Governing Curriculum Innovation: An Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework for Entrepreneurship Education

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Abstract: Higher education institutions are under increasing pressure to redesign study programmes in response to digital transformation, artificial intelligence, sustainability and rapidly changing labour market requirements. While curriculum innovation has received considerable attention in higher education research, existing studies have primarily examined curriculum design, academic leadership, stakeholder engagement and governance as separate research areas. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to explaining how these elements interact throughout the curriculum innovation process. This conceptual paper addresses this gap by proposing an Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework that conceptualises curriculum innovation as a continuous governance cycle rather than a linear curriculum development process. The framework is developed through a conceptual analysis of literature on curriculum innovation, higher education governance, academic leadership, stakeholder engagement and organisational learning. It combines six operational phases-environmental scanning, stakeholder co-design, curriculum governance, curriculum implementation, competency assessment and continuous improvement—with five cross-cutting governance principles: participation, accountability, transparency, evidence-based decision-making and organisational learning. The proposed framework extends existing curriculum development models by integrating governance mechanisms that support institutional coordination, collaborative decision-making and continuous curriculum improvement. Although developed in the context of entrepreneurship education, the framework is applicable across different higher education disciplines. The paper contributes to theory by linking previously disconnected research streams and provides practical guidance for university leaders, programme guarantors and quality assurance units seeking to strengthen governance arrangements supporting curriculum innovation.

Keywords: Curriculum innovation, Higher education governance, Curriculum governance, Academic leadership, Stakeholder engagement, Organisational learning, Entrepreneurship education

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions operate in an increasingly dynamic environment shaped by digital transformation, demographic change, sustainability challenges and evolving labour market expectations. Universities are expected to prepare graduates who possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also entrepreneurial thinking, digital competencies, problem-solving abilities and the capacity for lifelong learning. These developments require educational programmes to evolve more rapidly than in the past while maintaining academic quality, institutional accountability and compliance with accreditation requirements (European Commission, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Curriculum innovation has therefore become a strategic priority for universities seeking to remain relevant in changing educational and professional environments. Contemporary curriculum development extends beyond updating course content or introducing new teaching methods. It increasingly involves interdisciplinary collaboration, stakeholder engagement, competency-based education and continuous programme evaluation. In this context, curriculum innovation represents an institutional process requiring coordination across academic, organisational and external environments rather than an isolated educational activity (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006).

Entrepreneurship education provides a particularly relevant context for examining curriculum innovation. Universities are expected to develop graduates capable of recognising opportunities, creating value and responding to technological and market change. Consequently, entrepreneurship education increasingly combines disciplinary knowledge with experiential learning, project-based teaching, digital technologies and cooperation with external stakeholders (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Neck & Greene, 2011). These developments require universities not only to redesign educational content but also to establish governance arrangements capable of supporting continuous curriculum adaptation.

Despite growing interest in curriculum innovation, existing research remains fragmented. Studies on curriculum development primarily examine learning outcomes, competency frameworks and pedagogical approaches, whereas governance research focuses on institutional structures, leadership and organisational change. Stakeholder engagement, quality assurance and organisational learning are frequently discussed as

complementary elements rather than as integrated components of curriculum innovation. Consequently, limited attention has been devoted to explaining how universities can organise and govern curriculum innovation as a continuous institutional process (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Kezar, 2014; Bovill, 2020).

This gap has become increasingly important as universities respond to new challenges associated with artificial intelligence, digital transformation, sustainability and rapidly changing competency requirements. Curriculum revision can no longer be viewed solely as a periodic response to accreditation procedures. Instead, universities require governance arrangements that enable continuous environmental scanning, collaborative decision-making, implementation, evaluation and organisational learning. Such an approach supports institutional adaptability while ensuring that educational programmes remain aligned with societal and labour market expectations.

