

The Role of Thinking Across in the Concept of Dynamic Governance in Educational Services

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Thinking Across within the Dynamic Governance framework in the governance of educational services at Private Higher Education Institutions in Gorontalo Province. It aims to explore how Thinking Across, which includes cross boundary leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration, and cross sector integration, is internalized and operationalized in institutional practices. This study employed a qualitative multiple case study approach involving five private universities. Data were collected through in depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of governance practices and institutional dynamics. The findings show that the implementation of Thinking Across remains partial and uneven across institutions. Although awareness of the importance of collaboration across institutional and disciplinary boundaries has grown, its translation into consistent governance practices is still limited. Interdisciplinary initiatives and cross sector collaborations have begun to emerge through selected academic programs, collaborative research, and partnerships with external stakeholders. However, these efforts remain fragmented and are often driven by individual initiative rather than institutionalized mechanisms. The study also identifies several major challenges, including limited institutional capacity, weak coordination across units, regulatory rigidity, and insufficient digital integration for data driven decision making. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening institutional structures, fostering a collaborative culture, and improving digital integration to support adaptive governance. The study contributes to Dynamic Governance literature by highlighting the significance of cross disciplinary and cross sector integration in the transformation of higher education governance, particularly in resource constrained regional institutions.

Introduction

Rapid changes in the higher education landscape in the digital and globalization era require educational institutions, including private universities (PTS), to develop dynamic and adaptive governance. In Gorontalo Province, PTS face challenges such as limited resources, a lack of synchronization between strategic vision and managerial practices, and weak integration across disciplines and sectors. These conditions reduce the institution's ability to adapt to labor market needs, technological developments, and public expectations for academic quality. In this context, the concept of Dynamic Governance (Neo & Chen, 2007) is relevant because it emphasizes three key capabilities: Thinking Ahead, Thinking Again, and Thinking Across as the basis for adaptive and collaborative decision-making. The literature confirms that effective higher education governance can no longer rely on a hierarchical model but must be participatory and cross-boundary. Denhardt and Denhardt (2003) emphasize the importance of integrating ethical values, collaboration, and a public interest orientation for organizational

sustainability. The OECD (2025) and the Harvard Kennedy School (2024) add that alignment across sectors and levels of government is necessary to ensure policy coherence. Similar findings are presented by Cash et al. (2014) and Gulbrandsen (2014), who highlight the benefits of multilevel governance in enhancing institutional innovation. Therefore, the application of Thinking Across within the Dynamic Governance framework is crucial for higher education institutions (PTS) to strengthen collaborative and adaptive capabilities.

This research focuses on the weak implementation of Thinking Across in the governance practices of private universities (PTS) in Gorontalo. Although most private universities have adopted digital systems such as SIAKAD and SISTER and achieved accreditation ranging from "Good" to "Very Good," cross-program and cross-sector collaboration remains partial. Institutional evaluation focuses on accreditation fulfillment, not continuous organizational learning. Structural and regulatory barriers, as well as limited interfaculty coordination, reduce the effectiveness of Thinking Across. Consequently, awareness of the importance of innovation has not been followed by consistent policy implementation within a dynamic governance framework.

Previous studies recommend strengthening boundary-spanning thinking through collaborative leadership, policy design innovation, and continuous learning. Bolt (2023) and Hallinger and Kovačević (2021) emphasize that an institution's adaptive capacity depends on the integration of cross-domain learning and cross-sector collaboration. Thinking Across reflects a conceptual approach that connects disciplines and organizations to produce adaptive policies and services. This approach highlights the role of boundary-spanning leadership, which bridges faculty, industry, government, and society (Vink et al., 2020), while simultaneously developing a service ecosystem for cross-actor collaboration.

Several studies have shown that Thinking Across increases organizational flexibility and encourages curriculum and teaching innovation. Fitriana et al. (2021) emphasize that collaboration with external stakeholders helps universities design policies that are responsive to student and job market needs. Lake et al. (2021) and Zhao et al. (2023) emphasize that this approach supports the concept of Education 4.0, based on multidisciplinary collaboration and personalized learning. In the context of private universities, Thinking Across serves as a strategy to bridge academia and industry, strengthen educational relevance, and improve institutional performance.

