

## An Institutional Analysis of the Feasibility of Implementing a Student Parliament

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to assess the necessity and feasibility of establishing a Student Parliament by emphasizing the connection between student organizations and social participation. The current issues within student organizations have hindered the growth and expansion of social engagement within universities and, consequently, society at large. The main question of this paper is: What are the existing problems within student organizations, and what are the criteria and characteristics for the feasible implementation of a Student Parliament? According to the institutionalism theory and methodology, the challenges facing student organizations include the lack of appropriate models for practicing social participation, weak inter-organizational communication, failure to synergize information and preferences, lack of institutionalization toward collective participation, disruption of the organizations' mission, inadequacies in regulations for promoting collective awareness, and inefficiencies in procedural participation and achieving collective goals. As a solution, the creation of a Student Parliament within universities has been proposed. This platform would bring together various organizations, providing a conducive environment for the growth and expansion of social engagement within universities and, consequently, society. In the Student Parliament, students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives would collaborate to foster communication and solidarity among students, as well as between students and university officials. The Student Parliament would serve as a forum where student representatives are divided into specialized committees to propose, discuss, and debate important issues. Therefore, the Student Parliament can be an effective institution for advocating student interests.

**Keywords:** Student organizations, pathology, social participation, institutionalism, Student Parliament



## Introduction

Universities are key modern institutions responsible for preparing individuals to engage in the dynamics of contemporary society and fostering social participation. Within universities, student organizations play a crucial role in promoting social engagement. The first independent student organization in Iran, the Islamic Association of Tehran University, was established in 1942. Various student organizations, such as the Office for Strengthening Unity (1982), the Student Basij (1988), and student councils, have since emerged to address academic, cultural, and social needs. However, these organizations often face challenges in fulfilling their civil mission, particularly in countries like Iran, where political parties and civil institutions are underdeveloped. Understanding and addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing social participation among students. This paper explores the obstacles hindering student organizations and proposes a Student Parliament as a model to improve student engagement.

## Methodology

This qualitative study employs an interpretive approach, using a single case study to examine a specific event without comparison. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, supplemented by direct observation and document analysis. Nine key informants participated, including former and current student organization leaders, university administrators, and cultural planning experts. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the findings, presented in a reflective narrative style. Five main interview questions focused on student organizations' current resources, collaboration between organizations, barriers to collective action, and the essential features of a proposed Student Parliament.

## Findings

Student organizations in universities play a crucial role in fostering collective participation and influencing university decisions. However, these organizations often operate in a fragmented manner, with isolated activities that limit their overall impact. The lack of coordination among different groups has weakened their ability to effectively address student concerns and participate in university management. Cultural, structural, and managerial challenges, along with a lack of interest in group work, contribute to this issue. Without a clear framework for collaboration and synergy, student organizations struggle to unify their efforts, resulting in diminished influence on university policies and decisions. The student parliament should function as a cohesive entity for organizing student participation, particularly in addressing issues related to participation disorder and defining the roles of actors within the university. This body should consist of elected members and representatives from various student organizations, including graduate and doctoral students from different faculties. Its electoral system should be based on absolute majority voting to establish a clear connection between representatives and their constituencies. Specialized committees within the parliament, such as those for education, research, and sports, should have clearly defined roles to enhance their respective activities.

## Conclusion

Rapid changes in educational structures and the increasing development of data and knowledge across various student sectors highlight deficiencies in both hardware and software systems. Student enthusiasm, motivation, and ideals often drive dissatisfaction with the current state. Viewing student organizations through an institutional and participatory lens reveals fundamental shortcomings in embracing diversity, organizing cultural, social, and political actions based on rationality, and adhering to legal norms in student participation. Establishing a student parliament, encompassing various student groups and associations, can address these issues by providing a structured forum for discussion on academic, social, cultural, and vocational topics. This parliament can act as a democratic representative body, enhancing student engagement, promoting civil discourse, and supporting student interests across academic, social, and cultural domains.

### Recommendations:

- Establish a Student Parliament as a representative body for enhancing social participation and addressing academic, social, and cultural issues.

- Develop educational structures utilizing new technologies and data to address current deficiencies.
- Create a framework for integrating students' emotions, motivation, and ideals through institutional participation in student organizations.

Utilize the Student Parliament to support student interests, influence university policies, and cultivate active citizenship among students.

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