This paper addresses the identified gap by proposing an Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework. The framework conceptualises curriculum innovation as an iterative governance cycle supported by strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, institutional governance and continuous improvement. Unlike conventional curriculum development models that primarily describe educational design processes, the proposed framework focuses on the institutional mechanisms that enable universities to manage curriculum innovation over time.

This study adopts a conceptual framework development approach grounded in the literature on curriculum innovation, higher education governance, academic leadership and stakeholder engagement. Rather than evaluating a specific curriculum or educational intervention, the paper develops a transferable governance framework intended to support curriculum planning and institutional decision-making across different higher education contexts.

The paper makes three principal contributions. First, it integrates previously disconnected strands of literature on curriculum innovation, governance and academic leadership into a coherent analytical framework. Second, it introduces curriculum innovation as a continuous governance cycle supported by participation, accountability, transparency, evidence-based decision-making and organisational learning. Third, it demonstrates how the framework may support higher education institutions in designing, implementing and continuously improving study programmes while responding to changing educational, technological and labour market conditions.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on curriculum innovation, governance, academic leadership and stakeholder engagement. Section 3 presents the proposed Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework. Section 4 discusses its potential application within higher education institutions. Section 5 examines the theoretical and practical implications of the framework, and the final section concludes the paper by outlining its contributions, limitations and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Curriculum Innovation and Governance

Universities are increasingly expected to respond to technological, economic and societal change by redesigning their study programmes. Traditional curriculum development, centred primarily on disciplinary knowledge, is gradually being replaced by approaches that integrate transferable skills, entrepreneurship, digital literacy and collaboration with external stakeholders (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Curriculum innovation is therefore understood as a continuous process of designing, implementing and reviewing educational programmes to ensure their relevance for students, employers and society (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006).

As curriculum innovation has become more complex, governance has emerged as an important determinant of successful curriculum reform. Governance extends beyond formal organisational structures and includes the processes through which universities coordinate decision-making, allocate responsibilities and involve internal and external stakeholders in curriculum development (OECD, 2022). Effective curriculum governance requires cooperation among academic staff, university leadership, employers, accreditation bodies and students, supported by transparent responsibilities and shared institutional objectives (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

Governance influences the entire curriculum development process. During programme design, it facilitates stakeholder participation and alignment with labour market needs. During implementation, it supports resource allocation, interdisciplinary cooperation and organisational capacity. During programme evaluation, governance enables systematic feedback and organisational learning that inform future curriculum development (European Commission, 2022).

Although governance has become an important theme in higher education research, most studies examine institutional governance or quality assurance more broadly rather than governance mechanisms directly supporting curriculum innovation. Consequently, relatively limited attention has been devoted to explaining how governance structures can coordinate curriculum development as a continuous institutional process.

2.2 Academic Leadership and Stakeholder Engagement

Curriculum innovation requires academic leadership capable of coordinating organisational change while creating conditions for collaboration among internal and external stakeholders. Unlike hierarchical management, academic leadership in higher education is typically characterised by professional autonomy, shared responsibility and consensus-building, reflecting the collegial nature of university decision-making (Bolden et al., 2009).

Introducing curriculum innovation often requires changes in established teaching practices, programme structures and institutional routines. Such changes may generate resistance among academic staff, particularly where curriculum reform affects disciplinary boundaries or resource allocation. Effective academic leaders therefore play an important role in facilitating communication, encouraging participation and building institutional commitment to curriculum development (Kezar, 2014).

Leadership also contributes to curriculum innovation by aligning programme development with institutional strategy, supporting interdisciplinary cooperation and promoting organisational learning. Transformational and distributed leadership approaches have been identified as particularly appropriate in higher education because they encourage collective responsibility and knowledge sharing across academic communities (Bolden et al., 2009).

Academic leadership alone, however, is insufficient to ensure successful curriculum innovation. Universities increasingly recognise the value of engaging employers, students, graduates and professional organisations throughout curriculum development. Stakeholder participation improves curriculum relevance, supports competency-based education and strengthens links between universities and professional practice (Healey et al., 2014; Bovill, 2020).