The literature on collaborative governance and networked leadership also emphasizes the role of Thinking Across in modern governance. Tremblay et al. (2024) and Gordon et al. (2020) show that cross-sector collaboration strengthens accountability and policy innovation, while Sørensen and Vedeld (2022) highlight that networked leadership expands adaptive capacity through communication and shared learning. Thinking Across thus facilitates interorganizational learning, enabling private universities to develop knowledge-based collaborative solutions (Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Seid et al., 2021; Tootell et al., 2021; Haneberg, 2021; Lis & Kotelska, 2023; Bettiol et al., 2023).

The research gap arises from the lack of in-depth studies on the implementation of Thinking Across in regional private universities, such as Gorontalo. Most previous research has focused on state universities or large institutions with strong resources, while regional private universities still face structural and financial constraints. In Indonesia, Thinking Across is often discussed in the context of public management, rather than as an operational framework for transforming higher education governance (Hsieh, 2023; Criado et al., 2021; Meuleman, 2021). Yet, its implementation has the potential to create synergies across disciplines and sectors to improve academic quality and regional competitiveness.

This study aims to analyze the role of Thinking Across in strengthening dynamic governance in private universities (PTS) in Gorontalo Province. Specifically, this study identifies the level of internalization and operationalization of Thinking Across in institutional policies and practices, along with its inhibiting and supporting factors. The novelty of this study lies in the empirical mapping of cross-disciplinary collaborative capabilities in regional private universities with limited resources, which has not been the focus of previous studies. This study extends the theory of Dynamic Governance by emphasizing the role of Thinking Across as a key dimension in building adaptive governance based on collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning. The research findings are expected to enrich the literature on higher education governance in developing countries and provide recommendations for the formulation of more coherent, participatory, and evidence-based institutional policies in the PTS environment.

Methods

This research was conducted in Gorontalo Province, focusing on analyzing Dynamic Governance capabilities in the implementation of education at Private Higher Education Institutions (PTS). The selection of the research location was based on the complexity of educational issues in the region, including limited resources, declining interest from new students, low lecturer welfare, and a lack of synchronization between policies and operational practices. In this context, Dynamic Governance is understood as a systematic effort by leaders to shape the future of the institution through a combination of organizational culture and adaptive capabilities (Neo & Chen, 2007). This research aims to provide an empirical contribution to strengthening adaptive governance in the regional higher education sector. The research was conducted over three months through field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis.

Research Approach

This research employs a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design, chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the context, meaning, and dynamics of Thinking Across implementation in various private universities. According to Creswell (2017), a qualitative approach focuses on interpreting social phenomena through the interpretation of participants' experiences, while Yin (2018) emphasizes that case studies allow for in-depth analysis of complex phenomena in real-world contexts. This research also integrates elements of institutional phenomenology to uncover the meanings constructed by organizational actors regarding cross-boundary governance practices. This approach aligns with Hallinger and Kovačević's (2021) perspective, which argues that comparative qualitative studies are effective in examining adaptive governance practices in higher education.

This approach was chosen because Dynamic Governance theory was used as a conceptual framework, not for hypothesis testing. Data were collected in the form of narratives, actions, and documents that reflected the process of implementing Thinking Across. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation to build a comprehensive understanding. The researcher served as the primary instrument, observing the behavior and interactions of actors in a natural context. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), qualitative researchers are simultaneously data collectors and analysts, so reflexivity and field notes are essential to maintaining research validity.

Types and Design of Research

This research is a descriptive-explanatory case study. Yin (2018) states that descriptive studies describe phenomena in detail, while explanatory studies explain the mechanisms and causal

factors behind them. This design was used to empirically understand how Thinking Across is operationalized in PTS governance policies and practices, as well as to explain the supporting and inhibiting factors. This approach is relevant for exploring the interactions between actors in complex educational governance systems (Putri & Putri, 2023; Iriani et al., 2025).

