in LGU-managed colleges.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

This section presented the systematic procedures that were used in collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data divided into three phases namely: pre-gathering phase, gathering phase, and the post-gathering phase. It ensured that the study was conducted in an orderly, ethical, and reliable manner. In the pre-gathering phase, the questionnaires were prepared and necessary approvals secured. During the data gathering phase, after the researcher received all required approvals, the surveys were given out to the selected participants by the researcher using Google Forms. They were also given precise guidelines on how to fill out the surveys. Participation was voluntary, and participants were told that they had the right to leave this research anytime. The researcher was present while the surveys were being collected to answer any questions. In the post-gathering phase, after retrieval of the questionnaires, all responses were checked for completeness and consistency. The data that was deemed incompletely or wrongly answered was taken out of the final data. The data was then carefully recorded, encoded, and prepared for calculation by appropriate means, allowing the researcher to achieve set objectives. During this stage stringent ethical principles were strictly observed until the completed data was attained. Such ethical principles included anonymization, confidentiality, informed consent, and safe keeping of the data collected.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected from the adapted questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. For demographic characteristics of the respondents, frequency counts and percentages were utilized. The levels of administrative autonomy, governance practices, and institutional development were assessed through Likert-scale items using a five-point response format. The weighted mean and standard deviation were employed to describe the overall levels and variability of responses across the identified dimensions. To determine the relationship between administrative autonomy, governance practices, and institutional development, correlation analysis was conducted. The necessary conditions for the parametric statistical tests such as normality and interval level measurement were taken into account. Given that the obtained data is based on ordinal Likert scale responses, and the distribution of the composite score failed meeting the requirement of normal distribution Spearman Rank-Order Correlation test was utilized. The non-parametric method was used because it is the proper one that studies the relationships depending on ranks of variables without necessity of normal distribution of the data.

Moreover, Spearman's rho is suitable for examining relationships among educational and organizational constructs measured through rating scales because it evaluates whether higher or lower rankings in one variable are associated with corresponding changes in another variable. Thus, Spearman Rank-Order Correlation provided an appropriate measure for determining the relationship between administrative autonomy, governance practices, and institutional development among Local Government Unit-managed colleges in Bohol. Finally, findings from the descriptive and relational analyses were synthesized to propose a governance framework to enhance administrative autonomy, strengthen governance practices, and support sustainable institutional development of LGU-managed colleges in Bohol. Scoring followed five-point Likert scales with corresponding descriptive and

verbal interpretations for governance practices (Very Highly Practiced to Not Practiced), administrative autonomy (Very Great Extent to Very Low Extent), and institutional development (Very High to Very Low).

2.8 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with respect for the ethical principles in place so that all involved parties including college managers, deans, heads of departments, and staff were treated in a dignified and ethical manner. Ethical requirements have been observed at every stage of the research process to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of all affected parties. The consent form clearly explains the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the procedures involved, and the assurance that no harm will result from participation. The respondents are informed that they may opt to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. Only respondent who provides consent will be included in the data collection.

For ensuring privacy, names and any identification markers were not included in the questionnaire or in any section of the data analysis. The participants were given identification numbers for the purpose of documentation and analysis. All the data collected was stored in locked storage and in electronically secured files, which could be accessed only by the researcher. Data was disclosed in the form of aggregate data so that the individual respondent's identity could not be revealed.

The researcher explained in simple terms that their participation is voluntary and that they are free to skip any item they do not want to answer. The study aims to generate positive impact by identifying the levels of governance practices and administrative autonomy further examining its effect on the institutional development of the HEI. The insights obtained led to the development of a governance framework that can benefit by creating policies and strategies that are more responsive to institutional needs and may serve as a reference in promoting good governance and sustainable development in the local higher education sector.

The research relies on the “do no harm” principle. Every process needed for this research was planned in a way that the regular work of every participant was disrupted as little as possible. A respectful atmosphere was maintained during the whole research. The respondents were treated professionally and ethically. The ethical principles listed above were applied in each step of the research, including its preparatory stage, the gathering of consent from participants, the collection of data, its interpretation, and presentation. The researcher also followed the required procedures to gain approval for this research, according to the rules of the institution. All actions taken by the researcher were based on ethical principles of respect, transparency, and accountability.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Respondents' Profile

3.1.1 Position

The largest group of respondents belonged to the teaching staff, numbering 117 or 74.52 percent of the total. Administrative or management personnel accounted for 23 respondents or 14.65 percent, support personnel for 16 or 10.19 percent, and research personnel for only one respondent or 0.64 percent. The predominance of teaching staff reflects the workforce structure of LGU-managed colleges, where instructional personnel form the core of institutional activity and routinely participate in academic decision-making, curriculum implementation, and student services. This composition is consistent with Atanaw et al. (2025), who noted that faculty members and staff perform an important role in the university governance process and possess valuable knowledge of how policies affect institutional work. Maroma and David (2025) similarly observed that faculty members are key elements of university governance and organizational decision-making, and that governance structures shape how faculty experience autonomy.

