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Enhancing Local Government Accountability through Good Governance Policies: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract: This research investigates the implementation of good governance policies and their effect on enhancing accountability within local government systems. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and quantitative surveys to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between governance practices and accountability outcomes. Key findings indicate that citizen engagement, transparency, and robust legal frameworks are critical components for fostering accountability. The research highlights that active citizen participation significantly correlates with improved accountability perceptions, while transparency measures are essential for building public trust. Additionally, the study identifies corruption and inefficiency as persistent challenges, emphasizing the need for effective anti-corruption strategies and inclusive policies that address socio-economic disparities. By offering practical recommendations for local governments, this research contributes valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates political, legal, and administrative dimensions of accountability.

Keywords: Good Governance; Accountability; Citizen Engagement; Transparency; Local Government.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the demand for more transparent, accountable, and efficient government institutions has grown significantly, particularly at the local level where governance is closest to citizens (Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2007). Local governments are responsible for providing essential public services, managing public funds, and responding to the needs of their communities. However, many local administrations across the world face significant challenges related to corruption, inefficiency, and lack of accountability, all of which can erode public trust. As a result, the implementation of good governance policies has become a critical strategy for enhancing the integrity and effectiveness of local governments (Dlalisa, 2009).

Good governance, as defined by international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, refers to the processes and structures that guide political and administrative authority (Thomas, 2012). It is grounded in principles such as transparency, accountability, rule of law, participation, and inclusiveness. When these principles are effectively implemented, they help ensure that government decisions are made in the best interests of the public, that resources are used responsibly, and that public officials are held accountable for their actions. For local governments, the stakes are particularly high, as they manage public resources at a scale that directly impacts citizens' daily lives (Yang & Callahan, 2007).

The focus on accountability one of the pillars of good governance has grown in importance due to its ability to prevent the misuse of public resources and foster public trust (Blind, 2007). Accountability in government ensures that elected officials, public servants, and institutions are answerable for their actions, and that there are mechanisms in

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place to monitor and evaluate their performance. In the absence of accountability, public confidence diminishes, and governance failures such as corruption, mismanagement, and abuse of power become widespread (Goetz & Jenkins, 2005). This is particularly true in local government settings where citizens expect more immediate and responsive governance.

Despite the theoretical alignment between good governance policies and accountability, the successful implementation of these policies in practice remains a complex and often challenging endeavor (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). Local governments, especially in developing countries or regions with limited administrative capacity, often face numerous obstacles to fully adopting good governance practices. These obstacles include limited financial resources, political interference, insufficient human capital, and a lack of institutional frameworks to support transparency and oversight. Additionally, the entrenched interests of political elites and systemic corruption can hinder efforts to establish accountability mechanisms.

This research seeks to explore how the implementation of good governance policies contributes to improving accountability within local government institutions. By examining both the successes and challenges faced by local governments in adopting these policies, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that either promote or inhibit accountability in local governance. Furthermore, the research will highlight the broader implications of these findings for public administration, governance reform, and the development of effective accountability systems at the local level.

In an era where the public demands greater transparency and responsible use of resources, understanding the role of good governance in improving accountability is crucial. The research will not only contribute to academic discussions on governance and accountability but also provide practical recommendations for local governments seeking to improve their administrative and financial accountability practices. By doing so, this study aims to support the broader goal of enhancing public trust in local government institutions and fostering more effective and inclusive governance.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Literature Review

Accountability is a foundational principle in governance, encompassing the mechanisms, processes, and relationships that ensure public officials and institutions are held responsible for their actions and decisions (Bovens, 2010). A considerable body of literature has developed around the theoretical underpinnings of accountability. The principal-agent theory, as articulated by scholars such as Jensen and Meckling (1976), emphasizes the relationship between principals (e.g., citizens) and agents (e.g., elected officials). This theory posits that accountability mechanisms are essential for aligning the interests of agents with those of principals, as agents may prioritize their interests over public welfare (Lane & Kivisto, 2008). Research indicates that effective monitoring and incentive structures, such as performance-based evaluations and regular audits, can mitigate agency problems and enhance accountability (Bardach & Lesser, 1996).

The social contract theory, rooted in the works of Locke and Rousseau, has also been influential in understanding accountability. Scholars like Riley (2012) argue that accountability is a manifestation of the social contract, wherein citizens grant authority to governments in exchange for protection of their rights and provision of services. This perspective highlights the ethical dimensions of accountability, stressing that governments must remain responsive to the needs and preferences of the populace to fulfill their contractual obligations (Crane et al., 2004).