This study involved five private universities (PTS) in Gorontalo: Universitas Bina Mandiri Gorontalo (UBMG), Universitas Bina Taruna (UNBITA), Universitas Gorontalo (UG), Universitas Ichsan, and Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo (UMGO). Each case served as a unit of analysis, offering varying contexts, capability levels, and strategies for implementing Dynamic Governance. The multiple case study design supported triangulation across institutions to generate comparative understanding and enhance the transferability of findings.

Research Procedures

The research procedure includes three main stages as outlined by Moleong (2017): description, reduction, and selection. In the description stage, researchers observe field conditions, record phenomena relevant to education governance, and identify key actors. The reduction stage is carried out by sorting data from interviews, observations, and documentation to focus the analysis on Thinking Across practices. The selection stage includes grouping data into thematic categories to identify patterns of cross-boundary collaboration, leadership dynamics, and adaptive policy design. Analysis is conducted iteratively using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify relationships between themes and construct an integrated empirical narrative.

This study applies the principle of methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2012) to enhance validity by combining interviews, observations, and policy document analysis. Source triangulation involved stakeholders such as university leaders, lecturers, and representatives of APTISI. Data were verified through member checking and peer debriefing to ensure accurate interpretation. This strategy aligns with practices used in previous Dynamic Governance studies (Febriansyah et al., 2023; Iriani et al., 2025).

Presence of Researchers

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument (Creswell, 2017). Direct presence in the field allows for a more accurate understanding of the social and cultural context of the organization in PTS. The researcher interacts with informants through participant observation and in-depth interviews to collect empirical data. As part of reflexivity, the researcher maintains a neutral stance and uses field notes to minimize interpretive bias. The researcher's presence also allows for the identification of informal decision-making practices or inter-unit communication patterns not documented in formal documents.

Data and Source of Data

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews with key informants who have a direct role in higher education governance. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering their competence and experience in Dynamic Governance practices. Key informants included officials from LLDIKTI Region XVI, vice-chancellors from several universities, and the Chairperson of the Association of Private Higher Education Institutions (APTISI) of Gorontalo Province.

Table 1. Key Research Informants

No.	Informant Elements
1	Head of the Administrative Section of the Higher Education Services Institution for Region XVI Gosulutteng (LLDIKTI)

2	Vice Rector I of Universitas Bina Mandiri Gorontalo (UBM)
3	Vice Rector I of Universitas Bina Taruna Gorontalo (UNBITA)
4	Vice Rector I of Universitas Gorontalo (UG)
5	Rector of Universitas ICHSAN
6	Vice Rector I of Universitas ICHSAN
7	Vice Rector II of Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo (UMGO)
8	Vice Rector III of Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo (UMGO)
9	Chairman of the Association of Private Universities of Gorontalo Province (APTISI)

Source: Research Data

Secondary data is collected from official documents, meeting minutes, policy reports, academic publications, and relevant previous studies. Yin (2018) emphasized that in case studies, data sources include documents, archives, interviews, and direct observation. These three types of data complement each other to provide a comprehensive understanding.

Technique of Analyzing Data

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with the data collection process. Following the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), the analysis phase included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was achieved by selecting relevant information related to Thinking Across indicators such as boundary-spanning leadership, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and service ecosystem integration. Data presentation was structured in descriptive narratives and thematic tables linking collaboration patterns to the institutional context. Conclusions were drawn through interpretation and cross-case comparison.

In analyzing the implementation of Thinking Across, a thematic approach was used to identify patterns of collaboration, networks, and cross-disciplinary practices across various private universities. This approach aligns with practices applied in studies of collaborative governance and interorganizational learning (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). Key themes include cross-boundary leadership, adaptive policy design, collective learning, and digital infrastructure supporting dynamic governance. The study also utilized cross-case synthesis to compare results across universities and identify contexts that support the effective implementation of Thinking Across.

