

Advocating for Excellence: Legal Strategies in Shaping Higher Education as a World-Class Research and Education Hub (Case of Indonesia, Oman, and United Arab Emirates)

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of legal strategies and advocacy in shaping higher education institutions into world-class research and education hubs, with a comparative focus on Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) in Indonesia, Dhofar University in Oman, and the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Central to this analysis is the development of Centers of Excellence (CoEs) as catalysts for academic innovation, international collaboration, and institutional prestige. The study investigates how legal frameworks—ranging from national laws to internal university policies—facilitate or hinder the strategic growth of CoEs in each context. It highlights how legal advocacy can drive policy reform, secure essential resources, safeguard

intellectual property, and promote academic freedom and international accreditation. By examining case studies from the three institutions, the paper underscores the importance of legal professionals not only as compliance officers but as key actors in institutional transformation. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that a robust, forward-thinking legal strategy is essential to advancing the global aspirations of universities in emerging knowledge economies.

Keywords

Legal Advocacy, Higher Education Policy, Center of Excellence

A. Introduction

The pursuit of becoming a world-class research and education hub has become a central objective for many higher education institutions globally, particularly in emerging and rapidly developing regions.¹ This vision entails a comprehensive transformation of universities, not only in terms of academic output but also through reforms in governance, institutional policy, international engagement, and legal frameworks. In Indonesia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), select universities have begun to position themselves as global academic players through strategic initiatives, including the establishment of Centers of Excellence (CoEs) supported by legal and institutional innovations.

In the Indonesian context, Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) has taken concrete steps toward this goal by aligning its institutional vision with national higher education strategies and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNNES seeks to reinforce its research infrastructure and academic reputation by establishing CoEs that concentrate expertise in targeted disciplines.² Similarly, Dhofar

¹ Deem, Rosemary, Ka Ho Mok, and Lisa Lucas. "Transforming higher education in whose image? Exploring the concept of the 'world-class' university in Europe and Asia." *Higher Education Policy* 21, no. 1 (2008): 83-97.

² Sholeh, Muh, et al. "UNNES Conservation: Analysis of The Acceleration of Implementation of Conservation Pillar Achievements and Character Education (Case Study: UNNES Graduate School)." *E3S Web of Conferences*. Vol. 600. EDP Sciences, 2024.

University in Oman and the University of Sharjah in the UAE are investing in structural and academic mechanisms to enhance their global presence. These initiatives indicate a shared recognition across national contexts that world-class status cannot be achieved through academic merit alone—it must be underpinned by robust legal and policy environments.³

A key component of this transformation lies in the development and implementation of Centers of Excellence. These entities serve as focal points for high-impact research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strategic academic programming. At their core, CoEs are designed to consolidate institutional resources, attract top talent, and foster innovation in priority research areas. Their significance lies in the capacity to propel universities beyond traditional teaching roles into knowledge production engines that contribute meaningfully to national and global challenges.⁴

However, while CoEs represent a powerful academic and strategic tool, their success depends heavily on the legal frameworks within which they operate. This includes internal regulations, national education laws, intellectual property protections, research funding mechanisms, and international cooperation agreements.⁵ In countries such as Indonesia, Oman, and the UAE, the legal infrastructure governing higher education varies significantly, influencing how CoEs are

³ Damaj, Issam, Imran Baig, and Farid Chaaban. "Extending the Reflection on Dhofar University's Journey in Collaboration, Accreditation, and Sustainable Education." *Proceedings of the Regional Conference on Power and Energy Sustainability*, 48-54; Jaboob, Mohammed, Daood Al Hadabi, and Mawih Al Ani. "Evaluation of Dhofar University Performance according to Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Criteria of Islamic Universities Federation." *Global Journal of Economics & Business* 13, no. 4 (2023): 361-374; Mushtaha, Emad, et al. "Managing University of Sharjah Setting and Infrastructure Towards a Sustainable and Livable Campus." *Journal of Sustainability Perspectives* 2, no. 2 (2022): 99-109; Singh, Abhilasha, and Patrick Blessinger. "Examining the role and challenges of sustainable development goals for the universities in the United Arab Emirates." *Sustainability* 15, no. 20 (2023): 15123.

⁴ Kettunen, Juha Matti. "Evaluation of the centres of excellence in higher education." *Tertiary Education and Management* 17, no. 2 (2011): 151-161.

⁵ Ruben, Brent D. *Excellence in Higher Education Guide: A Framework for the Design, Assessment, and Continuing Improvement of Institutions, Departments, and Programs*. London: Routledge, 2023.

conceptualized, established, and managed. As such, legal advocacy emerges as a critical enabler in shaping these institutions into global academic leaders.