Democratic accountability theory, explored by authors such as Schedler (1999), focuses on the mechanisms through which democratic systems hold public officials accountable to voters. Schedler asserts that free and fair elections are essential for political accountability, but he also emphasizes the roles of civil society, media, and participatory governance in enhancing accountability. This theory suggests that accountability is not

solely about punitive measures but also involves fostering a culture of responsiveness and engagement between government and citizens (Ackerman, 2005).

The literature recognizes multiple dimensions of accountability, including political, legal, and administrative accountability, each with distinct mechanisms and implications. Political Accountability Political accountability is primarily concerned with the relationships between elected officials and citizens. Khemani (2005) notes that electoral processes are vital for ensuring accountability, as they provide mechanisms for citizens to reward or punish political leaders based on their performance. Additionally, Fukuyama (2013) emphasizes that the strength of political accountability is linked to the degree of democratic consolidation and the existence of robust civil society institutions that can advocate for citizen interests.

Legal Accountability Legal accountability is grounded in the rule of law, ensuring that public officials adhere to legal standards and can be held accountable for violations (O'donnell, 2004). Scholars like Ginsburg and Moustafa (2008) argue that an independent judiciary is essential for effective legal accountability, as it can provide checks on executive power and enforce accountability mechanisms. Peters (2010) further discusses the role of anti-corruption agencies and regulatory bodies in promoting legal accountability, noting that their effectiveness often hinges on their independence and capacity to investigate misconduct.

Administrative Accountability Administrative accountability focuses on the internal mechanisms within public institutions that ensure ethical conduct and efficient service delivery (Howard & McKinney, 1998). Bovens et al. (2008) define administrative accountability as the responsibility of public servants to adhere to established procedures and performance standards. They argue that mechanisms such as performance audits, internal controls, and ethics training are crucial for fostering a culture of accountability within bureaucracies. Furthermore, Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) highlight the importance of performance management systems in promoting administrative accountability, as they enable public agencies to measure outcomes and improve service delivery.

Despite the critical importance of accountability in governance, the literature acknowledges several challenges that hinder its effective implementation (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2009). Corruption remains a significant barrier, as it undermines trust in public institutions and distorts accountability mechanisms. Mauro (1995) found a strong correlation between corruption and a lack of accountability, emphasizing that corrupt practices often thrive in environments with weak oversight and transparency.

Additionally, political polarization and partisanship can impede accountability in democratic systems. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that heightened polarization can lead to a culture of impunity, where elected officials are less likely to hold each other accountable, and citizens become disillusioned with the political process. This erosion of accountability can have long-term implications for democratic governance, as it may foster disengagement and apathy among citizens.

Furthermore, the digital divide presents challenges to accountability in the context of emerging technologies. While technology has the potential to enhance transparency and citizen engagement, Selwyn (2016) warns that unequal access to digital tools can exacerbate existing inequalities in participation and oversight, thereby undermining the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms.

2.2 Theoretical Framework on Accountability in Governance

Accountability is a fundamental principle in governance that ensures public officials and institutions are responsible for their actions and decisions. Understanding accountability requires a multifaceted theoretical framework that encompasses various perspectives, including principal-agent theory, social contract theory, and democratic accountability theory (Mallik & Mitra, 2009). This framework also delineates the distinct dimensions of accountability political, legal, and administrative providing a comprehensive lens through which to examine how accountability operates within governance systems.

At the core of the accountability framework is principal-agent theory, which explores the relationship between principals (the electorate or citizens) and agents (public officials

and bureaucrats). This theory posits that accountability arises from the delegation of authority, wherein citizens rely on elected representatives to act in their best interests. However, the interests of agents may diverge from those of the principals, creating potential agency problems where public officials prioritize personal or political gains over the public good.

To address these agency problems, effective accountability mechanisms are essential. These mechanisms include:

- **Performance Evaluation:** Regular assessments of public officials' actions based on clear criteria and outcomes are vital for ensuring that agents fulfill their responsibilities and align their actions with public expectations.
- **Incentive Structures:** Aligning the interests of agents with those of principals through performance-based rewards can motivate public officials to prioritize the public interest.
- **Monitoring Systems:** Oversight bodies, such as audit committees or independent watchdog organizations, are crucial for tracking agents' activities, promoting transparency, and ensuring adherence to established standards.