Data Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, the study employed a triangulation strategy of sources and methods. Internal validity was strengthened through member checking, while external validity was maintained through a detailed description of the research context (thick description). Dependability and confirmability were tested through an audit trail and discussions with colleagues. These steps align with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for maintaining the credibility of qualitative research. The researcher's direct involvement over three months allowed for repeated observations, strengthening the reliability of the data.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Thinking Across in Dynamic Governance

This paper has concluded that Thinking Across concept under the Dynamic Governance framework is core in enhancing adaptive and innovative ability of Private Higher Education Institutions in Gorontalo Province. This aspect focuses on receptiveness to ideas at the disciplinary level, institutions, and sectors to generate responsive and sustainable governance. Through in depth interviews, field observations and review of policy related documents in five

large PTS, specifically, UBMG, UNBITA, UG, UMGO and Universitas Ichsan, it is found that Thinking Across has been identified as a significant overarching governance orientation, yet its practice has been partial and uneven across institutions. As one policy informant explained,

“Private universities already understand that they cannot move only within their own institutional boundaries. They need to learn from other sectors and other institutions, but the problem is that this awareness has not yet been followed by a strong governance mechanism”

This assertion is indicative of the larger empirical trend observed in cases, that is, recognition of collaborative and adaptive governance is already there, and there is just a little operational translation done.

Cross case comparison also shows that implementation is different in one university to the other. The findings in UMGO and UBMG indicate that there are greater early attempts to establish the linking of internal academic operations with external stakeholders by using chosen collaborative programs on the part of MBKM and interdisciplinary academic programs. On the contrary, the pattern of UG and UNBITA is more cautious and limited as the recognition of necessity to collaborate is present, but institutional support is low. This condition was also expressed by one university leader who stated,

“We have started to encourage collaboration across units, but it still depends heavily on the initiative of certain leaders and lecturers. It has not yet become part of the institutional culture”

On the whole, the findings indicate that Thinking Across exists on the institutional awareness and selective practice level, yet it is yet to turn into a stable and integrated governance competency across the five private universities that have been examined.

Knowing Vision and Mission

It is important to understand vision and mission as the baseline to use in the implementation of Thinking Across in higher education governance. The results have shown that even in the case of academic actors in private universities in Gorontalo, the perception of the role of vision and mission is not spread evenly across all work units. This lack of socialization has led to a situation where not all academics are well aware of the long term direction of the institution and as such, a number of the academic and teaching policies are not fully oriented towards the strategic direction of the university. This situation is indicative of the loose linkage between institutional aspiration and daily practice of governance. A leader from one university acknowledged this gap by stating,

“The vision and mission are already clear at the institutional level, but not all units understand how to translate them into concrete academic programs and collaborative activities”

This means that the issue is not that the formal direction is not there, but that there is a low level of internalization of the formal direction to the broader institutional framework.

The results of the interview also indicate that the process of setting and appraising the vision and mission is mostly top down in a number of institutions. This implies that the strategic direction continues to be chiefly formulated at the leadership level with little participation of faculties, study programs, and other academic players. One informant explained,

“In many cases, the vision and mission are still treated as formal documents for accreditation purposes rather than as active instruments for policy innovation and institutional learning”

This observation is reinforced by field observations and analysis of documents. There is usually aspirational talk of quality, competitiveness, and innovation in institutional texts, but without explicit operational routes towards interdisciplinary cooperation, stakeholder integration, or adaptive academic governance. The general trend is thus an indication that internalization of vision and mission is still unequal and thus constraining the full application of Thinking Across in the governance practices of the private universities in Gorontalo.