3.1.2 Years in Service

The data showed that 109 respondents (69.43%) had been employed in their respective institutions for one to three years. In contrast, only four respondents (2.55%) had served for 13 to 15 years, while three respondents each (1.91%) had 10 to 12 years of service and 16 years or more. The predominance of personnel with one to three years of institutional experience suggests that the workforce is largely composed of relatively new employees, potentially reflecting recent recruitment to accommodate institutional expansion, increasing enrollment, and the growing demand for academic and administrative services. The expansion of public higher education associated with free tertiary education may have increased the need for additional personnel, infrastructure, and student support services. Meanwhile, the small proportion of long-serving employees may indicate challenges in maintaining workforce continuity. Salazar and Carreon (2023) linked such challenges to leadership transitions and shifting political priorities. Given this distribution, the respondents' assessments may have been influenced more by recent policies and current leadership practices than by extensive experience with long-term institutional operations.

3.1.3 Highest Educational Attainment

The largest group consisted of 75 respondents, or 47.77 percent, who had earned units toward a master's degree. Taken together, 88.54 percent of the respondents had either completed a graduate degree or pursued graduate-level education, with 17 holding doctoral degrees and 13 having doctoral units. The high proportion of respondents

with graduate units or completed graduate degrees indicates substantial engagement in continuing education and professional advancement, consistent with the academic qualifications expected in higher education and with institutional efforts to strengthen teaching competence, leadership capacity, and quality standards. The predominance of master's units rather than completed degrees, however, suggests that many personnel were still progressing toward degree completion, possibly constrained by financial limitations, workload, or access to programs. This pattern aligns with Painsi et al. (2025), who emphasized that institutional autonomy and development require capable personnel and organizational readiness, and with Luo et al. (2024), who highlighted the contribution of institutional capacity and human resources to university governance competency.

3.1.4 Seminars and Trainings Attended

The largest proportion of respondents, 36.94 percent, had attended nine or more seminars, and almost all had participated in at least one professional development activity. National seminars were the most frequent level of participation at 26.11 percent, followed by local or municipal at 23.57 percent and institutional at 19.75 percent. Educational leadership accounted for the highest share of training areas at 20.61 percent, followed by research and extension and curriculum development, while financial management and human resource management received the least participation. Substantial exposure to continuing professional development strengthens the knowledge and competencies needed for governance, administrative processes, and institutional initiatives. Participation in national seminars is particularly relevant because LGU-managed institutions operate within hybrid frameworks that combine local funding with CHED requirements (CHED, 2022). Muftahu (2023) stressed the importance of governance flexibility in response to globalization and societal needs, while Luo et al. (2024) noted that governance capacity increases through better coordination and resource use. The concentration of training in educational leadership, research, and curriculum development indicates stronger preparation for academic governance, yet the limited participation in financial and human-resource management reveals a capacity gap in areas directly linked to administrative autonomy. Painsi et al. (2025) observed that autonomy alone cannot produce strong outcomes without capable leadership and internal systems, and Cajés (2024) identified financial limitations as a major barrier for local colleges in Bohol.

3.2 Governance Practices

3.2.1 Academic Governance

Among the indicators of academic governance, the highest-rated practice was the institution's compliance with CHED policies and academic standards, with a mean of 4.57, followed closely by the alignment of academic policies with the institution's vision, mission, and goals at a mean of 4.55. The grand mean for academic governance was 4.35, interpreted as very highly implemented. The lowest-rated indicator, prompt addressing of academic concerns raised by students and faculty, still registered a mean of 4.19 and was interpreted as highly implemented. Strong compliance with CHED standards indicates that regulatory mechanisms effectively support institutional quality assurance. This finding is consistent with CHED (2012) emphasis on quality-assurance policies and with Huisman and Stensaker (2022), who noted that performance governance in higher education centers on monitoring, accountability, and institutional performance indicators. Alignment of academic policies with institutional vision and mission further suggests that governance extends beyond rule compliance to strategic direction, supporting Chankseiani et al. (2021) observation that higher education contributes to development when structures enable responsiveness to societal needs, and Inga et al. (2021) emphasis on strategic management in universities. The relatively lower rating on responsiveness to academic concerns points to an area for strengthening feedback and consultation mechanisms. Atanaw et al. (2025) found that effective higher education governance is associated with accountability, transparency, and stakeholder involvement. Shared governance, transparency, inclusivity, and effective communication are also important considerations in academic governance.