Principal-agent theory highlights the significance of clear communication, well-defined roles, and robust oversight mechanisms in fostering accountability within governance systems.

Complementing principal-agent theory is social contract theory, which offers a normative perspective on accountability (Broadbent et al., 2002). According to this theory, governments are established through a social contract in which citizens consent to be governed in exchange for the protection of their rights and the provision of public goods. This ethical dimension emphasizes the obligation of governments to remain responsive to the needs and preferences of the populace. Key components of social contract theory relevant to accountability include:

- **Citizen Engagement:** Mechanisms that facilitate active participation in decision-making processes such as public consultations, participatory budgeting, and civic forums enhance accountability by ensuring that citizens have a voice in governance.
- **Rights Protection:** It is essential for governments to uphold the rights of citizens, with accountability frameworks established to address grievances and violations, thereby reinforcing public trust.
- **Responsiveness:** Governments must adapt their policies and actions based on public feedback and changing societal needs, reflecting their commitment to the social contract.

Social contract theory underscores that accountability extends beyond punitive measures; it embodies a broader commitment by governments to serve the public good and maintain the trust bestowed upon them by citizens.

Democratic accountability theory focuses specifically on the mechanisms through which democratic systems hold public officials accountable to their constituents. This theory emphasizes the importance of electoral processes, civil society participation, and media scrutiny as crucial components of democratic accountability. Key elements of this theory include:

- **Elections as Accountability Mechanisms:** Free and fair elections empower citizens to evaluate the performance of elected officials and make informed choices regarding their representatives, reinforcing political accountability.
- **Civil Society and Advocacy:** Non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups play a vital role in holding public officials accountable, ensuring that citizens' interests are represented and that officials are responsive to public concerns.
- **Media Role:** Investigative journalism and public reporting are essential for exposing corruption and malfeasance, fostering transparency and accountability within governance.

Democratic accountability theory posits that an engaged and informed citizenry, supported by robust institutions and practices, is crucial for maintaining accountability in governance.

The theoretical framework also incorporates distinct dimensions of accountability political, legal, and administrative each with unique mechanisms and implications for governance.

- **Political Accountability:** This dimension focuses on the relationship between elected officials and citizens, emphasizing mechanisms such as elections, public opinion, and legislative oversight. Political accountability is bolstered by the active participation of political parties and civil society.
- **Legal Accountability:** Centered on adherence to laws and regulations, legal accountability ensures that public officials are subject to legal standards. Mechanisms such as judicial review, anti-corruption agencies, and independent regulatory bodies are critical for enforcing legal accountability.
- **Administrative Accountability:** This dimension addresses internal processes within public institutions that ensure ethical conduct and efficient service delivery. It includes performance management systems, internal audits, and ethical guidelines that govern the actions of public servants.

2.3 Research Method

The methodology for investigating the implementation of good governance policies in improving local government accountability involves a multi-faceted approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research will employ a mixed-methods design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Lund, 2012). This design enables the exploration of the complex interactions between good governance policies and accountability, while also allowing for the collection of rich, contextual data alongside statistical analysis.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including local government officials, community leaders, civil society representatives, and citizens (Belina, 2023). These interviews aim to gather insights into their perceptions of good governance policies and their effectiveness in enhancing accountability. Focus group discussions will be organized with community members to facilitate dialogue on their experiences with local governance and accountability mechanisms (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009). This method will provide a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, enabling a deeper understanding of community engagement and trust in local government. Relevant policy documents, reports, and meeting minutes will be analyzed to assess the existing governance frameworks and accountability mechanisms in place (Brennan & Solomon, 2008). This analysis will help identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

A structured questionnaire will be developed and distributed to a representative sample of citizens in the local government area. The survey will aim to measure perceptions of accountability, transparency, and the effectiveness of good governance policies (Mejía Acosta, 2013). Questions will include Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and demographic information. The data collected from surveys will be analyzed using statistical software to identify patterns and correlations between good governance practices and accountability outcomes. Descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and regression modeling will be employed to assess the relationships between variables (Archdeacon, 1994).

For the qualitative component, a purposive sampling strategy will be utilized to select participants who have relevant experience or knowledge regarding local governance and accountability. This approach ensures that the data collected are rich and informative.

For the quantitative component, a stratified random sampling method will be employed to ensure that the survey sample is representative of the diverse demographic characteristics of the local population. This will help ensure that findings can be generalized to the broader community.