Skill to synthesize Multiple Viewpoints

The capability to incorporate various views as it is expressed indicates the degree to which the private universities can accommodate the perspectives of lecturers, students, alumni, industry, and external stakeholders in the strategic decision making process. In the Thinking Across framework, this dimension is the ability to cross organizational and disciplinary lines to come up with more holistic and responsive decisions. The results indicate that the majority of the private universities in Gorontalo continue to experience a major challenge in this area. The process of decision making is still inclined towards centralization of the leadership in the university as well as the aspirations of lecturers, students, and external partners are yet to be integrated into normal governing mechanisms. One informant stated,

“Strategic decisions are still mostly concentrated at the top. Lecturers may be involved in certain discussions, but broader participation from alumni, industry, and students is still limited” (Vice Rector I of UNBITA, interview, 2025).

This statement is the empirical trend that has been observed, which is that participation is not solely institutionalized and is still incomplete.

It also shows that the ongoing stakeholder dialogue continues to be an infrequent support of curriculum development and academic planning processes. At other times, the interaction with the external actors is only done within particular programs or short-lived initiatives, as opposed to permanent forums through which collective deliberation can take place. This was also highlighted in an interview that noted,

“We understand the importance of involving industry and alumni, especially in curriculum development, but the available forums are still limited and not regular”

At the structural level, limited funding is a major barrier. An informant from LLDIKTI explained,

“Private universities face financial and regulatory limitations that make it difficult to establish sustainable cross sector forums and interdisciplinary initiatives” (Head of Administrative Section of LLDIKTI Region XVI, interview, 2025).

Even so, the findings also show early positive developments. UMGO, for example, has begun to connect students with local industry through project based learning in MBKM. As one leader stated,

“Through MBKM, we have started to open more space for students to interact with external partners, although the mechanism is still not comprehensive across all faculties”

These results suggest that the process of diversified views integration has started to appear, although it is still incomprehensive and unequal in all the studied institutions.

Interdisciplinary Engagement

Thinking Across manifests through interdisciplinary engagement since it entails incorporating the methods, theories and practices of other disciplines in addressing complex problems. The results have shown that interdisciplinary interaction in the private universities in Gorontalo is still at its early stages and has not been institutionalized yet. Other universities have started cross faculty programs like joint research and cross study program MBKM projects, but there is no order in coordination between units. No concrete evidence that there has been a development of permanent academic forums to perpetuate cross disciplinary collaboration at the institutional level is strong. One informant described this condition clearly by stating,

“There have been attempts to build cross study program and cross faculty activities, but without a permanent forum, collaboration usually depends on personal initiative and is difficult to sustain”

This suggests that interdisciplinary engagement is still developing at the level of isolated initiatives rather than as an integrated institutional system.

The findings also identify several major barriers that hinder wider interdisciplinary practice. These include limited lecturer competence in cross disciplinary teaching, inadequate supporting facilities, minimal incentives for collaborative research, and heavy administrative workloads. As one leader explained,

“Many lecturers are actually interested in interdisciplinary collaboration, but administrative burdens and teaching responsibilities make it difficult to maintain that involvement consistently”

Similar concerns were also evident in cases where institutional flexibility remained limited. One informant noted,

“There is interest in cross program collaboration, but our academic system is not yet flexible enough to support it in a wider and more regular way” (Vice Rector I of Universitas Ichsan, interview, 2025).

Nevertheless, there are early signs of progress. Several study programs at UMGO and UBMG have begun to develop research and learning activities that connect technology, economics, and social sciences. This was affirmed by one academic leader who stated,

“Through MBKM and selected research programs, we have started to connect different fields of study, but these efforts are still in the early stage and have not yet become a formal academic design” (Vice Rector III of UMGO, interview, 2025).

Combined, these results indicate that interdisciplinary engagement is just starting to be realized, although its institutionalization has structural, cultural, and managerial limitations.

Digital Integration and Multifunctional Data Governance

Thinking Across is also cross unit digital operating system that facilitates data driven decision making. The results indicate that SIAKAD, SISTER, and LMS systems are already implemented in the majority of the private universities in Gorontalo but their integration is weak. These systems are in most cases operated independently by academic, administrative, and faculty level units which results in a broken information flow and lack of interoperability. As one informant explained,

“SLAKAD, SISTER, and LMS are already available, but they still run separately. Each unit manages its own data, so integration for strategic decision making remains a challenge.