3.2.2 Decision-Making Processes

The highest-rated practice under decision-making processes was that decisions are based on institutional data, needs, and priorities, with a mean of 4.22, interpreted as very highly implemented. The grand mean was 4.10, interpreted as highly implemented. Faculty participation in institutional decisions received a comparatively lower mean of 3.99, still within the highly implemented range.

Evidence-based decision-making demonstrates that institutional actions are guided by actual conditions and strategic priorities, supporting Luo et al. (2024) finding that institutional structures enhance governance capability when they promote coordination, flexibility, and effective resource utilization. Huisman and Stensaker (2022) likewise explained that contemporary higher education governance relies on performance monitoring and accountability processes. The lower rating for faculty participation suggests a possible distinction between the existence of participatory structures and the actual experience of participation, indicating that decision-making may still lean toward a top-down approach. Atanaw et al. (2025) highlighted that effective governance is strengthened when administrators, employees, and faculty are involved in decision-making. Expanding participatory mechanisms can therefore enhance ownership and commitment without diminishing administrative authority.

3.2.3 Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

Promotion of ethical conduct and integrity in governance recorded the highest mean of 4.39, while mechanisms that enhance trust in institutional leadership scored 4.34. The grand mean was 4.24, interpreted as very highly implemented. Documentation and reporting of financial transactions and channels for addressing complaints, feedback, and grievances received the lowest means of 4.11 and 4.12, respectively, both still highly implemented. The high ratings for ethical conduct and leadership trust indicate that moral principles and credibility are core components of the governance framework, consistent with Atanaw et al. (2025) finding that effective higher education governance is characterized by accountability, transparency, responsibility, and ethical practices, and with OECD (2023) emphasis on accountability and transparency as foundations of sound public governance. Huisman and Stensaker (2022) likewise noted that governance systems rely on accountability and efficiency processes. The comparatively lower ratings for financial documentation and grievance mechanisms, together with higher standard deviations, suggest variability in procedural transparency and stakeholder responsiveness. Lee and Kim (2024) emphasized that transparency and accountability practices are essential for institutional trust. Strengthening these mechanisms can further improve responsiveness and organizational trust.

3.2.4 Summary of Governance Practices

Academic governance obtained the highest mean of 4.35, decision-making processes the lowest at 4.10, and transparency and accountability mechanisms 4.24. The overall mean for governance practices was 4.23, interpreted as very highly implemented. The results indicate that LGU-managed higher education institutions demonstrate generally strong adherence to structured academic leadership, ethical standards, and accountability systems. The relatively lower rating for decision-making processes points to the need for more inclusive stakeholder participation. Pernia (2017) noted that local colleges and universities operate within the realities of decentralization and local politics, making clear policies and constructive governance practices essential. Cajés (2024) similarly found that local colleges require strategic frameworks to address implementation gaps and realize institutional visions.

3.3 Extent of Administrative Autonomy

3.3.1 Academic Decision-Making

The capacity to set academic development priorities recorded the highest mean of 4.31, followed by authority over instructional strategies and delivery at 4.28 and the ability to recommend curriculum revisions based on local needs at 4.26. The grand mean was 4.22, interpreted as very great extent. Freedom of academic departments to initiate program reviews without excessive outside interference and determination of academic priorities based on student and institutional needs received the lowest means of 4.13 and 4.15, still within the great-extent range. The findings show that LGU-managed higher education institutions enjoy a high level of independence in academic affairs, enabling leaders to prioritize development according to student and community needs. This supports Marginson (2018) assertion that universities require liberty to set academic priorities in order to respond to societal challenges, and de Boer and File (2009) finding that academic autonomy fosters innovation. Authority over instructional strategies and curriculum revisions also supports adaptability and relevance, while CHED (2012) outcomes-based education frameworks allow HEIs to design learning outcomes within minimum standards. The slightly lower ratings for departmental initiative indicate that autonomy, while strong at the institutional level, remains moderated by external or higher-level controls, consistent with the concept of bounded autonomy and Estermann and Nokkala (2009) observation that institutions must still follow governing-body guidelines. Strengthening internal participatory structures can further distribute autonomy without compromising compliance.

