

HOSPITAL GOVERNANCE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS CONCEPTUALIZATION AND EVOLUTION IN THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

GOVERNANÇA HOSPITALAR: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA DE SUA CONCEITUALIZAÇÃO E EVOLUÇÃO NA LITERATURA CIENTÍFICA

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Abstract

This study reviewed research published between 2020 and 2025 in the Scopus and Scielo databases, with the aim of analyzing the conceptualization and evolution of hospital governance in the scientific literature. Twelve relevant articles were selected and examined, considering criteria of relevance, methodological rigor, and timeliness. Hospital governance is presented as a constantly evolving concept, linked to the quality of care, transparency in management, accountability, and the participation of institutional stakeholders. The literature shows that, although common theoretical frameworks exist, the practical application of governance varies significantly depending on the political, social, and economic context of each health system. Furthermore, gaps in scientific production were identified in low- and middle-income regions, which limits the comparison of models. Factors influencing the evolution of the concept include the digitalization of processes, health policy reforms, and the incorporation of participatory governance models. It is concluded that strengthening hospital governance requires greater conceptual standardization, comparative research, and strategies that integrate clinical and administrative management to ensure more efficient, transparent, and sustainable hospital systems.

Keywords: Hospital Governance. Hospital Management. Quality of Health Care. Accountability. Institutional Transparency.

Resumo

Este estudo revisou pesquisas publicadas entre 2020 e 2025 nas bases de dados Scopus e SciELO, com o objetivo de analisar a conceitualização e a evolução da governança hospitalar na literatura científica. Doze artigos relevantes foram selecionados e examinados, considerando critérios de relevância, rigor metodológico e atualidade. A governança hospitalar é apresentada como um conceito em constante evolução, vinculado à qualidade do atendimento, à transparência na gestão, à prestação de contas e à participação dos atores institucionais. A literatura mostra que, embora existam marcos teóricos comuns, a aplicação prática da governança varia significativamente de acordo com o contexto político, social e econômico de cada sistema de saúde. Além disso, foram identificadas lacunas na produção científica em regiões de baixa e média renda, o que limita a comparação de modelos. Entre os fatores que influenciam a evolução do conceito destacam-se a digitalização dos processos, as reformas das políticas de saúde e a incorporação de modelos de governança participativa. Conclui-se que o fortalecimento da governança hospitalar requer maior padronização conceitual, pesquisas comparativas e estratégias que integrem a gestão clínica e administrativa para garantir sistemas hospitalares mais eficientes, transparentes e sustentáveis.

Palavras-chave: Governança Hospitalar. Gestão Hospitalar. Qualidade da Atenção à Saúde. Prestação de Contas. Transparência Institucional.



1 INTRODUCTION

Hospital governance has become established in recent decades as a fundamental pillar for understanding and strengthening the management of health systems (Jalilvand *et al.*, 2024). This concept integrates transparency in decision-making, accountability, the participation of institutional stakeholders, and the efficient use of resources, elements that together directly impact the quality of hospital services (Haddiya *et al.*, 2025). In a global context where health systems face challenges of sustainability, efficiency, and equity, it is necessary to review how hospital governance has been conceptualized and developed in the scientific literature (Moldovan & Moldovan, 2024).

The growing interest in this topic responds not only to the need to improve hospital performance indicators but also to the pressure to adapt health institutions to political, social, and technological changes (Ding *et al.*, 2025). Processes such as digitalization, the incorporation of citizen participation mechanisms, and health policy reforms have transformed the dynamics of governance, raising new questions about its effectiveness and scope in different contexts (Saladdin & Wuri Handayani, 2025). Thus, hospital governance ceases to be an abstract category and becomes a strategic management tool with direct effects on patient safety, institutional trust, and the sustainability of the system.

In this context, systematic reviews allow us to identify patterns, trends, and gaps in scientific production related to hospital governance (Achiro *et al.*, 2024). Through rigorous analysis, it is possible to establish which theoretical approaches predominate, how the application of the concept varies in different countries, and what factors influence its evolution (Giunti *et al.*, 2024). This approach not only clarifies the current state of knowledge but also facilitates the construction of comparative frameworks that guide more sound public policies and hospital practices (Kenny *et al.*, 2025).