Legal advocacy in the higher education context refers to the strategic use of legal mechanisms and policy instruments to advance institutional objectives. This involves not only ensuring compliance with existing regulations but also engaging in institutional lobbying, policy drafting, contract negotiation, and legal reform.⁶ Universities aiming to establish CoEs must often navigate complex legal terrains—especially in countries where higher education is heavily regulated or where legal recognition of autonomous research entities is limited.

At UNNES, for example, the development of CoEs has faced challenges stemming from rigid bureaucratic structures and limited institutional autonomy. Indonesian higher education law provides little explicit guidance on the formation of semi-autonomous units like CoEs, creating legal ambiguity and administrative bottlenecks. In this environment, legal advocacy becomes essential to revise internal statutes, push for regulatory innovation, and create legal pathways for sustainable institutional change. Without such efforts, CoEs risk being viewed as mere academic programs rather than legally empowered entities capable of operating with strategic independence.⁷

In Oman, Dhofar University operates within a legal framework that is centrally governed by the Ministry of Higher Education,

⁶ Ayeni, O., et al. "Equity and access in higher education: Legal perspectives and management strategies." *International Journal of Science and Research Archive* 11, no. 2 (2024): 199-206.

⁷ See also Masyhar, Ali, Muhammad Azil Maskur, and Mulyo Widodo. "Document Study of UNNES Legality as Legal Entity State University." *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018): 305-326; Riyanto, R. Benny, and Suchatiningsih Dian Wisika Prajanti. "The Grand Design of LPPM UNNES Innovation in Supporting UNNES Towards PTNBH." *Unima International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities (UNICSSH 2022)*. Atlantis Press, 2023; Wulandari, Cahya, et al. "Reconstructing Legal Information Openness Through the Legal Documentation and Information Network System, Universitas Negeri Semarang." *Russian Law Journal* 12, no. 2 (2024): 1686-1696; Masyhar, Ali, Siti Mursidah, and Ali Murtadho. "Formulating Institutional Harmonization of UNNES Legal Entity Organs in The Frame of Check and Balances System." *Pandecta Research Law Journal* 18, no. 1 (2023): 47-52.

Research and Innovation. While this structure offers some degree of standardization and quality control, it may also limit institutional agility. To develop CoEs that can partner internationally, attract global funding, and manage intellectual property effectively, legal strategies must be employed to negotiate flexibility within national frameworks. This includes drafting institution-specific bylaws, securing exceptions or endorsements from regulatory bodies, and aligning CoE objectives with national research priorities.⁸

Similarly, the University of Sharjah in the UAE benefits from a more diversified higher education landscape, where semi-private governance models coexist with federal oversight. This hybrid model provides opportunities for innovation but also necessitates a careful balance between compliance and autonomy. Legal advocacy in this context often focuses on harmonizing institutional regulations with federal laws, ensuring compatibility with international accreditation standards, and safeguarding academic freedom and research integrity within CoEs.⁹

Across all three cases, a significant gap emerges in the legal infrastructure that directly supports the establishment and operationalization of CoEs. Many existing laws and regulations were designed for traditional academic structures and have not evolved to accommodate new forms of academic organization. This legal lag creates uncertainty, restricts innovation, and inhibits the potential of CoEs to fulfill their intended role as drivers of excellence. Addressing this gap requires proactive legal advocacy that goes beyond institutional boundaries to influence national policy discourse and legislative reform.

⁸ Damaj, Issam W., and Farid B. Chaaban. "Dhofar University: a case study in the practicalities of collaboration and accreditation." *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives* 11, no. 1 (2014): 115-133; Sanyal, Shouvik, and A. M. Al Mashani. "Entrepreneurial intention of university students in sultanate of Oman—a study of Dhofar University." *Journal of Contemporary Trends in Business and Information Technology* 5, no. 1 (2018): 16-31.

⁹ Kangooni, Horiya Essa, and Panagiotis D. Zervopoulos. "Efficiency Measurement of the Colleges at the University of Sharjah." *Advances in Science and Technology* 129 (2023): 117-136; Talib, Manar Abu, et al. "Enhancing social science research in the UAE: An open source software solution university of Sharjah (UOS) case study." *Journal of Computer Science* 11, no. 1 (2015): 98.