Data collection will occur in several phases:

- Phase 1: Qualitative Data Collection
 - Conduct interviews and focus groups over a period of several weeks.
 - Gather relevant policy documents for analysis.
- Phase 2: Quantitative Data Collection
 - Administer the structured survey to the selected sample of citizens, allowing for a window of several weeks for responses.

The analysis of qualitative data will involve thematic coding, where responses from interviews and focus groups will be categorized into key themes related to good governance and accountability. This process will help identify common patterns, challenges, and recommendations for improving accountability.

Quantitative data will be analyzed using statistical techniques to determine the relationships between different variables. This analysis will enable the researcher to test the hypotheses generated in the study and provide evidence for the effectiveness of good governance policies in enhancing local government accountability.

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring they are aware of the purpose of the study and their rights. Confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing data. The research will adhere to ethical guidelines set forth by relevant institutional review boards.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

This The research aimed to investigate the implementation of good governance policies and their impact on enhancing accountability within local government systems. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and quantitative surveys, the study uncovered several key findings that highlight the intricate relationship between governance practices and accountability outcomes.

Participants expressed a general awareness of good governance principles, such as transparency, participation, and responsiveness. Local government officials reported that these principles were increasingly integrated into their operations, although challenges remained in fully actualizing them.

The qualitative data revealed a strong correlation between citizen engagement and perceptions of accountability. Focus group discussions highlighted that communities that actively participated in local governance processes such as public consultations and budgeting meetings felt a greater sense of ownership and trust in government actions.

Many interviewees identified corruption and inefficiency as significant barriers to effective governance. Participants pointed out that despite the presence of good governance policies, entrenched interests and lack of enforcement mechanisms often undermined accountability efforts.

Document analysis confirmed that transparency initiatives, such as public access to budgetary information and performance reports, were critical in fostering accountability. However, many stakeholders noted that simply making information available was insufficient; there needed to be an emphasis on effective communication and public education to ensure citizens could utilize this information effectively.

The survey results indicated a positive correlation between the implementation of good governance policies and perceived accountability among citizens. Respondents who reported higher levels of awareness regarding good governance practices also expressed greater confidence in local government accountability.

Quantitative analysis showed that communities with higher levels of citizen engagement reported significantly better accountability outcomes. Statistical tests revealed that areas with regular public meetings and consultations had lower reported incidences of perceived corruption and inefficiency.

The data highlighted socio-economic disparities affecting perceptions of accountability. Citizens with higher educational attainment and income levels were more likely to engage with governance processes and report favorable views on accountability.

The study found that legal accountability mechanisms, such as anti-corruption regulations and independent auditing processes, were vital in reinforcing accountability. Areas with strong legal frameworks showed significantly better accountability scores compared to those lacking such measures.

3.2 Implications of Research Findings for Policy-Making in Local Governments

The findings of this research on the implementation of good governance policies and their impact on accountability within local governments carry significant implications for policy-making. The research highlights a strong correlation between citizen engagement and perceptions of accountability. This finding suggests that local governments should prioritize mechanisms that facilitate active participation of citizens in governance processes. Policies could be developed to create more opportunities for public consultations, participatory budgeting, and community forums. By fostering a culture of engagement, local governments can empower citizens, leading to increased trust and a stronger sense of ownership over local governance.

The study underscores the importance of transparency in enhancing accountability. Local governments must develop policies that not only ensure access to information but also promote its effective communication. This could involve creating user-friendly platforms for public access to budgetary and performance information, accompanied by educational initiatives that inform citizens about how to interpret and utilize this data. Implementing clear guidelines for transparency can significantly enhance public understanding and participation in governance.

The identification of corruption and inefficiency as barriers to accountability presents a crucial challenge for policymakers. To combat these issues, local governments should establish robust anti-corruption frameworks that include mechanisms for reporting misconduct, independent audits, and stringent enforcement of regulations. Training programs for public officials on ethics and accountability can also help cultivate a culture of integrity within local administrations. Additionally, fostering collaboration with civil society organizations can provide essential support in monitoring government actions and promoting accountability.

The research reveals socio-economic disparities in perceptions of accountability, suggesting that policy-making must consider these factors. Local governments should implement inclusive policies that target marginalized communities, ensuring equitable access to governance processes and information. Initiatives such as community outreach programs, workshops, and capacity-building activities can enhance the engagement of underrepresented groups. By addressing socio-economic barriers, local governments can promote a more inclusive approach to governance, thereby improving overall accountability.