This indicates that the presence of digital systems does not automatically result in integrated governance.

The findings further show that the problem is not solely technological, but also organizational and cultural. Cross unit data governance remains weak because there is not yet a strong policy framework and institutional culture for data sharing, coordination, and interoperability. This was reflected in one interview statement that said,

“The issue is not only about infrastructure. It is also about governance. We still do not have a strong shared policy and culture for managing data across units” (Vice Rector I of Universitas Ichsan, interview, 2025).

Even so, several campuses such as UMGO and UG have begun to initiate internal dashboards and improve digital linkage, although these efforts remain limited in scope. An informant from LLDIKTI also observed,

“Some private universities have started to improve their internal data systems, but integration across faculties and administrative units is still a major challenge”

These results imply that digital integration can play an important role to enhance adaptive governance, yet currently it has not been used as a completely effective facilitator of Thinking Across in private universities in Gorontalo.

Summary and Major Patterns

In general, the research results prove that the application of Thinking Across in the private universities of Gorontalo is not in the optimal level yet. The three key indicators under focus in the original results section, including the knowledge of vision and mission, the capacity to combine different perspectives, and interdisciplinary involvement, reflect a significant disparity between policy dream and governance reality. Also, the results of digital integration indicate that disintegrated data systems undermine the adaptive capacity of such institutions even more. In general, in all cases, the most notable obstacles are lack of coordination among the faculties, insufficient funding to support collaborative efforts, institutional rigidity, disjointed digital infrastructure, and cultural resistance to change. This broader pattern was summarized well by one informant who stated,

“The willingness to collaborate is already there, but institutional support, coordination, flexibility, and data integration still need to be strengthened if Thinking Across is to become part of everyday governance”

At the same time, the results also show that the potential for transformation remains open. Across the five universities, there are early signs of progress through MBKM, selected interdisciplinary initiatives, and emerging partnerships with external stakeholders. A policy actor captured this condition by stating,

“What we see is not the absence of awareness, but the incomplete institutionalization of that awareness. Private universities know they need to adapt, but they are still building the structures that can make that adaptation sustainable”

Thus, the key pattern emerging from this study is that private universities in Gorontalo are in a transitional phase. They are moving toward more collaborative and adaptive governance, but they still require stronger institutional structures, more participatory mechanisms, and better

integrated support systems in order to fully realize Thinking Across within the Dynamic Governance framework.

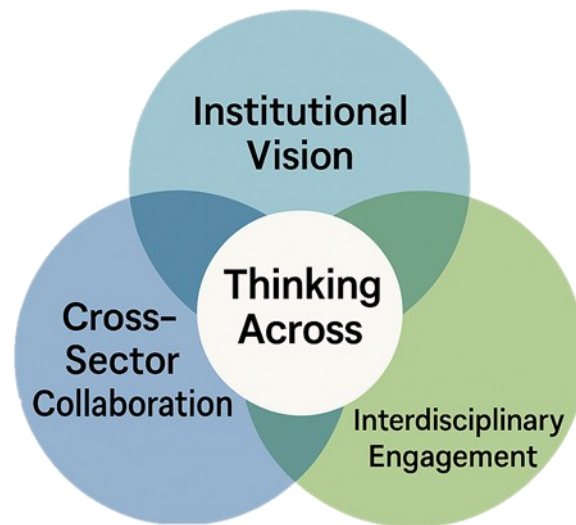


Figure 1. Dynamic Governance Framework in PTS Gorontalo

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of Thinking Across (TA) within the Dynamic Governance framework in Private Higher Education Institutions (PTS) in Gorontalo Province is still partial, with variations between institutions in institutional capacity, organizational culture, and regulatory support. The following discussion places these empirical results within the context of global literature on collaborative governance, design thinking, and university service ecosystems to interpret how TA plays a role as a basis for collaborative governance innovation and institutional capacity building in higher education in developing regions.