3.3.2 Financial Management

The ability of college heads to identify financial priorities based on institutional needs obtained the highest mean of 4.04. Authority to prepare the annual budget proposal and discretion to allocate available funds both scored 3.94. The grand mean was 3.86, interpreted as great extent. The ability to make financial decisions without unnecessary delays from external authorities recorded the lowest mean of 3.53. Institutional leaders possess meaningful input in aligning resources with academic and developmental priorities, supporting Acido and Kilongkilong (2022) emphasis on planning, budgeting, and allocation for sustaining institutional operations, and Hong (2023) finding that financial autonomy strengthens flexibility and sustainability. Structured participation in budget preparation and fund allocation indicates meaningful yet bounded financial autonomy. The lowest rating for timely decision-making without external delays points to residual constraints from LGU procedures, procurement requirements, and bureaucratic controls. Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024a) found that Local Universities and Colleges often rely on LGUs for budget and staffing, limiting autonomy, while Flores (2025) observed that public HEIs face challenges in revenue generation because of limited financial autonomy and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Improving timely decision-making, income-generation mechanisms, and flexible fund utilization can enhance financial responsiveness while remaining within regulatory frameworks.

3.3.3 Human Resource Management

Performance evaluation of personnel with active involvement of administrators recorded the highest mean of 4.36. Recommendation of training and development opportunities scored 4.32, and the institution's role in addressing personnel concerns scored 4.29. The grand mean was 4.24, interpreted as very great extent. The ability to

recommend deserving personnel for promotion or recognition obtained the lowest mean of 4.11, still within the great-extent range. Strong participation in hiring recommendations, staffing, performance evaluation, training, and employee development reflects a decentralized yet structured approach to human-resource governance. The central role of administrators in performance evaluation aligns with the view that appraisal systems are critical HRM strategies influencing productivity and accountability, and with Mallillin et al. (2024) identification of performance management as a core HRM component. Training and staff development are also important to school management effectiveness. The comparatively lower rating for promotion and recognition suggests partial constraint by higher-level approval systems or standardized government procedures, as Mallillin et al. (2024) noted that promotion and rewards are often guided by formal policies and regulatory frameworks. Overall, human-resource management constitutes a strong component of administrative autonomy and supports institutional performance when aligned with organizational goals.

3.3.4 Strategic Planning

The ability to formulate plans responsive to institutional vision and mission obtained the highest mean of 4.41. The grand mean was 4.24, interpreted as very great extent. The indicator that strategic planning is not overly constrained by political or external pressures recorded the lowest mean of 3.92, still within the great-extent range. The institution demonstrates strong participation and independence in preparing strategic plans, setting priorities, and pursuing long-term directions. High alignment of plans with vision and mission indicates that planning is tightly linked to institutional mandate. Graves and Erickson (2024) emphasized that strategic planning in higher education is more effective with administrator and stakeholder participation, while Garad et al. (2025) found strategic planning positively related to institutional performance. The lower rating on freedom from political or external pressures suggests that external influences may still affect aspects of planning, consistent with Sywelem and Makhoulf (2023) observation that strategic planning can be constrained by limited resources, weak planning culture, and external factors. Strengthening evidence-based, participatory, and independent planning mechanisms can help ensure that institutional plans remain responsive and sustainable.

3.3.5 Summary of Administrative Autonomy

Human resource management and strategic planning both obtained the highest mean of 4.24, academic decision-making 4.22, and financial management the lowest at 3.86. The overall mean was 4.14, interpreted as great extent. Administrative autonomy is strongly evident, particularly in human-resource management, strategic planning, and academic decision-making, enabling institutions to align internal processes with strategic goals. Inga et al. (2021) emphasized that strategic management improves institutional efficiency and sustainability, while Mallillin et al. (2024) identified performance management as an important human-resource practice. Academic autonomy supports quality and responsiveness, while sound public governance requires accountability (OECD, 2023). The comparatively constrained financial management reflects dependence on LGU allocations, external budget approvals, and public procurement rules. Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024a) and Flores (2025) confirmed that Philippine local universities and colleges experience fiscal constraints that limit flexibility and timely decision-making. Balanced authority across academic, administrative, financial, and strategic domains, coupled with accountability, is required for more effective institutional autonomy (OECD, 2023).