Another key challenge lies in the management of intellectual property (IP) generated through CoEs. In the absence of clear legal protections and ownership structures, research outputs may be vulnerable to misuse, underutilization, or contested claims. This is particularly problematic when international collaborations are involved, as varying IP laws and institutional policies can create conflict. Legal services must therefore establish clear IP policies, licensing frameworks, and dispute resolution mechanisms to ensure that CoEs can engage globally with confidence and security.¹⁰

Moreover, the legal dimension of internationalization poses additional complexities. Establishing transnational research partnerships, joint programs, and faculty exchange schemes requires a foundation of legal agreements, mutual recognition of qualifications, and alignment with global academic standards.¹¹ In contexts such as the UAE and Oman, where higher education is undergoing rapid expansion, universities must develop the legal competence to enter, negotiate, and manage international academic relations in ways that protect institutional interests and comply with both local and foreign regulations.

In addition, questions of institutional governance are deeply embedded in the legal structure of CoEs. Whether CoEs are governed as independent units, faculty-affiliated research centers, or cross-cutting initiatives affects their legal status, decision-making authority, and financial autonomy. Without legal clarity on these points, CoEs may face internal conflicts, duplication of roles, or accountability issues. As such, institutional policies must be legally codified to define the governance, reporting lines, and resource allocation models of CoEs clearly and transparently.

While the need for legal reform is evident, it is equally important to build internal legal capacity within universities. Many institutions lack dedicated legal units with expertise in education law, research

¹⁰ Young, Beth, Nola Hewitt-Dundas, and Stephen Roper. "Intellectual Property management in publicly funded R&D centres—A comparison of university-based and company-based research centres." *Technovation* 28, no. 8 (2008): 473-484.

¹¹ Heitor, Manuel. "How university global partnerships may facilitate a new era of international affairs and foster political and economic relations." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 95 (2015): 276-293.

regulation, and international agreements. In such cases, reliance on external legal counsel may lead to inconsistencies or misalignment with institutional strategy. Building internal legal advocacy teams that understand the specific needs of CoEs and the broader university mission is therefore critical for long-term success.

Furthermore, the relationship between legal advocacy and academic freedom must be carefully balanced. Legal frameworks should not merely serve to control or regulate but must also protect the intellectual autonomy of researchers and the integrity of academic work.¹² Especially in politically sensitive contexts, CoEs may produce research that challenges prevailing norms or policy directions. Legal services must be equipped to defend academic freedom while ensuring institutional compliance with national laws.

Therefore, the development of world-class research and education hubs through CoEs is a promising strategy for universities in Indonesia, Oman, and the UAE. However, the success of this model hinges on the effectiveness of legal advocacy and the adaptability of legal frameworks. As universities increasingly compete in global knowledge markets, their ability to leverage law as a tool for institutional transformation will determine the extent to which they can claim a place among the world's leading academic institutions.

B. Legal Frameworks Supporting Center of Excellence Development

The establishment and sustainability of Centers of Excellence (CoEs) within higher education institutions hinge critically on the existence of robust, adaptable legal frameworks. These frameworks encompass national laws, international conventions, institutional policies, and governance structures that collectively shape the environment in which CoEs operate. Without a coherent legal foundation, CoEs face operational ambiguity, regulatory challenges, and constraints in accessing critical resources, thus impeding their potential to become engines of academic excellence and innovation.

¹² Reichman, Henry. *Understanding Academic Freedom*. JHU Press, 2025. See also Al-Fatih, Sholahuddin, et al. "Academic Freedom of Expression in Indonesia: A Maqashid Sharia Notes." *El-Mashlahah* 13, no. 2 (2023): 203-224.

At the national level, the legal architecture for higher education defines university autonomy, governance modalities, funding mechanisms, intellectual property rights, and quality assurance. As Marginson posits in his theory on university autonomy and state governance, a dynamic tension exists between state regulation and institutional freedom, which profoundly influences the capacity of universities to innovate and create specialized units like CoEs.¹³ Greater institutional autonomy legally sanctioned allows universities to respond flexibly to academic and societal demands by tailoring structures, allocating resources, and forming strategic partnerships essential for CoEs.

In Indonesia, where UNNES is situated, higher education is governed by Law No. 12/2012 concerning Higher Education. This legislation emphasizes centralized regulatory oversight through the Ministry of Education and Culture and imposes stringent requirements on institutional changes. The law does not explicitly address the legal status or governance of CoEs, leading to gaps that create administrative hurdles and limit the autonomy necessary for CoEs to thrive. These legal lacunae manifest in challenges such as unclear authority over budget allocation, personnel recruitment, and intellectual property management within CoEs. This scenario highlights a critical gap between policy aspirations to foster centers of excellence and the enabling legal environment, necessitating proactive legal advocacy to push for regulatory reforms or flexible interpretations.