Conceptually, Thinking Across emphasizes cross-disciplinary and cross-sector integration through three main dimensions: boundary-spanning leadership, design thinking, and intersystem learning within service ecosystems (Vink et al., 2020; Sørensen & Vedeld, 2022). These three aspects serve as drivers of adaptability and innovation in Dynamic Governance because they enable organizations to learn from multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder interactions. In the context of private universities in Gorontalo, the implementation of Thinking Across is reflected in interfaculty collaboration, cross-disciplinary research, and multidisciplinary curriculum development, as identified through interviews and observations at UBMG, UMGO, UG, UNBITA, and Universitas Ichsan. However, these processes have not been fully institutionalized due to communication barriers, a lack of formal coordination mechanisms, and limited human and financial resources.

Compared to practices at universities in East Asia and Europe that have adopted the service ecosystem design model, private universities in Gorontalo are still in the early stages of building cross-sector networks. Zhao et al. (2023) and Guaman-Quintanilla et al. (2022) emphasize that the success of Thinking Across in enhancing learning relevance and governance innovation depends on two critical elements: planned collaboration through policy co-design and data-driven evaluation. The results of this study indicate that although private universities in Gorontalo have begun implementing TA elements, their implementation remains ad hoc and lacks support for a sustainable monitoring and evaluation system. For example, cross-study program collaboration (MBKM) and multidisciplinary research have been implemented, but have not been integrated into an established institutional policy system.

From a leadership perspective, the results indicate that a collegial approach is a key factor in TA effectiveness. Purba et al. (2023) emphasized that collegial leadership encourages the distribution of authority and responsibility across units, enabling horizontal, rather than just vertical, policy coordination. Interviews with UBM and UMGO leaders indicated that although cross-faculty collaboration is encouraged, strategic decisions are still dominated by the rectorate, limiting deliberative space for faculties and research centers. Ansell and Torfing (2021) and Sørensen et al. (2021) emphasized that collective participation in deliberative forums enhances policy ownership and institutional innovation. Therefore, without strong collegial leadership and an incentive system that supports cross-unit collaboration, Thinking Across tends to be symbolic.

Field findings also highlight the importance of academic networks as infrastructure for cross-border learning. Studies by Seid et al. (2021) and Pausits et al. (2025) show that collaborative networks between universities, industry, and local governments strengthen institutional capacity. In the Gorontalo context, triple helix partnerships between private universities, industry, and local governments remain limited. LLDIKTI Region XVI and APTISI have acted as coordination facilitators, but have not yet established a formal mechanism for integrating research, learning, and public services across sectors. Yet, an effective triple helix model demands the active role of boundary-spanning leadership capable of bridging interests between actors and ensuring the sustainability of partnerships (Vedeld, 2022; Gordon et al., 2020; Scheibe et al., 2025; Galbi et al., 2021).

From an academic perspective, the level of interdisciplinary engagement reflects the maturity of Thinking Across. Global research on Education 4.0 shows that technology integration, problem-based learning, and cross-disciplinary collaborative approaches can increase the relevance of curricula to industry needs (Rienties et al., 2023; Zlatanović et al., 2023). However, empirical data shows that Gorontalo's private universities remain tied to a rigid, single-discipline curriculum structure. The lack of flexibility in the academic system makes it difficult for students to take courses across programs, while lecturers lack adequate training in interdisciplinary teaching. Consistent with Warshaw and Ciarimboli (2020), an organizational culture resistant to innovation is a major obstacle to interdisciplinary policies.

The success of Thinking Across in the context of Dynamic Governance is also determined by the institution's capacity to manage knowledge flows through data-driven governance. Leong and Howlett (2021) and Atimi and Pradasari (2020) emphasize that digital systems such as SIAKAD, SISTER, and LMS play a strategic role in evidence-based decision-making. However, the integration of these systems in Gorontalo's private universities remains partial due to data fragmentation across faculties. This situation indicates that technological readiness has not been matched by institutional readiness, a gap also identified by Imansyah et al. (2024) in their study of university IT governance in Indonesia.