3.4 Level of Institutional Development

3.4.1 Academic Program Development

Growth in the quality and effectiveness of academic offerings recorded the highest mean of 4.45. The grand mean was 4.35, interpreted as very high. Responsiveness of academic offerings to student needs, industry demands, and societal changes obtained the lowest mean of 4.26, still within the very-high range. The college demonstrates strong development in curriculum alignment, program quality, continuity, and responsiveness to educational and community needs. This finding is supported by Largoza and Fernandez (2025), whose review noted Philippine higher education reforms emphasizing outcomes-based typology, the Philippine Qualifications Framework, and curriculum standards. Aldaba et al. (2024) emphasized CHED's role in aligning programs with national standards and evolving economic and societal needs. Prado (2025) found that quality-assurance practices in a Philippine locally funded university improve program delivery and alignment with national and global benchmarks. Continuous attention to industry linkages and curriculum review can further ensure responsiveness to labor-market and societal changes.

3.4.2 Faculty and Staff Development

Faculty capacity to deliver quality instruction and related academic functions obtained the highest mean of 4.27. The grand mean was 4.24, interpreted as very high. Progress in enhancing the competencies of non-teaching personnel recorded the lowest mean of 4.19, interpreted as high. The institution shows strong development in the competence, preparedness, and professional capability of teaching and non-teaching personnel. Faculty instructional capacity is consistent with Lomenario (2025) finding that faculty development programs improve teaching quality and institutional performance, and with Dio (2025) emphasis on training needs analysis for instructional strategies and professional growth. Lucero et al. (2022) likewise linked faculty readiness for e-learning to training and institutional support. The comparatively lower rating for non-teaching personnel development indicates a need for targeted staff training, as highlighted by Esmane and Quezon (2024).

3.4.3 Facilities and Learning Resources

Improvement of facilities and learning resources supporting institutional development recorded the highest mean of 4.18, followed by a conducive campus environment at 4.15. The grand mean was 3.94, interpreted as high. Availability and functionality of laboratories and specialized rooms obtained the lowest mean of 3.76, with library resources also relatively lower at 3.79. The institution provides a favorable level of classrooms, offices, learning spaces, ICT resources, and instructional materials, and respondents recognize the contribution of facilities to overall institutional growth. Emague (2023) found that student satisfaction is connected with the quality of facilities and services, while Ubat and Villalon (2024) identified library services and campus facilities as important areas for institutional assessment. The lower ratings for laboratories and library resources imply that development must address not only presence but also quality, functionality, and relevance to current academic needs. Sustained investment in laboratories, library holdings, ICT access, and updated materials can strengthen instructional delivery, student engagement, and research capability.

3.4.4 Student Support Services

Student support services contributing to student success and institutional growth recorded the highest mean of 4.38, followed by activities promoting student development and well-being at 4.37. The grand mean was 4.30, interpreted as very high. Career guidance and job placement services obtained the lowest mean of 4.15, interpreted as high. The institution provides strong support services addressing academic, personal, social, financial, health, leadership, and career-related needs. Student satisfaction with admission, guidance, scholarships, and related services at Isabela State University is an important consideration in evaluating service quality. Pineda et al. (2025) noted that even when satisfaction is high, scholarships and funding often require improvement, paralleling the relatively lower rating for career guidance and placement. Lumasag and Gawahan (2025) likewise observed that student affairs services enhance welfare but require continuous evaluation. Strengthening industry partnerships, alumni linkages, and employment-related services can further improve career readiness while sustaining existing strengths in counseling, scholarships, and student development programs.

3.4.5 Summary of Institutional Development

Academic program development obtained the highest mean of 4.35, student support services 4.30, faculty and staff development 4.24, and facilities and learning resources the lowest at 3.94. The overall mean was 4.20, interpreted as high. LGU-managed higher education institutions are developing well in academic programs, personnel capability, and student services, yet facilities and learning resources lag comparatively. Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b) emphasized that expansion of SUCs and LUCs must be accompanied by measures safeguarding quality of programs and services. Lumasag and Gawahan (2025) confirmed the importance of continuous monitoring of student services. Balanced attention across academic, human-resource, student-service, and physical-resource dimensions is required for comprehensive institutional growth.