Oman presents a somewhat different context with Dhofar University operating under the governance of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Omani higher education law emphasizes quality assurance and alignment with national development goals, often favoring centralized oversight. While this structure aims to maintain standards, it also restricts institutional autonomy, particularly in pioneering entities like CoEs. The absence of explicit legal provisions for autonomous research centers within universities complicates their establishment and operation. Legal advocacy in this setting focuses on negotiating institutional regulations to allow CoEs flexibility in

¹³ Marginson, Simon. "Imagining the Global." In *Handbook on Globalization and Higher Education*. London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011.

governance, funding, and international partnerships, crucial for engaging in cross-border collaborative research. Moreover, Oman's growing engagement in international education accords necessitates alignment of CoE operations with international legal standards, further complicating the legal environment.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), exemplified by the University of Sharjah, reflects a hybrid legal governance model combining federal regulation with institutional autonomy granted to universities, especially those with private or semi-private status. UAE's Federal Law No. 4 of 2016 on the Regulation of Private Universities supports innovative governance structures and encourages universities to establish specialized research centers. This legal framework, comparatively progressive in the region, facilitates the formation and management of CoEs by providing clear statutes on intellectual property, research funding, and partnerships. Nonetheless, universities must navigate the interplay between federal laws, emirate-level regulations, and institutional policies. Legal advocacy here is focused on harmonizing these layers to provide CoEs with sufficient operational freedom while ensuring compliance with national priorities and accreditation standards.

Beyond national legislation, international legal frameworks increasingly influence CoE development, particularly in institutions seeking global collaboration. Instruments such as the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997) and the World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) impose standards on academic freedom, cross-border education, and intellectual property that affect how CoEs operate transnationally. Knight (2013) underscores that internationalization in higher education requires harmonizing domestic laws with global norms to manage risks and opportunities effectively. For universities like UNNES, Dhofar University, and University of Sharjah, these international frameworks challenge legal teams to reconcile diverse regulatory demands while fostering global research networks.

Policy-making at the national and institutional levels also plays a pivotal role in translating legal provisions into actionable frameworks for CoE development. Drawing on policy cycle theory, effective policies

involve clear problem definition, agenda setting, and instrument design that align with institutional goals.¹⁴ South Korea's Brain Korea 21 initiative and Singapore's Research Centers of Excellence exemplify how targeted policies, backed by adequate funding and legal support, successfully foster CoEs. In Indonesia, Oman, and the UAE, similar national strategies emphasizing CoEs as engines of innovation are emerging but require stronger integration into binding legal frameworks.

Institutionally, the codification of policies into bylaws and governance statutes ensures that CoEs operate with legitimacy and clarity. Institutional theory—Meyer & Rowan—suggest that the formalization of structures is essential for organizational legitimacy and resource mobilization.¹⁵ Universities with coherent legal frameworks enabling clear governance, accountability, and resource allocation mechanisms for CoEs demonstrate greater success in achieving research excellence. UNNES, for example, is in the process of revising internal regulations to better define CoE governance, while Dhofar University is negotiating flexible statutes with government bodies, and the University of Sharjah benefits from an existing legal framework that explicitly supports such entities.

Global exemplars like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Germany's Max Planck Society highlight the importance of legal autonomy in nurturing CoEs. MIT's legal charter allows semi-autonomous labs significant freedom over governance and intellectual property, fostering innovation.¹⁶ Similarly, Max Planck Institutes benefit from legal independence and guaranteed federal funding,

¹⁴ Howlett, Michael, and M. Ramesh. "Globalization and the choice of governing instruments: The direct, indirect, and opportunity effects of internationalization." *International Public Management Journal* 9, no. 2 (2006): 175-194. See also Jann, Werner, and Kai Wegrich. "Theories of the Policy Cycle." In *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis*. London: Routledge, 2017. 69-88.

¹⁵ Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. "Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (1977): 340-363.

¹⁶ Etzkowitz, Henry, et al. "Pathways to the entrepreneurial university: towards a global convergence." *Science and Public Policy* 35, no. 9 (2008): 681-695; Roberts, Edward B. *Entrepreneurs in high technology: Lessons from MIT and beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

providing operational stability.¹⁷ The University of Oxford's statutes empower CoEs with contractual and IP rights enabling effective partnerships and commercialization.¹⁸ These cases reveal that successful CoEs require legal frameworks granting autonomy, clear IP rights, and resource control—elements that remain aspirational in many emerging university contexts.

