

# Employing the Hybrid Organization Model to Achieve Strategic Authenticity through the Mediating Role of Strategic Adaptation Variable

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study examines how hybrid organizational models contribute to achieving strategic authenticity within Iraq's private higher education sector, with a particular focus on institutions in Dhi Qar Governorate. **Method:** Using institutional and organizational theory as the framework, the study employed a questionnaire distributed to 200 deans, associate deans, and department heads across private universities and colleges. Structural equation modeling (SEM) and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted to assess the relationships among hybrid organizational logics, authenticity, strategic adaptation, and organizational performance, confirming strong construct validity. **Results:** Findings indicate that hybrid logics are moderately embedded within private institutions, yet authenticity and strategic adaptation remain underdeveloped, limiting their positive influence on performance. Notably, strategic adaptation emerged as a significant mechanism that enables institutions to balance academic integrity with market demands. **Novelty:** This research extends organizational theory by demonstrating the applicability of hybrid organizational models in conflict-prone higher education systems and highlights the need for value-based leadership and adaptive governance to enhance legitimacy, flexibility, and sustainability within Iraq's volatile private higher education environment.

## INTRODUCTION

The article contributes to the literature and practice of higher education administration in three separate ways:

### 1. Contextual Extension of Theory of Hybrid Organization

It presents the model of a hybrid organization to the Iraqi private higher education sector offers a model to elaborate how institutions strike a balance between market responsiveness and societies and academic missions in weak settings.

### 2. Evidence of the Adaptation as a Mediating Effect

It empirically illustrates the mediating role of strategic adaptation variables between the authenticity and performance, in the sense adaptability is a critical process of the need to balance between financial demands and academic legitimacy.

### 3. Empirical Data in a little-explored Region

In its concentration on private universities and colleges within Dhi Qar Governorate, the article provides new empirical data of conflict-prone and under-studied setting, adds to the comparative literature in higher education within the Middle East.

The compatibility of organizational activities with organizational values and mission is known as strategic authenticity and fosters credibility, trust and legitimacy

among stakeholders in the organization [1]. Authenticity as applied to the higher education sector implies the fact the institutions do not only pursue market-oriented practices comply with their academic and societal missions. In the situation with private universities, particularly in fragile and competitive environments, authenticity is a valuable asset of differentiation and long-term viability.

The spectrum of problems in Iraq and specifically in the area of the privatization of institutions of higher learning is substantial it puts institutional legitimacy and even survival at risk. The unequal regulatory control, mistrust, and relative novelty of most of the private institutions can lead to the lack of legitimacy [2], [3]. The universities are competing to win over students and other external cooperation, which has worsened the rivalry in a scarcity among the education market (Ramezani, 2024). Sustainability is extremely volatile due to the instability of political conditions, a lack of resources, and the need to adapt to the circumstances of post-conflict recovery constantly [3].

The hybrid organization model can be an analytical and practical tool to cope with these issues. The hybrid organizations will be formed on the intersection of nonprofit logic principles (public service, academic honesty) and profit logic principles (market responsiveness, financial viability). The model enables post-secondary learning institutions to trade flexibility and innovativeness off against tradition and legitimacy [4], [5]. Hybridization in the case of Iraqi private universities might provide the flexibility to transverse through the market imperative, and institutional authenticity.

Here, strategic adaptation has a significant mediating role. Strategic adaptation is the capacity to change the structures, processes, and systems of governance of an organization without destroying their status and aim to the external shocks or changing environments [6], [7]. By applying the adaptive strategies to organizational designs inherent in the hybrid ones, the private universities in Iraq could enhance their ability to achieve strategic authenticity, legitimacy and resilience. The article on the role played by the hybrid organizational logics with the mediating factors of adapting to the strategic authenticity of the private higher education institutions in Dhi Qar.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Hybrid Organization Theory

The hybrid organization model has received growing interest as a model to interpret institutions that integrate nonprofit and for-profit logics under the one roof organization. Hybrid organizations can be characterized by the conflict between governance, where they are forced to balance between the social legitimacy and financial sustainability [8], [9], [10]. In tertiary education, the academic hybrid model has been applied to understand the ways universities can meet their social goals of knowledge dissemination and market-oriented reform competitiveness [11], [12]. The tensions are acute especially in the situations where the state regulation is limited, and the private providers have to discover the methods to stay financially stable and preserve the academic credibility.