3.5 Relationship Between Governance Practices and Institutional Development

Spearman's rank-order correlation yielded a rho value of 0.814 with a p-value of less than .001, indicating a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between governance practices and institutional development. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

As governance practices become more highly implemented, institutional development tends to increase. Effective governance supplies clear direction, accountability mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and policy alignment that enable institutions to respond to challenges, allocate resources efficiently, and implement development initiatives. The discussion noted that Local Universities and Colleges operate under a decentralized structure in which LGUs influence funding and administration while CHED regulates academic standards, making governance central to planning and sustaining development. PIDS discussions likewise noted that expansion of SUCs and LUCs must be balanced with quality and institutional capacity (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al., 2024a). Aquino (2025) found that strategic planning, faculty development, curriculum responsiveness, stakeholder engagement, and quality assurance contribute to institutional quality in high-performing Philippine HEIs, while Cajes (2024) showed that strategic frameworks and implementation gaps affect realization of institutional visions in Bohol colleges. The result is consistent with Good Governance Theory's emphasis on transparency, accountability, participation, and effectiveness, with Stakeholder Theory's recognition of multi-actor dependence, and with Institutional Theory's account of organizational development in response to external standards and expectations. Strengthening participatory planning, accountability systems, transparent decision-making, and coordination with LGUs and CHED can therefore translate governance improvements into gains in academic programs, personnel development, facilities, and student services.

3.6 Relationship Between Administrative Autonomy and Institutional Development

Spearman's rank-order correlation yielded a rho value of 0.846 with a p-value of less than .001, indicating a statistically significant and very strong positive relationship between administrative autonomy and institutional development. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Institutions with higher levels of administrative autonomy tend to demonstrate higher levels of institutional development. Greater authority over administrative

functions, internal processes, resource management, strategic planning, and organizational decisions is closely associated with the capacity to improve performance and achieve development goals. Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. (2024b) emphasized that governance structures and institutional autonomy in Philippine local universities and colleges significantly influence performance in resource utilization, staffing, and operational efficiency. Flores (2025) found that financial and administrative autonomy contributes to institutional sustainability when institutions are empowered to manage resources and implement strategic priorities. OECD (2023) linked institutional autonomy to improved higher education performance when decision-making authority over academic affairs, staffing, budgeting, and internal governance is balanced with accountability. Chen and Liao (2022) similarly reported a significant positive effect of university autonomy on institutional effectiveness, innovation capacity, and organizational responsiveness. Institutional Theory further explains that autonomy enables adaptation to CHED regulations, LGU policies, and community needs while maintaining compliance. Enhancing academic-unit empowerment, financial flexibility, human-resource systems, and strategic-planning capacity can therefore strengthen the contribution of administrative autonomy to sustainable institutional development.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

LGU-managed higher education institutions in the Province of Bohol exhibit generally strong governance practices that support institutional effectiveness and sustainability, with academic governance and transparency mechanisms well-established and reflecting adherence to standards, ethical leadership, and accountability, although effectiveness can be further enhanced by more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes; the institutions demonstrate a considerable degree of administrative autonomy particularly in academic, human resource, and strategic domains that enables proactive responses to challenges and opportunities, yet financial management remains constrained and limits the full realization of autonomy; institutional development is evident across multiple domains especially in academic programs, faculty capability, and student support services, while gaps in facilities and learning resources indicate uneven progress requiring targeted interventions; and governance practices and administrative autonomy are critical determinants of institutional development, as shown by their significant and positive relationships with institutional outcomes, confirming that effective governance provides direction and accountability while autonomy enables flexibility and innovation.

The study recommends the development and implementation of the Integrated Governance and Administrative Framework for Institutional Development as the primary output, to serve as a comprehensive guide that integrates administrative autonomy, governance practices, and institutional development strategies among Local Government Unit-managed higher education institutions by elaborating roles, rules for decision-making, accountability mechanisms, and performance measures in academic decision-making, financial management, human resource management, and strategic planning, while emphasizing participatory and collaborative governance through strengthened involvement of administrators, faculty members, non-teaching personnel, and other stakeholders via consultation processes, representation in institutional committees, and feedback systems, improving financial management through stronger budget planning, transparent resource allocation, and coordinated decision-making with the Local Government Unit in compliance with government policies, and incorporating continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with evidence-based planning, measurable performance indicators, and regular assessment so that governance practices and administrative autonomy are effectively translated into sustainable institutional development outcomes.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

This study adhered to established ethical principles in educational research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and right to withdraw at any time without consequence were clearly explained. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained: no personal identifiers were collected, respondents were assigned identification numbers, and all data were stored securely with access limited to the researcher and reported only in aggregate form. Participation caused minimal disruption to regular work duties, and the principle of non-maleficence was observed throughout. The research protocol followed institutional requirements for ethical clearance.

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