Nonetheless, transferring these legal models requires careful contextual adaptation. Scott warns against blind institutional isomorphism and advocates for reforms that respect local socio-legal realities while aspiring to global best practices.¹⁹ For UNNES, Dhofar University, and the University of Sharjah, this means balancing national legal constraints with the demands of internationalization and academic excellence. Developing tailored legal strategies and advocacy that align with each country's regulatory environment is crucial to bridging existing gaps and empowering CoEs as transformative agents.

The development of Centers of Excellence as catalysts for world-class research and education requires multi-layered legal frameworks. These include national higher education laws that provide institutional autonomy, international agreements that facilitate global collaboration, and internal policies that operationalize these mandates. Legal advocacy plays a central role in closing the gap between visionary policy goals and practical legal realities. As UNNES, Dhofar University, and the University of Sharjah navigate these complexities, their experiences underscore the critical importance of law as both a facilitator and protector of academic innovation in the global knowledge economy.

¹⁷ Seidelman, William E. "Science and Inhumanity: The Kaiser-Wilhelm/Max Planck Society." *Not Now: An Electronic Journal* 2, no. 1 (2001): 1-13.

¹⁸ Leslie, Larry L., and Sheila A. Slaughter. "The development and current status of market mechanisms in United States postsecondary education." *Higher Education Policy* 10, no. 3-4 (1997): 239-252.

¹⁹ Scott, W. Richard. "Lords of the dance: Professionals as institutional agents." *Organization Studies* 29, no. 2 (2008): 219-238.

C. The Role of Legal Advocacy in Shaping University Centers of Excellence (Case of UNNES, Dhofar University, and University of Sharjah)

Legal advocacy is a critical mechanism through which universities navigate the complex interplay between regulatory environments, institutional goals, and academic innovation. In the cases of UNNES, Dhofar University, and the University of Sharjah, legal professionals act not merely as advisors but as strategic change agents who facilitate policy reform, safeguard institutional autonomy, and manage risks inherent in the operation of Centers of Excellence (CoEs).

The process of advocating for policy changes to formally recognize and empower CoEs is best understood through Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (1995). According to this theory, policy change occurs when three streams—problems, policies, and politics—converge. Legal advocates identify regulatory gaps (problems), propose viable legal reforms (policies), and engage with political actors to open a policy window for change.²⁰ At UNNES, legal experts have utilized this framework to advance regulatory flexibility, enabling CoEs to operate with greater autonomy in managing budgets and academic programs. Similarly, Dhofar University's legal teams navigate centralized regulatory systems by strategically negotiating exceptions, illustrating how advocacy can influence policy dynamics even in restrictive contexts. At the University of Sharjah, legal efforts focus on harmonizing institutional statutes with federal laws to optimize CoE governance, reflecting a nuanced understanding of multi-level governance theory²¹ where power and authority are dispersed across different levels of government and institutions.

Institutional theory as emphasized by Meyer & Rowan, further explains the significance of legal advocacy in embedding CoEs within

²⁰ Béland, Daniel, and Michael Howlett. "The role and impact of the multiple-streams approach in comparative policy analysis." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 18, no. 3 (2016): 221-227.

²¹ Marks, Gary, and Liesbet Hooghe. *National identity and support for European integration*. No. SP IV 2003-202. WZB Berlin Social Science Center, 2003. See also Bache, Ian, Ian Bartle, and Matthew Flinders. "Multi-level governance." In *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016, pp. 486-498.

the formal structures of universities. This theory posits that organizations gain legitimacy by adopting formal rules and procedures that align with societal expectations and regulatory requirements.²² Legal professionals help translate national policies and international standards into concrete institutional bylaws and governance frameworks that legitimize CoEs, thereby facilitating resource mobilization and organizational stability. For example, at UNNES, legal drafting of internal regulations provides CoEs with defined governance structures, which enhances legitimacy and operational clarity. Dhofar University's legal negotiations reflect institutional isomorphism, where organizations adapt legal frameworks to align with normative pressures while balancing local contextual constraints.²³ The University of Sharjah's legal framework demonstrates how formal institutionalization of academic freedom and research governance strengthens the legitimacy of CoEs in competitive global knowledge environments.

Legal advocacy also critically impacts institutional autonomy, which Marginson highlights as a key factor in university innovation and global competitiveness. Autonomy, understood as the freedom to govern internal affairs, manage resources, and define academic priorities, is a legal construct that must be defended and expanded through advocacy.²⁴ At all three universities, legal professionals work to carve out spaces within national regulations where CoEs can exercise financial independence, recruit talent, and enter research partnerships. This autonomy supports dynamic decision-making and responsiveness to emerging scientific challenges. Furthermore, legal protections for academic freedom within CoEs prevent external interference and promote a culture of open inquiry—an essential condition for pioneering research.²⁵

²² Meyer, and Rowan. "Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony

²³ DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields." *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147-160.