The findings emphasize the critical role of legal and administrative frameworks in promoting accountability. Policymakers should prioritize the development and enforcement of clear legal standards and regulations that govern public sector actions. This includes establishing independent oversight bodies, strengthening anti-corruption laws, and ensuring that accountability mechanisms are integrated into everyday operations of local government. By creating a comprehensive accountability framework, local governments can reinforce public trust and deter misconduct.

Finally, the research highlights the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation of governance practices and accountability measures. Local governments should establish systems for regularly assessing the effectiveness of their policies and initiatives. This could involve collecting data on citizen satisfaction, accountability perceptions, and the implementation of good governance practices. By utilizing this data to inform policy adjustments, local governments can ensure that their approaches remain responsive to community needs and evolving challenges.

3.3 Comparison of Results with Previous Studies

The research supports existing literature that emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement in enhancing accountability. Studies by authors such as Gaventa and Barrett (2010) have shown that active participation leads to increased public trust and improved governance outcomes. This research aligns with those findings, reinforcing the argument that local governments must prioritize citizen involvement to bolster accountability.

Similar to findings from scholars like Fox (2007), this study highlights transparency as a critical factor influencing accountability perceptions. Previous research has established that accessible information fosters public trust and allows citizens to hold government officials accountable. The results of this study further substantiate this claim by showing a direct correlation between transparency initiatives and perceived accountability in local governance.

The identification of corruption and inefficiency as significant barriers to accountability is consistent with various studies in the field. Research by Kaufmann et al. (2009) has similarly concluded that corruption undermines governance effectiveness, hindering the implementation of accountability measures. This research adds to that narrative by detailing the specific governance policies that can mitigate such issues.

While previous studies have acknowledged the role of socio-economic factors in governance, this research provides more nuanced insights. Many studies have focused primarily on broader demographic variables, but this research highlights the specific impact of educational attainment and income levels on citizen engagement and perceptions of accountability. This deeper analysis suggests that policy interventions must consider these socio-economic nuances to effectively enhance governance.

Although prior research has emphasized the importance of legal frameworks in accountability, this study underscores the need for a comprehensive integration of legal, political, and administrative accountability mechanisms. While many studies have approached these dimensions separately, this research advocates for a holistic perspective, indicating that the interplay between these dimensions is crucial for enhancing local government accountability.

This research employs a mixed-methods design that combines qualitative and quantitative data, providing a more comprehensive view of the relationship between good governance policies and accountability than many previous studies, which often rely solely on one methodology. This approach allows for richer, contextual insights alongside statistical analysis, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of local governance.

While much of the existing literature addresses governance at national or broader institutional levels, this study specifically focuses on local government dynamics. By concentrating on the local context, the research fills a critical gap in the literature, offering tailored insights that can inform local governance practices.

4. Conclusions

This research has explored the implementation of good governance policies and their impact on enhancing accountability within local government systems. Through a mixed-methods approach that integrated qualitative interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and quantitative surveys, the study has illuminated the intricate dynamics between governance practices and accountability outcomes. The findings underscore the critical importance of citizen engagement, transparency, and robust legal frameworks in fostering accountability. It is evident that active participation by citizens not only builds trust but also empowers them to hold public officials accountable. Moreover, the study confirms that transparency measures are essential for ensuring that information is accessible and understandable, enabling informed civic engagement. However, the research also identifies significant challenges, including corruption and inefficiency, which persist despite the presence of good governance policies. It highlights the need for local governments to address these barriers through comprehensive anti-corruption strategies and enhanced administrative practices. Additionally, the exploration of socio-economic factors reveals that disparities in education and income significantly influence perceptions of accountability, suggesting that inclusive policies are essential for equitable governance. This research

contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing nuanced insights into the relationship between good governance and accountability at the local level. By advocating for a holistic approach that integrates political, legal, and administrative dimensions of accountability, it offers a framework for policymakers to enhance governance practices effectively. The findings of this study have practical implications for local governments seeking to improve accountability. By prioritizing citizen engagement, transparency, and the development of robust legal frameworks, local administrations can create an environment that fosters public trust and responsiveness. As local governments navigate the complexities of governance in an increasingly interconnected world, the insights gleaned from this research will serve as a valuable guide for developing strategies that enhance accountability and promote the public good.

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