Despite these developments, stakeholder engagement often remains project-based or linked to accreditation procedures rather than being embedded within institutional governance. Consequently, universities require governance arrangements that support continuous stakeholder participation throughout the curriculum lifecycle rather than at isolated stages of programme development.

2.3 Research Gap and Conceptual Contribution

Research on curriculum innovation has generated valuable knowledge regarding educational design, academic leadership, stakeholder engagement and higher education governance. However, these areas have generally developed as separate research streams, providing limited explanation of how governance mechanisms coordinate curriculum innovation throughout its lifecycle.

Most curriculum models focus on learning outcomes, teaching methods or competency development, whereas governance research primarily examines institutional structures, leadership and quality assurance. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to explaining how strategic planning, stakeholder participation, governance arrangements and organisational learning interact as mutually reinforcing components of curriculum innovation.

To address this gap, this paper proposes an Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework that conceptualises curriculum innovation as a continuous governance cycle. The framework combines strategic environmental scanning, collaborative governance, curriculum implementation, competency assessment and continuous organisational learning into a single conceptual model capable of supporting both institutional decision-making and curriculum development.

These approaches offer different strengths but also have limitations. Curriculum design research provides guidance on learning outcomes and teaching methods (Biggs & Tang, 2011) but gives less attention to institutional responsibilities and decision-making. Governance studies explain organisational structures and authority (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; de Boer et al., 2007), but do not always show how these arrangements support curriculum changes in practice. Research on student partnership highlights participation (Healey et al., 2014; Bovill, 2020), although participation alone does not establish who is responsible for implementation or how

feedback leads to further revision. The proposed framework seeks to connect these perspectives rather than replace them.

3. Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework

3.1 Theoretical Foundations of the Framework

Previous research has substantially advanced knowledge on curriculum development, academic leadership, stakeholder engagement and quality assurance in higher education. Curriculum studies have primarily focused on programme design and learning outcomes, whereas governance research has examined institutional decision-making and organisational change. Stakeholder engagement and quality assurance have generally been treated as complementary activities rather than integrated components of curriculum innovation (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Bovill, 2020).

As a result, universities often possess guidance on individual aspects of curriculum development but lack an integrated governance perspective explaining how strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, implementation and continuous improvement should be coordinated throughout the curriculum lifecycle. In practice, curriculum reform frequently remains linked to accreditation procedures or periodic programme reviews instead of being managed as a continuous institutional process.

These challenges have become more pronounced as universities respond to digital transformation, artificial intelligence, sustainability and changing labour market expectations. Institutions are increasingly required to revise educational programmes while maintaining academic quality, institutional accountability and responsiveness to external developments (European Commission, 2022; OECD, 2023).

To address these challenges, this study proposes an Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework that conceptualises curriculum innovation as an iterative governance cycle rather than a linear curriculum development process. The framework integrates strategic environmental scanning, stakeholder co-design, governance arrangements, curriculum implementation, competency assessment and continuous improvement within a single analytical model. Unlike conventional curriculum development approaches, it assumes that curriculum innovation is sustained through organisational learning, stakeholder collaboration and evidence-based institutional decision-making.

3.2 Governance Principles Underpinning the Framework

The proposed framework is built on the assumption that curriculum innovation should be understood as a governance process rather than solely as an educational or administrative activity. While curriculum development is commonly associated with programme design and teaching methods, its successful implementation depends on institutional arrangements that coordinate decision-making, allocate responsibilities and enable collaboration among internal and external stakeholders.

From this perspective, governance provides the institutional conditions under which curriculum innovation can be planned, implemented and continuously improved. The framework therefore extends beyond curriculum design by emphasising how universities organise decision-making processes, involve stakeholders and use evidence to support strategic programme development.