²⁴ Marginson, "Imagining the Global." In *Handbook on Globalization and Higher Education*.

²⁵ Clark, Burton R. "The contradictions of change in academic systems." *Higher Education* 12, no. 1 (1983): 101-116.

In the further, for instance, Intellectual Property (IP) management, stands as a cornerstone in the success and sustainability of Centers of Excellence (CoEs), particularly because these centers often operate at the cutting edge of research and innovation. As hubs where novel ideas and technologies are generated, CoEs must have clear and effective IP governance to protect the rights of inventors and institutions, facilitate commercialization, and attract external partnerships. Without robust IP management, innovations risk being inadequately protected, leading to potential conflicts, lost revenues, and missed opportunities for societal impact.

Legal advocacy plays a critical role in shaping the frameworks that govern IP within CoEs. Legal professionals and advisors work to design and implement policies that clarify the ownership of intellectual property generated by researchers affiliated with CoEs, whether these be patents, copyrights, trademarks, or trade secrets. This clarity is essential because academic research frequently involves multiple stakeholders—individual researchers, the university, funding agencies, and industry partners—each with potentially competing claims. Advocacy ensures that the legal rights and obligations of these parties are transparently defined, preventing future disputes and fostering trust.

The entrepreneurial university theory, articulated by Henry Etzkowitz (2008), provides a valuable lens for understanding the centrality of IP management in modern universities. According to this theory, universities no longer operate solely as knowledge creators but also as active participants in economic development, fostering innovation ecosystems that link research, entrepreneurship, and commercialization. A fundamental aspect of this model is the effective management of intellectual property as the bridge between academic research and marketable products or services. By protecting IP rights and facilitating licensing, universities can translate scientific discoveries into startups, spin-offs, and industry collaborations, thereby generating economic value and enhancing institutional prestige.

In the context of UNNES, Dhofar University, and the University of Sharjah, legal advocacy has been instrumental in establishing tailored IP policies that align with national laws and international best practices. For instance, advocacy teams ensure that university regulations specify how patent rights are allocated between the researcher and the

institution, the procedures for filing patents, and the mechanisms for licensing inventions to third parties. These protocols often include provisions for revenue sharing, reinvestment into research, and protections against unauthorized use, which incentivize researchers to innovate while securing institutional interests.

Moreover, such legal frameworks facilitate technology transfer, a process by which inventions move from the laboratory to the marketplace. By providing clear legal channels and support structures, universities can actively engage industry partners, negotiate licensing agreements, and foster incubators or innovation hubs associated with CoEs. This not only increases the economic impact of university research but also reinforces the relevance and sustainability of CoEs in addressing societal needs.

Addressing institutional risks through legal strategies aligns with risk management theories emphasizing prevention, compliance, and dispute resolution.²⁶ Legal advocates develop compliance frameworks ensuring CoEs adhere to national regulations, donor requirements, and ethical standards, mitigating legal exposure. They also design contract templates and dispute resolution mechanisms, including mediation and arbitration, to efficiently manage conflicts related to IP, funding, and personnel. These measures safeguard the continuity and reputation of CoEs, which is vital in competitive global academic landscapes.

Legal advocacy serves as a dynamic enabler of institutional transformation, embedding Centers of Excellence within the legal and organizational fabric of universities. Through strategic engagement with policy processes, institutionalization of governance structures, protection of autonomy and academic freedom, and proactive risk management, legal professionals elevate the capacity of CoEs to achieve world-class standards. The cases of UNNES, Dhofar University, and the University of Sharjah illustrate how integrating theories such as Kingdon's policy streams, institutional theory, Marginson's autonomy concept, and the entrepreneurial university framework enriches our understanding of the multifaceted role legal advocacy plays in higher education reform and excellence.

²⁶ Hopkin, Paul. *Fundamentals of Risk Management: Understanding, Evaluating and Implementing Effective Risk Management*. Kogan Page Publishers, 2018.

D. Strategies for Legal Support in Center of Excellence Development

Developing world-class Centers of Excellence (CoEs) requires comprehensive legal strategies that address various dimensions of university operations. The following sub-strategies highlight key legal approaches that UNNES, Dhofar University, and the University of Sharjah have employed or can adopt to support CoE development effectively.