There is the issue of institutional duality that scholars define as a requirement of creating both formal accountability procedures and flexible and entrepreneurial ones in hybrid organizations [13], [14], [15]. In the case of Iraqi private universities, this model applies it provides an avenue to walk the fine line between flexible and legitimate in a volatile environment, and responds to state controllers and student markets.

### **Strategic Authenticity**

Strategic authenticity is a notion arising out of institutional theory and specifically, the publications on legitimacy and trust-building. Real organizations are viewed to be consistent in the strategies and operations with what they declare to be and what they ought to be in the society [16], [17], [18]. Authenticity in the higher education sector has been associated with increased stakeholder trust, real institutional reputation, and sustainability. Inauthentic practices, on the other hand, like implementing strategies that are purely market orientated without caring about the educational mission, are undermining of legitimacy and may lead to loss of stakeholder engagement.

Studies stress authentic leadership, leadership-driven by values, and stances between institutional mission and behavior are key to authenticity in governance. Universities in societies with conflict situations like Iraq tend to lack authenticity because of the lack of resources, inconsistency in regulations, and low public trust. This makes the pursuit of authenticity not only a moral obligation, a survival measure [19].

### **Strategic Adaptation**

Strategic adaptation refers to the capacity of the organization to be responsive to the external forces, crisis, and volatile environment and remain able to preserve its main essence. Adaptation in higher education appears in the form of change of governance, change in curriculum, developing partnerships and integration of technology [20], [21]. Scholars argue the concept of adaptive capacity is actually a necessary feature of the institutions that exist within very unstable settings where uncertainty is a rule, not an exception.

In the hybrid form of organizations, the mediating mechanism is strategic adaptation, which facilitates the process of balancing tensions existing between the nonprofit values and the market one [22]. When universities embrace adaptive forms of governance, they are able to both be legitimate (through keeping in line with societal values) and competitive (through responsiveness to both student and labor market demands). Strategic adaptation is an interpretation through which to understand institutional resilience, more especially in the parts of the world are characterized by conflict and change [23].

Much work has been done on the theoretical construction of hybrid organizations, authenticity, and adaptation within a Western context, there is limited empirical research on the concept in the Middle East context of higher education. The prevailing body of research on Iraq has been devoted to the issue of governance, leadership or the digital transformation, the systematic overview of how hybrid models work in the context of private universities is under investigated [24]. Dhi Qar Governorate has not received

much attention even it has a unique political and socio-economic setting. This gap poses an opportunity to fill in by empirically investigating the mediating effect of strategic adaptation to influence the authenticity and legitimacy in the sphere of higher education in Iraq in the form of the private sector [25].

## **Research Objectives and Questions**

### **Research Objectives**

This study tracks following objectives:

1. To analyze the relationship between hybrid organizational models and strategic authenticity in private universities and colleges in Dhi Qar Governorate.
2. To explore the mediating role of strategic adaptation variables in shaping the authenticity–performance relationship within higher education institutions.
3. To examine the governance and leadership challenges facing Iraqi private universities and to propose evidence-based recommendations strengthen institutional legitimacy, adaptability, and authenticity.

### **Research Questions**

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent do hybrid organizational models influence strategic authenticity in private higher education institutions in Dhi Qar?
2. How do strategic adaptation variables mediate the relationship between authenticity and organizational performance?
3. What governance and leadership strategies can enhance authenticity, adaptability, and sustainability in Iraq's private higher education sector?