The framework is guided by five governance principles that operate throughout all stages of curriculum innovation. These principles are not conceived as sequential phases but as cross-cutting mechanisms supporting the effectiveness and sustainability of curriculum development.

Participation

Curriculum innovation requires active participation from a broad range of stakeholders. Academic staff contribute disciplinary expertise, university leadership provides strategic direction, while employers, students, graduates and professional organisations offer perspectives on evolving competency requirements. Broader participation improves curriculum relevance, strengthens institutional legitimacy and facilitates the integration of practical knowledge into programme development (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Healey et al., 2014).

Rather than limiting stakeholder involvement to formal consultations, the proposed framework encourages continuous engagement throughout curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation.

Accountability

Successful curriculum innovation requires clearly defined responsibilities at different organisational levels. Programme guarantors, academic departments, faculty management and quality assurance units perform complementary functions throughout curriculum development. Transparent allocation of responsibilities supports consistent decision-making and facilitates institutional accountability towards students, accreditation bodies and society (de Boer et al., 2007).

Within the proposed framework, accountability extends beyond regulatory compliance by supporting responsible management of curriculum quality and long-term programme development.

Transparency

Transparent governance improves trust among institutional actors and external stakeholders. Curriculum decisions should therefore be supported by explicit procedures, clearly defined evaluation criteria and open communication regarding programme objectives, expected competencies and quality assurance processes.

Transparency also facilitates stakeholder participation by enabling different actors to understand how curriculum decisions are made and how their contributions influence programme development (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007).

Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Curriculum innovation should be informed by systematic evidence rather than individual preferences or isolated institutional practices. Labour market analyses, graduate employment data, employer feedback, accreditation reports and international policy documents provide valuable information supporting curriculum planning and revision (OECD, 2023; European Commission, 2022).

Within the framework, evidence is used not only during environmental scanning but throughout the entire governance cycle, supporting implementation, evaluation and continuous improvement.

Organisational Learning

Curriculum innovation is conceptualised as an iterative process supported by institutional learning. Universities continuously acquire knowledge from programme evaluation, stakeholder feedback, graduate outcomes and educational practice. This information enables institutions to revise curricula, improve governance arrangements and respond more effectively to changing external conditions (Argyris & Schön, 1996).

Organisational learning therefore represents the mechanism that transforms curriculum evaluation into future curriculum innovation, creating a continuous cycle of institutional adaptation.