1. *Legal Facilitation of International Collaborations and Partnerships*

International collaboration is a cornerstone for the development of Centers of Excellence (CoEs), allowing universities to access global knowledge networks, advanced resources, and interdisciplinary expertise. However, such cooperation brings legal complexities stemming from jurisdictional differences, intellectual property rights, data protection, and contractual obligations. According to De Wit and Hunter²⁷, internationalization in higher education necessitates a robust legal infrastructure to manage these challenges effectively.

Legal facilitation in this context involves drafting comprehensive partnership agreements, including Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), research collaboration contracts, and data sharing agreements. These documents must clearly articulate the scope of cooperation, governance mechanisms, liability clauses, and intellectual property ownership. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) underscores that clear IP provisions are critical to avoiding disputes and fostering trust among partners, especially when multiple jurisdictions are involved.

From a theoretical perspective, the institutional theory²⁸ provides insight into how universities adapt their legal and organizational structures to meet normative pressures from global academic networks. By embedding legal protocols in international agreements, CoEs gain

²⁷ De Wit, Hans, and Fiona Hunter. "The future of internationalization of higher education in Europe." *International Higher Education* 83 (2015): 2-3.

²⁸ DiMaggio, and Powell. "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields."

legitimacy and align with global standards, which is essential for sustained collaboration.

National legal frameworks also influence international partnerships. For example, Indonesia's Law No. 12/2012 on Higher Education regulates foreign cooperation but requires compliance with national interests and sovereignty. Oman and UAE have similar laws emphasizing controlled foreign involvement in academic activities. Legal advocates ensure these domestic requirements are harmonized with international agreements to prevent legal conflicts and maintain government approval. In practice, legal teams at UNNES, Dhofar University, and the University of Sharjah navigate these frameworks by employing adaptive negotiation strategies and creating legal templates compliant with multiple jurisdictions. This proactive approach facilitates smoother international cooperation, enhances the quality and impact of CoE research, and strengthens institutional reputations globally.

2. *Securing and Managing Funding Through Legal Instruments*

Funding is the lifeblood of CoEs, providing resources for research, infrastructure, human capital, and innovation activities. Legal professionals play a crucial role in securing and managing these funds by designing contracts and grant agreements that protect institutional interests and ensure compliance with donor requirements. According to Salamon²⁹, effective legal governance of funding mechanisms is fundamental for nonprofit organizations, including universities, to maintain financial sustainability and accountability.

Key legal instruments include grant agreements, sponsorship contracts, and partnership funding arrangements. These documents delineate the rights and responsibilities of parties, conditions for fund disbursement, reporting obligations, and intellectual property clauses. For example, the World Bank and international donors often impose stringent fiduciary and audit requirements that universities must legally uphold to avoid sanctions or loss of funding.

²⁹ Salamon, Lester M., ed. *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

The theory of resource dependency is relevant here, highlighting how organizations depend on external resources and must develop strategies to manage relationships with funders effectively.³⁰ Legal advocacy acts as a mediator to balance donor demands with institutional autonomy, ensuring that CoEs can pursue their academic mission without undue interference.

In the context of Oman and the UAE, where funding often comes from government-linked entities or private sector partners, legal advisors ensure compliance with national financial regulations and contractual obligations. For instance, public funds may require transparency, procurement compliance, and limitations on fund usage, which legal teams must codify into agreements.

Moreover, legal professionals are essential in drafting clauses that secure continuity of funding amidst political or economic changes. This includes force majeure provisions, termination clauses, and dispute resolution mechanisms, reducing financial risks for CoEs. Through such meticulous legal structuring, CoEs at UNNES, Dhofar University, and Sharjah University enhance their financial resilience and ability to attract diverse funding sources.

3. Ensuring Compliance with International Accreditation Standards

International accreditation serves as a benchmark of quality assurance for Centers of Excellence, signaling that their academic and research programs meet global standards. Accreditation bodies such as ABET, AACSB, or QS require universities to demonstrate compliance with strict criteria, including governance, curriculum, faculty qualifications, research output, and ethical conduct.

Legal advocacy is vital in interpreting these standards and embedding them into institutional policies and practices. For example, compliance with data protection laws such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is increasingly required for international accreditation, especially when dealing with international students and

³⁰ Pfeffer, Jeffrey, and Gerald Salancik. "External control of organizations—Resource dependence perspective." In *Organizational Behavior* 2. London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 355-370.

collaborative research data.³¹ Legal teams help universities implement data privacy protocols that align with these standards. According to quality management theory, continuous improvement and compliance with external standards are crucial for organizational excellence.³² Legal frameworks provide the structure necessary for consistent adherence to accreditation requirements, preventing violations that could jeopardize the CoE's status.