To carry out this review, specific parameters were defined to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies (Silvera *et al.*, 2024). Only studies directly linked to the analysis variable, supported by empirical evidence, and published within the years established for the review were considered. In contrast, studies that did not centrally address the topic of hospital governance, that presented limitations in digital accessibility, or that did not delve into the essential aspects of the phenomenon were excluded. This methodological delimitation ensures a representative and reliable body of literature for analysis (Yang, 2025).

In summary, this systematic review seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the conceptualization and evolution of hospital governance in recent scientific literature. The study will not only identify advances and limitations regarding the variable, but also offer recommendations that contribute to strengthening hospital systems from a perspective of transparent, efficient, and participatory management. Thus, it represents a significant contribution to both academic research and institutional practice in the field of health.

2 METHODOLOGY

The review was conducted using academic databases such as Scielo and Scopus, considered essential for obtaining specialized, high-quality information. Scielo was particularly useful in the Latin American context, as it facilitates access to relevant research from the region, while Scopus provided a global perspective, allowing us to identify scientific literature produced in various healthcare systems worldwide (Msatfa *et al.*, 2025).

To optimize the search, clear selection criteria were established, prioritizing those studies that met the defined requirements: research directly related to hospital governance, based on empirical evidence, and published within the last five years. In contrast, works that did not centrally address the variable, that had restricted access on digital platforms, or that did not delve into the essential aspects of the analysis were discarded.

During the search, strategic search engine terms such as "hospital governance," "healthcare management," "accountability in hospitals," and "hospital efficiency" were used. These were combined with Boolean operators such as AND and OR to expand or restrict the results according to topic relevance.

The results were also organized into structured tables, where keywords were classified along with their respective codes. This methodological strategy allowed for more organized and efficient information management, ensuring transparency and traceability of the review process.

3 RESULTS

A detailed literature analysis was conducted using qualitative and quantitative approaches, complemented by a review of specialized articles and other relevant sources, resulting in a total of 11 documents evaluated. Regarding the results obtained in the different databases, the search for the term "hospital governance" yielded 15 articles in Scielo and 210 publications in Scopus between 2020 and 2025.

Meanwhile, the search for the term "healthcare management" yielded 132 articles in Scielo and 1,245 in Scopus during the same period. For the term "accountability in hospitals," three articles were identified in Scielo and 54 in Scopus. Finally, the search for "hospital efficiency" returned eight publications in Scielo and 342 in Scopus.

These results reflect a marked difference between the databases, showing that Scopus offers a greater volume of international literature related to hospital governance, while Scielo concentrates publications relevant to the Latin American context. Furthermore, it is observed that the most studied topics are related to hospital management and efficiency, while accountability remains a field with less representation in scientific production.

Table 1

Synthesis Table of Variables in Hospital Governance

Author(s)	Country	Definition	Dimensions	Results/Conclusions
Jalilvand <i>et al.</i> (2025)	<i>Irán</i>	It is understood as a key process for ensuring quality of care and patient safety, based on governance and accountability structures that regulate hospital administration.	Governance structure Accountability structure	Internal challenges (dominance by physicians, lack of medical advice) and external challenges (centralization and inflexible regulations) were identified. Accountability issues relate to administrative, financial, and sociopolitical aspects.
Garnier & Eckert (2025)	<i>Suíza</i>	It is conceived as the strengthening of hospital management structures, where physicians must assume an active role in decision-making and accountability.	Medical Leadership Key Competencies Training Strengthening Mechanisms	Hospital governance requires integrating medical leadership as an essential strategy. There is a gap between clinical training and management requirements, which can be bridged through training programs and shared leadership structures.
Achiro <i>et al.</i> (2024)	<i>Reino Unido</i>	Corporate governance in	- Board meetings.	Board experience, number of meetings, gender diversity, CEO