Framework Summary

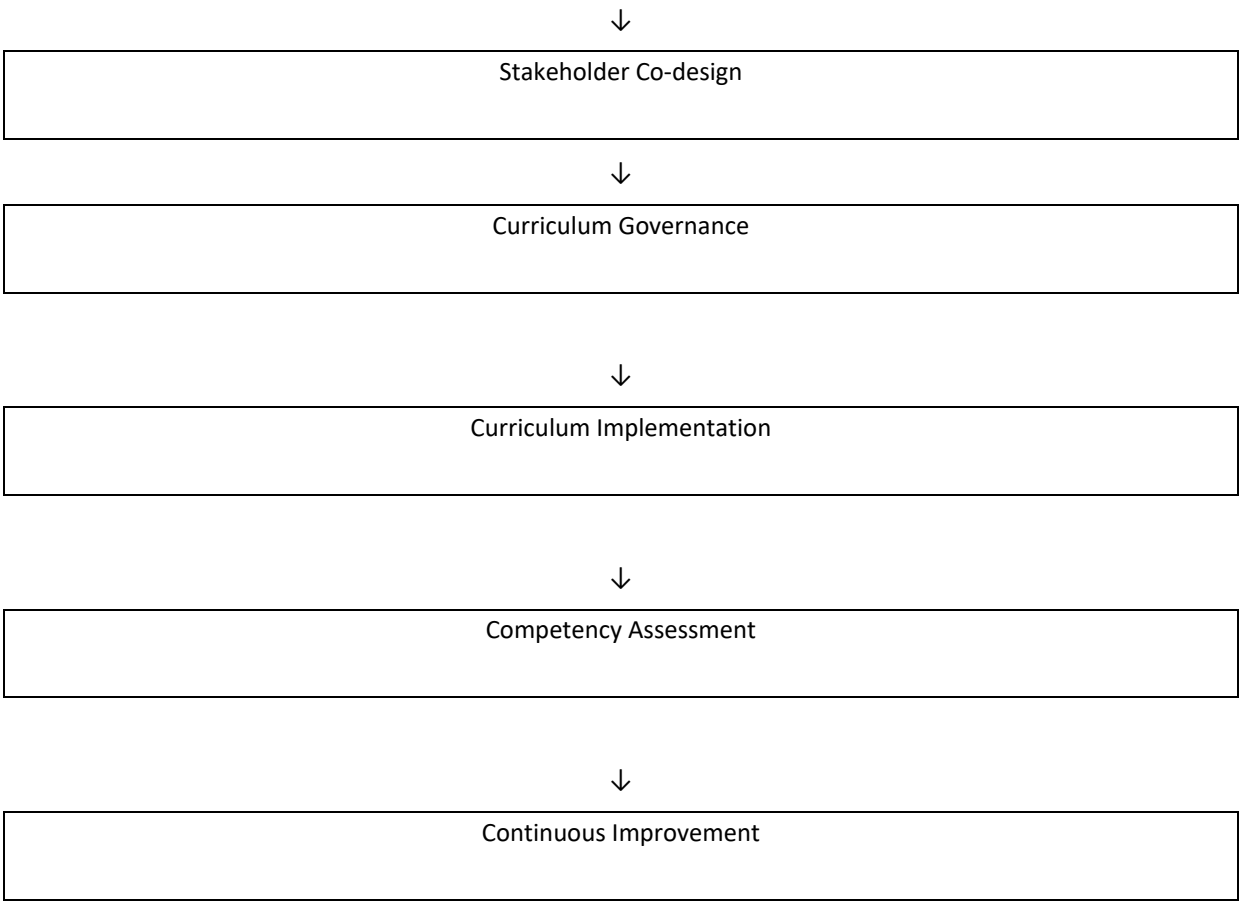
Together, these governance principles provide the institutional foundation of the proposed framework. While the six operational phases describe how curriculum innovation progresses over time, the governance principles explain how universities organise decision-making, coordinate stakeholder participation and sustain continuous curriculum improvement. The interaction between operational phases and governance principles distinguishes the proposed framework from conventional curriculum development models, which primarily focus on programme design without explicitly addressing the institutional processes that support long-term curriculum innovation.

GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

Participation | Accountability | Transparency | Evidence | Organisational Learning

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Environmental Scanning



The governance principles therefore operate across all phases of the framework, ensuring that curriculum innovation remains adaptive, collaborative and evidence-informed rather than a sequence of isolated administrative activities.

4. Applying the Framework in Higher Education Institutions

Instead of presenting curriculum innovation as a sequence of educational activities, the proposed framework may serve as a governance tool supporting institutional decision-making throughout the curriculum lifecycle. It provides universities with a structured approach for coordinating strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, implementation and continuous programme evaluation. Although the framework was developed with entrepreneurship education in mind, its principles are applicable to curriculum innovation across different academic disciplines.

4.1 Strategic Planning and Environmental Scanning

The framework begins with strategic analysis rather than curriculum design itself. Universities should first identify the external and internal factors that justify curriculum innovation, including labour market developments, technological change, demographic trends, public policy priorities and accreditation requirements. Such analyses enable institutional leaders to define educational priorities using evidence rather than individual preferences or short-term organisational pressures (OECD, 2023; European Commission, 2022).

At the institutional level, environmental scanning also supports strategic alignment between curriculum development and broader university objectives. It helps programme teams identify future competency needs, prioritise educational investments and anticipate changes that may influence graduate employability.