Furthermore, research ethics is a critical component of accreditation. Legal advocacy ensures that institutional review boards (IRBs) and ethical clearance processes comply with international norms, such as the Declaration of Helsinki or the Belmont Report, safeguarding human subjects and research integrity. This compliance protects universities from reputational damage and legal sanctions.

In countries like Indonesia, Oman, and the UAE, national accreditation bodies may have overlapping or complementary standards to international agencies. Legal professionals work to harmonize institutional policies to satisfy multiple accreditation requirements, thereby maximizing the university's competitive advantage in attracting students and funding. Through these legal supports, CoEs demonstrate their commitment to excellence, accountability, and global competitiveness, enhancing their appeal to stakeholders and positioning them as leaders in higher education.

4. Risk Management and Legal Capacity Building

Risk management is an essential component in the development and sustainability of Centers of Excellence. Universities face diverse legal risks, including intellectual property disputes, contractual breaches, compliance failures, and conflicts among partners or faculty. According to Hopkin, effective risk management involves identification, assessment, mitigation, and continuous monitoring of legal and operational risks.³³

³¹ Kuner, Christopher. "Reality and illusion in EU data transfer regulation post Schrems." *German Law Journal* 18, no. 4 (2017): 881-918.

³² Shewhart, Walter Andrew, and William Edwards Deming. *Statistical method from the viewpoint of quality control*. Courier Corporation, 1986.

³³ Hopkin, *Fundamentals of Risk Management: Understanding, Evaluating and Implementing Effective Risk Management*.

Legal advocacy contributes by establishing comprehensive risk management frameworks that incorporate clear policies, contractual safeguards, and dispute resolution procedures. For example, universities adopt standard contract templates with arbitration clauses to handle conflicts efficiently, reducing costly litigation and operational disruptions.

Furthermore, building legal capacity within universities is crucial. Providing training for academic leaders, researchers, and administrative staff on legal rights and obligations ensures that all stakeholders understand compliance requirements and risk mitigation strategies. This approach aligns with organizational learning theory³⁴, which posits that knowledge acquisition and adaptation are key to institutional resilience. In the context of UNNES, Dhofar University, and Sharjah University, legal capacity building includes workshops on intellectual property management, contract negotiation, and research ethics. This equips university personnel to anticipate legal challenges and integrate legal considerations into strategic decisions proactively.

Additionally, ongoing collaboration between legal teams and academic units fosters a culture of legal awareness and compliance, which is essential for maintaining accreditation, securing funding, and managing partnerships. This culture reduces the risk of violations that could damage the CoE's reputation or financial standing. Ultimately, proactive legal risk management and capacity building empower CoEs to operate confidently within complex legal environments, enhancing their ability to innovate and compete globally.

E. Conclusion

This study has illuminated the pivotal role that legal strategies and advocacy play in the development and sustainability of Centers of Excellence (CoEs) within higher education institutions aspiring to achieve world-class status. Through a comparative analysis of UNNES in Indonesia, Dhofar University in Oman, and the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, it is evident that legal frameworks serve as

³⁴ Argyris, Ch, and Donald A. Schön. "Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective." *Reis* 77/78 (1997): 345-348.

both enablers and safeguards in advancing academic excellence, institutional autonomy, and international collaboration.

The legal facilitation of international partnerships emerges as a fundamental strategy to navigate complex jurisdictional landscapes, protect intellectual property, and harmonize regulatory requirements. Moreover, securing and managing funding through meticulously crafted legal instruments ensures the financial sustainability essential for CoE growth. Compliance with international accreditation standards, underpinned by robust legal policies, affirms institutional quality and global competitiveness, while comprehensive risk management and capacity-building initiatives foster resilience amid evolving legal and academic challenges. Grounded in theoretical perspectives such as institutional theory, resource dependency, and the entrepreneurial university framework, this research underscores the multifaceted contributions of legal advocacy—not merely as technical compliance but as a dynamic, strategic function integral to institutional transformation. The cases studied highlight the necessity for universities to embed legal expertise within their governance structures, enabling them to anticipate challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and elevate their research and education missions to meet global benchmarks.

Ultimately, the findings advocate for a proactive, interdisciplinary approach where legal strategies are seamlessly integrated with academic and administrative planning. Such integration is indispensable for the realization of Centers of Excellence that not only excel in research and education but also contribute meaningfully to national development and global knowledge economies.

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