	hospitals consists of steering and oversight mechanisms that influence management and financial results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board gender diversity. - CEO gender. 	gender, and the presence of academic directors were found to have a significant negative impact on financial performance. For NHS trusts, the most critical variables were experience, diversity, and CEO gender; in foundation trusts, only CEO gender showed negative effects.
Jung <i>et al.</i> (2023)	<i>Estados Unidos</i> Hospital governance includes the participation of nursing professionals in decision-making, managerial support, and interprofessional relationships as key elements in patient safety and infection control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managerial support. - Nurse participation in hospital governance. - Physician-nurse relationships. 	Hospitals with more favorable work environments had lower odds (OR: 0.35–0.45) of exceeding the national average in C. difficile infections. Sustained improvement of the nursing work environment is a promising strategy for reducing hospital-acquired infections and improving quality of care.
Mourajid <i>et al.</i> (2023)	<i>Marruecos</i> It is understood as the institutional, financial, accountability, and decision-making framework that regulates the operation of public hospitals, articulating legal norms, resources, and stakeholder participation in management.	Financial Accountability - Decision-making	Despite multiple reforms and legal frameworks, dysfunctions persist: limited hospital autonomy, chronic resource shortages, obsolete equipment, staff demotivation, and a lack of accountability mechanisms. This has deteriorated the quality of services and patient satisfaction.
Lipunga <i>et al.</i> (2022)	<i>Malawi</i> It is conceived as the set of management structures and processes linked to the interaction between the hospital board (or equivalent) and hospital administration. The effectiveness of this depends on stakeholders' awareness and understanding of their role in governance.	Not applicable	Governance awareness among hospital stakeholders is low. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stakeholders recognize general functions, but do not articulate the connection between governing bodies and management.
Ilmayanti <i>et al.</i> (2025)	<i>Indonesia</i> It is understood as a governance model oriented	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is recommended to strengthen institutional accountability mechanisms to optimize the quality

	toward bureaucratic reform, based on the principles of participation, responsiveness, and accountability, which seeks to empower healthcare professionals and influence organizational decision-making.		of care and the effectiveness of hospital management.
Mourajid <i>et al.</i> Marruecos (2024)	It is conceived as a process of strategic direction and supervision of the hospital through governing councils (hospital boards), whose performance directly impacts the quality of care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Size and composition of the boards. - Level of clinical expertise of members. - Perception of impact on quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No strong relationship was established with hospital mortality indicators. - The use of the BSAQ is presented as a valuable tool to strengthen board competencies and guide improvements in hospital governance.
Wijaya & Alfarizi (2024) <i>Indonesia</i>	It is understood as the management model applied in teaching hospitals, where governance integrates accreditation standards, quality management, and specific JCI (Joint Commission International) standards for academic hospitals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching hospital governance. - Hospital accreditation standards. - Quality assurance. 	A quantitative study using a survey approach was conducted among clinical professional students in vertical teaching hospitals administered by the Indonesian Ministry of Health.
Silvera <i>et al.</i> Estados Unidos (2024)	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of executive involvement on boards of directors. - Organization al characteristics (hospital vs. health system). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The level of executive involvement is associated with certain organizational characteristics, such as the type of institution and the degree of dependence of the board on the parent system. - No significant direct relationship was found between executive involvement and the overall performance of the health system.

Source: Elaboración propia

4 DISCUSSION

A recent review of hospital governance examined scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025, using repositories such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Scielo. The results highlighted an unequal distribution of scientific production, where Scopus concentrated the largest volume of research, while Scielo provided fewer but highly contextualized contributions. This asymmetry reaffirms the central role of Scopus as a key source for accessing global evidence on governance in healthcare institutions, although it also suggests the need to strengthen the dissemination of studies in regional databases, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Hospital governance, as evidenced in the literature, is a multidimensional construct that integrates decision-making processes, accountability, professional participation, and organizational culture. Studies such as those by Zhen and Yang (2023) in China demonstrate that governance in industrial park hospitals functions as an evolutionary game between government, hospital, and local stakeholders, where factors such as subsidies, authority allocation, and cost-benefit relationships determine governance efficiency. Similarly, Lipunga *et al.* (2022) emphasize that in Malawi, the low awareness of governance frameworks among hospital board members limits their ability to ensure transparency and accountability, reflecting how educational background and lack of institutional training weaken governance structures.