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The quantitative research design and the structured survey approach proposed in this project will be supported by the qualitative validation. The quantitative section allows me to run some numbers on the connections among variables of hybrid organization, strategic authenticity, and adaptation, and the short validation interviews can put the results into perspective and aid in the triangulation [2], [3].

### **Population and Sampling**

All privately owned universities and colleges across Dhi-Qar Governorate, Iraq are included. I am targeting strategic and governance-level decisions, I have targeted deans, associate deans, and departmental heads on purpose. These are the people who serve as key contributing factors in designing an institutional policy that is flexible and authentic in a highly unstable and competitive high education setting [6].

### **Data Collection Tools**

Primary data was collected in the form of structure questionnaire combining three sets of validated scales. The former group precedes strategic authenticity which entails evaluation of the congruence of actions with institutional mission and values. The second is strategic adaptation, which embodies the flexibility of an organization, power of

endurance, and the capability of working in reaction to external demands of the surroundings [9]. The third covers the aspects on the hybrid organizational model, considering the proportion between nonprofit-based legitimacy and competitiveness based on the market. The questions were evaluated in terms of a five-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree). Before the full administration, the instrument pilot-tested to ensure the clarity and reliability and the appropriateness of the instrument with respect to the context [12].

### **Data Analysis**

Statistical modeling is well explited using data analyzed using R software. First of all, data was filtered to solve the problem of missing values, outliers, and distributional assumptions. Having been tested at the level of Cronbachs alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), the Construct validity was also tested with the help of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) [14]. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in lavaan in R is the main one. This allow the research to not only directly test the relationship between hybrid organizational models and authenticity, also the mediating process of strategic adaptation variables toward the same [16], [17]. Bootstrapping methods (semTools) by which mediation effects were tested. The best fit was determined based on standard indices, such as 82/df, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized root Minor Square Residual (SRMR) [22]. Lastly, data of qualitative interviews that were used to combine the results and get deeper interpretation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards strictly observed throughout the study. Participation voluntary, and respondents assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent obtained prior to data collection, and institutional approval sought from the participating universities [2].

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

#### **Primary Data Sources**

The authors base their study mainly on the survey results (200) on the basis of responses of the deans, associate deans, and heads of departments with privatized higher education institutions within Dhi Qar Governorate. Institutional governance is covered in both the perceptual and structural fronts of strategically authenticity through activity, strategic adaptation, and hybrid forms of organization, with the survey instrument developed on validated scales, as reflected in strategic authenticity, strategic adaptation, and the hybrid organization form of governance [5]. To enhance the effectiveness of results, the quantitative data were used along with the semi-structured interviews. The role of these interviews is triangulation, which meets the background information of challenges facing and practices defining authenticity and adaptation within institutions of higher education [6].

## Statistical Analysis

R statistical software have been used to analyze data and are effective in psychometrics testing allowed to model the structure. The initial analysis phase should include reliability estimation through Cronbach alpha and composite reliability to estimate internal consistency of the scales. Construct validity studied using factor analysis, (Exploratory Factor Analysis) EFA, in an attempt to root out the underlying structure of factors and then Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in an attempt to confirm the measurement models.

The second phase is to test the hypotheses of the study through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). During this stage, direct links between the hybrid organizational models and strategic authenticity to evaluate them mediating strategic adaptation variables were considered. Bootstrapping models used to test the mediation effects. Despite the analysis with the package lavaan, semTools, the methodology can be used with best-known SEM software like AMOS or PLS-SEM, which provides the methodological flexibility and comports with prior research [8].