4.2 Collaborative Curriculum Governance

The second stage focuses on organising collaboration among institutional and external stakeholders. Rather than concentrating exclusively on curriculum content, universities should establish governance arrangements that facilitate participation, define responsibilities and coordinate decision-making throughout programme development.

The proposed framework recommends involving academic staff, university leadership, students, graduates, employers and professional organisations at different stages of curriculum planning. Continuous stakeholder participation contributes to curriculum relevance while improving transparency and institutional legitimacy (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bovill, 2020).

From a governance perspective, curriculum development becomes a shared institutional responsibility instead of an activity carried out exclusively by individual academic departments.

4.3 Organising Curriculum Implementation

Implementation requires more than introducing new courses or teaching methods. Universities need organisational capacity to support curriculum delivery, including staff development, digital infrastructure, interdisciplinary cooperation and collaboration with external partners.

The framework therefore emphasises institutional preparedness as a prerequisite for successful curriculum innovation. Decisions regarding project-based learning, entrepreneurship education, digital technologies or the responsible use of artificial intelligence should be coordinated through institutional governance rather than introduced as isolated educational initiatives. Such an approach improves consistency across study programmes and supports long-term curriculum sustainability (Biggs & Tang, 2011; UNESCO, 2023).

4.4 Monitoring Curriculum Quality and Institutional Learning

The final stage focuses on transforming curriculum evaluation into organisational learning. Information obtained from student feedback, graduate outcomes, employer surveys, accreditation reviews and internal quality assurance processes provides evidence for future curriculum revision.

Within the proposed framework, evaluation serves not only to assess educational quality but also to support institutional learning and adaptive governance. Universities capable of systematically incorporating evaluation results into future programme development are better positioned to respond to technological change, labour market developments and evolving educational expectations (Argyris & Schön, 1996; OECD, 2022).

Rather than concluding the curriculum development process, evaluation initiates a new cycle of strategic analysis, ensuring that curriculum innovation remains continuous rather than episodic.

The proposed framework demonstrates that effective curriculum innovation depends not only on educational design but also on the quality of institutional governance. Strategic planning, collaborative decision-making, organisational capacity and continuous learning should therefore be regarded as mutually reinforcing dimensions of curriculum development. By integrating these elements into a single governance cycle, universities may improve their ability to adapt educational programmes to changing societal, technological and labour market conditions.

5. Discussion

The proposed framework builds on existing research on curriculum innovation, higher education governance and academic leadership while offering a more integrated perspective on curriculum development. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of competency-based education, stakeholder engagement and organisational learning in improving higher education quality (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Kezar, 2014). However, these concepts have largely been examined independently, with limited attention devoted to the governance processes that connect them throughout curriculum innovation.

A central contribution of this study is the conceptualisation of curriculum innovation as a continuous governance cycle rather than a sequence of isolated educational activities. Existing curriculum models frequently concentrate on programme design, learning outcomes or teaching methods, whereas governance studies primarily examine institutional structures and decision-making processes (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; de Boer et al., 2007). The proposed framework integrates these perspectives by demonstrating how strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, institutional governance and organisational learning collectively support curriculum innovation.

The framework also extends current discussions on stakeholder participation. Earlier studies have consistently highlighted the importance of involving employers, students and external partners in curriculum development (Healey et al., 2014; Bovill, 2020). Nevertheless, stakeholder engagement is often presented as a consultation activity conducted during programme design. The present framework argues that participation should continue throughout implementation, competency assessment and curriculum review. This broader understanding

strengthens institutional adaptability and enables universities to respond more effectively to changing labour market expectations.