Other research highlights the direct impact of governance on hospital performance and service quality. Ilmayanti *et al.* (2025) showed in Indonesia that the implementation of good hospital governance, particularly accountability and responsiveness, significantly improves nurses' performance and decision-making. This finding resonates with Mourajid *et al.* (2024), who found that hospital boards in Morocco exert a measurable influence on quality of care outcomes, with governance competencies (rather than mere structures) being key determinants of clinical performance. In the context of teaching hospitals, Wijaya and Alfarizi (2024) demonstrated that governance aligned with accreditation and quality standards positively affects service quality and compliance with academic requirements, evidencing the dual role of teaching hospitals in service delivery and medical training.

From a broader organizational perspective, governance also entails the role of executives and hospital boards. Silvera *et al.* (2024), in the U.S., analyzed executive

involvement in governing boards and found that while no direct relationship was established with overall health system performance, executive participation was strongly associated with organizational characteristics, suggesting the presence of indirect pathways through which leadership and governance interact to shape hospital performance. This supports the idea that governance should not be reduced to formal structures but should be understood as a dynamic interplay between leadership, accountability, and contextual factors.

The comparative analysis of these studies reveals that hospital governance is context-dependent, varying according to political, cultural, and institutional frameworks. In high-income countries, governance is closely linked to executive participation and board performance metrics, while in developing contexts, challenges focus on awareness, accountability, and alignment with health policies. Overall, the findings converge on the idea that effective governance improves healthcare quality, professional performance, and institutional efficiency, but its success depends on combining structural reforms, educational initiatives, and the empowerment of governance actors.

5 CONCLUSIONS

A recent review on hospital governance analyzed publications between 2020 and 2025, using databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Scielo. A notable difference was observed in the number of studies available on each platform: Scielo returned few relevant articles, while Scopus and ScienceDirect yielded a significantly greater scientific production, reinforcing their centrality in the academic field. This finding suggests that, although hospital governance is a fundamental topic for health systems, its dissemination and accessibility remain limited depending on the database consulted.

Hospital governance in the healthcare sector is a broad and multidimensional concept that encompasses accountability, responsiveness, participation, organizational culture, and leadership. The literature shows that governance not only influences the efficiency of decision-making but also affects quality of care and professional performance. For instance, studies in Indonesia demonstrate that implementing good governance significantly enhances nurses' performance through accountability and responsiveness (Ilmayanti *et al.*, 2025), while research in Morocco highlights the association between hospital boards' competencies and quality outcomes (Mourajid *et*

al., 2024). Similarly, studies in teaching hospitals underline the role of governance in meeting accreditation standards and ensuring service quality (Wijaya & Alfarizi, 2024).

The dimensions of governance vary across contexts. Some authors emphasize the interaction between government, hospitals, and local stakeholders in decision-making processes (Zhen & Yang, 2023), while others stress governance awareness among board members as a decisive factor in ensuring transparency and efficiency (Lipunga *et al.*, 2022). In developed contexts, research focuses on the role of executives in governing boards and its indirect impact on system performance (Silvera *et al.*, 2024), whereas in developing countries the main challenges revolve around awareness, accountability, and capacity building.

The studies analyzed converge on the conclusion that effective governance requires a combination of structural reforms, continuous training, and empowerment of governance actors. It has been identified that a lack of awareness of governance frameworks negatively impacts decision-making, while accountability, collaborative leadership, and adherence to quality standards strengthen hospital performance. It is therefore recommended to strengthen governance training, promote participatory leadership, and align hospital boards' roles with clinical quality indicators. Additionally, fostering accountability and organizational commitment is crucial to improving both service quality and institutional sustainability.

In general, hospital governance emerges as a determinant of quality, efficiency, and professional performance. The literature reviewed indicates that governance is not limited to formal structures, but also depends on organizational culture, awareness, and active participation of all stakeholders. Strengthening these dimensions can significantly optimize health system performance, ensuring safer and more efficient services for patients while consolidating hospitals as transparent and sustainable institutions.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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