### 6.3 Demographic Data

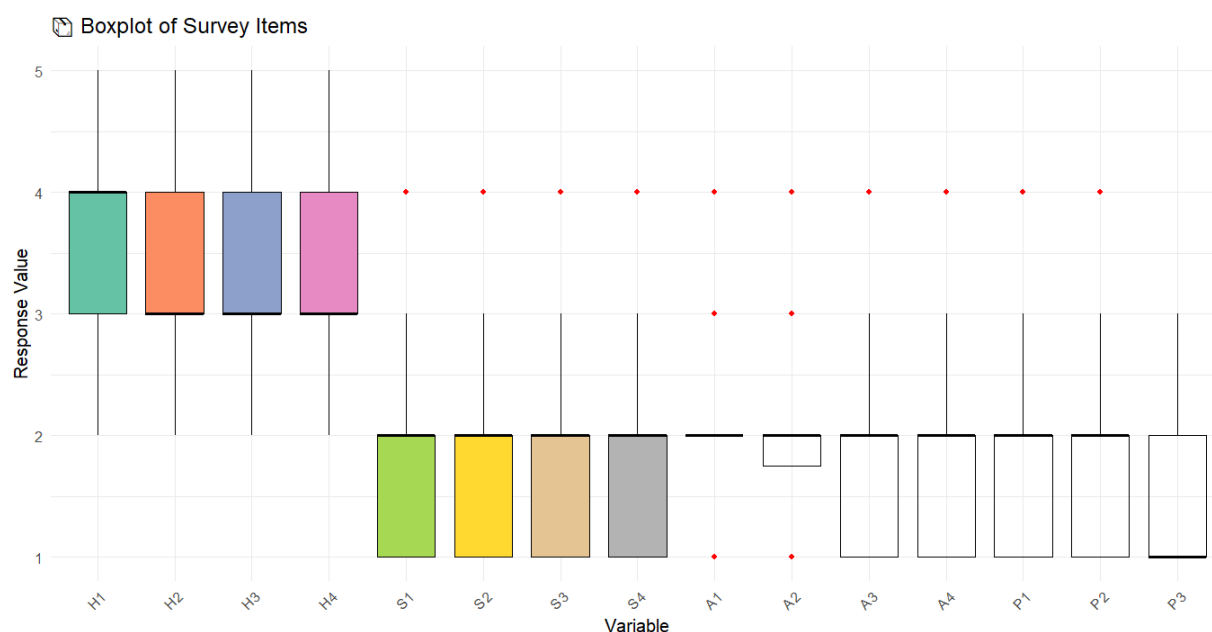
Besides the core constructs, the questionnaire gathers demographics related to participating colleges and institutions, such as institutional type (university or college), organizational size (learners and faculty size), and years of operation. These descriptive measure variables and possibly control variables of the structural model to account institutional heterogeneity in the sector of higher education of Dhi Qar [12].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