Lack of coordination and communication across faculties is another structural obstacle. Interviews with UMGO and UG leaders revealed that the absence of formal academic forums bringing together lecturers and students from various fields hinders cross-disciplinary collaboration. Consequently, the exchange of ideas, research integration, and academic policy formulation are slowed down. Castellanos et al. (2023) state that effective horizontal communication is a key factor in accelerating policy innovation and efficient governance in private universities.

Comparisons with advanced universities demonstrate that successful Thinking Across requires synergy between policy design, organizational culture, and infrastructure. Ansell and Torfing (2021) describe adaptive universities as institutions that implement policy co-creation through

collaboration between internal and external actors, with data-driven evaluation and continuous collaborative learning. In the Gorontalo context, new co-creation practices are emerging through collaborative research between faculties and partnerships with local industry, but they are not yet institutionally coordinated.

From a public policy perspective, the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, a national framework for interdisciplinary collaboration, has not been fully optimized. MBKM aligns with the Thinking Across principle because it encourages students to learn across fields and lecturers to innovate in teaching methods (Hasanah et al., 2023; Meke et al., 2021). However, interviews with APTISI and LLDIKTI indicate that MBKM implementation in Gorontalo's private universities remains hampered by rigid regulations and minimal financial support. Najwa et al. (2023) emphasize that policy decentralization and flexible funding are key prerequisites for the success of regional educational innovation.

Budget constraints are the most prominent factor hampering interdisciplinary programs and curriculum innovation. Lack of funding for cross-faculty research and collaborative facility development limits innovation opportunities. Agile governance literature (Furuta, 2021) emphasizes the need for a paradigm shift in resource management from an administrative model to a flexible and collaborative system. In the context of private universities in Gorontalo, such funding reforms could be a crucial step towards achieving adaptive and responsive governance that addresses cross-sectoral needs.

Theoretically, this research broadens the understanding of Dynamic Governance by emphasizing that cross-sector and cross-disciplinary integration is a core dimension of adaptive governance in higher education. Thinking Across strengthens collective learning structures and cross-system policy design, enabling universities to adapt to technological changes, industry needs, and national public policies (Anggara, 2023). Thus, TA expands the theory of Dynamic Governance through the dimensions of multidisciplinary collaboration and data-driven governance as driving mechanisms for institutional adaptation.

Practical implications include the establishment of cross-faculty leadership forums, strengthening integrated digital infrastructure, and providing design thinking and data literacy training for lecturers and university leaders. Investment in a university service ecosystem that connects faculties, research centers, industry, and local governments is also crucial to strengthening the competitiveness of private universities at the national and global levels. With these steps, private universities in Gorontalo have the potential to transform into adaptive institutions capable of translating Thinking Across into collaborative and innovative governance within a Dynamic Governance framework.

Conclusion

This study confirms that Thinking Across (TA) is a strategic dimension within the Dynamic Governance framework that plays a role in strengthening adaptive, collaborative, and innovative capabilities in Private Higher Education Institutions (PTS) in Gorontalo Province. The results show that the implementation of TA in PTS has begun through cross-faculty collaboration, multidisciplinary curriculum development, and cross-sector partnerships, although it has not been running optimally due to limited resources, weak coordination, and cultural resistance to innovation. Structural barriers, including the absence of cross-disciplinary academic forums, fragmented data systems, and regulations that do not support academic flexibility, slow the implementation of cross-sector governance.

Conceptually, TA extends Dynamic Governance theory by adding cross-disciplinary and cross-sector integration as a core dimension of adaptive governance. The main contribution

of this research lies in the empirical mapping of Thinking Across capabilities in the context of regional higher education, which has been under-discussed in the Indonesian university governance literature. Practical implications include the need to establish academic collaboration forums, provide design thinking training for lecturers, and integrate data systems across faculties to strengthen evidence-based decision-making. Further research is recommended to develop quantitative indicators for measuring Thinking Across capabilities and assess their impact on the quality of academic services and the long-term competitiveness of institutions.

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