Another contribution concerns the relationship between governance and academic leadership. Previous research has shown that successful curriculum reform depends on leadership capable of coordinating organisational change and building consensus among academic communities (Bolden et al., 2009; Kezar, 2014). The proposed framework complements this perspective by emphasising that leadership alone is insufficient without governance arrangements that clarify responsibilities, support evidence-based decision-making and establish mechanisms for continuous institutional learning. Leadership therefore acts within governance structures rather than replacing them. The literature also points to tensions that the framework cannot fully resolve. Wider stakeholder participation may improve the relevance of a programme, but it can make decisions slower and responsibilities less clear. Formal governance arrangements can strengthen accountability, while excessive procedures may reduce flexibility in curriculum development. The framework therefore treats participation, accountability and organisational learning as principles that need to be balanced in different institutional settings, not as guarantees of successful innovation.

The findings also contribute to current debates on higher education policy. European universities are expected to modernise curricula in response to digital transformation, artificial intelligence, sustainability objectives and changing competency requirements (European Commission, 2022; OECD, 2023). Many institutions, however, continue to approach curriculum reform primarily as an accreditation exercise or periodic administrative review. The proposed framework suggests that curriculum innovation should instead become an integral component of institutional governance, allowing universities to adapt educational programmes more systematically and proactively.

An additional strength of the framework lies in its potential transferability. Although developed in the context of entrepreneurship education, its governance principles are not discipline-specific. Strategic environmental scanning, collaborative governance, competency-oriented assessment and continuous organisational learning are equally relevant for engineering, business, public administration, healthcare and other professionally oriented study programmes. The framework may therefore provide a common governance structure while allowing institutions to adapt curriculum content to disciplinary requirements.

The proposed framework nevertheless has several limitations. As a conceptual study, it has not yet been empirically validated in institutional settings. The relationships between governance arrangements and curriculum outcomes remain theoretically grounded and require empirical testing. Future research should examine how universities apply the framework in practice and whether different governance arrangements influence curriculum quality, graduate competencies and institutional adaptability. Comparative studies across universities and national higher education systems may further refine the proposed governance model and identify contextual factors affecting its implementation.

Despite these limitations, the framework offers a structured conceptual basis for understanding curriculum innovation as an institutional governance process. It provides an analytical perspective that connects strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, implementation and continuous improvement within a single governance cycle. This integrated approach may support future theoretical development while also offering practical guidance for higher education institutions seeking to strengthen the governance of curriculum innovation.

5.1 Contributions to Theory and Practice

Theoretical contribution

The proposed **Integrated Curriculum Governance Framework** contributes to higher education research by integrating curriculum innovation, governance, academic leadership and stakeholder engagement into a single analytical perspective. While previous studies have mainly examined these topics separately (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Kezar, 2014), the proposed framework conceptualises curriculum innovation as a continuous governance process. By linking strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, curriculum implementation and organisational learning, it extends existing curriculum development models beyond their traditional pedagogical focus and highlights the institutional mechanisms supporting long-term curriculum innovation.

Practica contribution

From a practical perspective, the framework provides universities with a structured governance approach to curriculum development. It supports strategic planning, stakeholder participation and evidence-based decision-

making throughout the curriculum lifecycle, rather than limiting programme revision to accreditation cycles or administrative requirements. The framework may assist university leaders, programme guarantors and quality assurance units in coordinating curriculum innovation while maintaining academic quality, institutional accountability and responsiveness to changing labour market needs.

6. Future Research

As a conceptual study, the proposed framework requires empirical validation in different higher education contexts. Future research should examine how governance arrangements influence curriculum quality, stakeholder collaboration and graduate competencies across universities and academic disciplines. Comparative studies may also explore how institutional characteristics and national higher education systems affect the implementation of curriculum governance, thereby contributing to further refinement of the proposed framework.

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Ethics Declaration: This study is a conceptual paper based exclusively on published literature and does not involve human participants, personal data or experimental procedures. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

AI Declaration: Generative AI tools were used solely for language editing and stylistic refinement of the manuscript. They were not used to generate the scientific content, conceptual framework, literature analysis or conclusions. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality and integrity of the work.

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