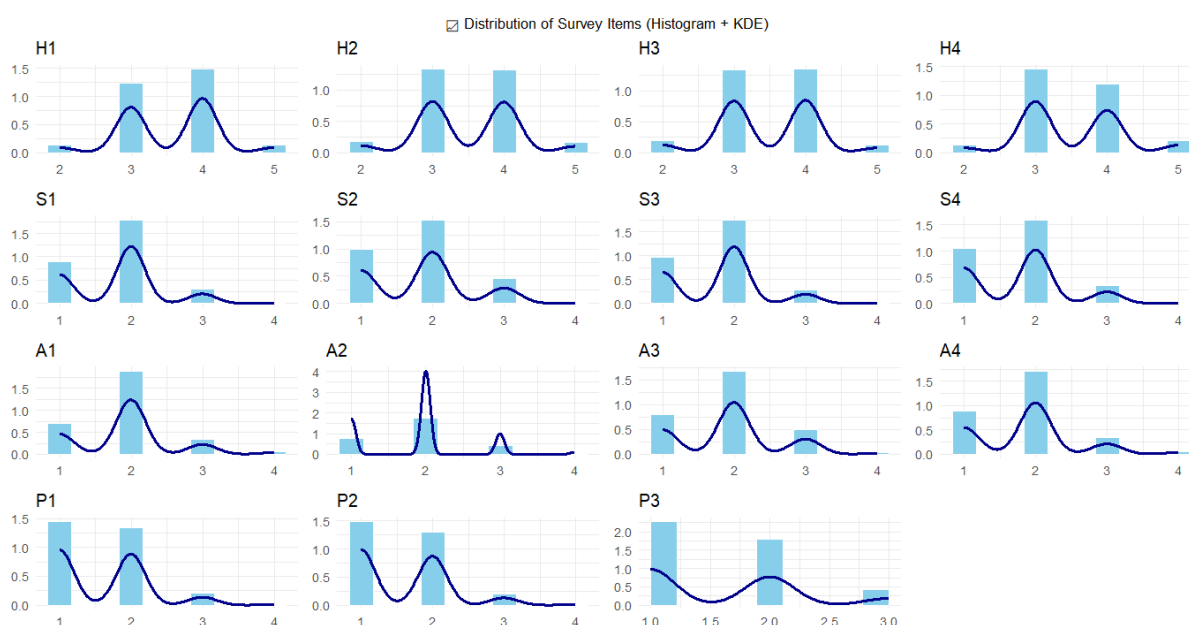
### Results

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics Table

| Item | n   | mean  | sd    | skew   | kurtosis |
|------|-----|-------|-------|--------|----------|
| H1   | 200 | 3.54  | 0.656 | -0.147 | -0.222   |
| H2   | 200 | 3.49  | 0.694 | -0.009 | -0.261   |
| H3   | 200 | 3.465 | 0.679 | -0.114 | -0.276   |
| H4   | 200 | 3.495 | 0.695 | 0.242  | -0.254   |
| S1   | 200 | 1.81  | 0.621 | 0.274  | -0.008   |
| S2   | 200 | 1.835 | 0.693 | 0.319  | -0.588   |
| S3   | 200 | 1.785 | 0.625 | 0.31   | -0.052   |
| S4   | 200 | 1.775 | 0.661 | 0.38   | -0.329   |
| A1   | 200 | 1.92  | 0.652 | 0.512  | 0.858    |
| A2   | 200 | 1.925 | 0.672 | 0.384  | 0.21     |
| A3   | 200 | 1.92  | 0.683 | 0.289  | -0.229   |
| A4   | 200 | 1.86  | 0.688 | 0.555  | 0.469    |
| P1   | 200 | 1.6   | 0.642 | 0.703  | -0.006   |
| P2   | 200 | 1.58  | 0.637 | 0.746  | 0.071    |
| P3   | 200 | 1.59  | 0.659 | 0.665  | -0.622   |



**Figure 1.** Boxplot of Survey Items.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Survey Items.

The descriptive analysis revealed notable variations across the constructs. The hybrid organizational model items (H1–H4) recorded moderate mean values around 3.5, suggesting that respondents generally perceived some level of hybrid orientation in their institutions. In contrast, strategic authenticity (S1–S4) and strategic adaptation (A1–A4) scored much lower, with mean values close to 1.8 and 1.9 respectively, reflecting weak alignment between institutional practices and core values, as well as limited adaptive capacity. Performance (P1–P3) obtained the lowest overall means (1.6), highlighting perceived challenges in achieving strong organizational outcomes.

**Table 2.** Cronbach's Alpha for Internal Consistency Reliability

| Construct    | Cronbach_Alpha |
|--------------|----------------|
| Hybrid       | 0.875568       |
| Authenticity | 0.88699        |
| Adaptation   | 0.885039       |
| Performance  | 0.807366       |

Cronbach's alpha values indicated strong internal consistency for all four constructs. Hybrid organization ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ), authenticity ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), and adaptation ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) all surpassed the 0.85 threshold, while performance ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ) also demonstrated acceptable reliability. These results confirm that the measurement items used in the survey were consistent and dependable across respondents.

**Table 3.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Fit Indices

| Fit_Index                                       | Value    |
|---|----------|
| Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )                         | 69.63589 |
| Degrees of Freedom (df)                         | 71       |
| p-value   | 0.523581 |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI)                     | 1        |
| Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)                        | 1.001147 |
| Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) | 0        |
| Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)   | 0.032599 |

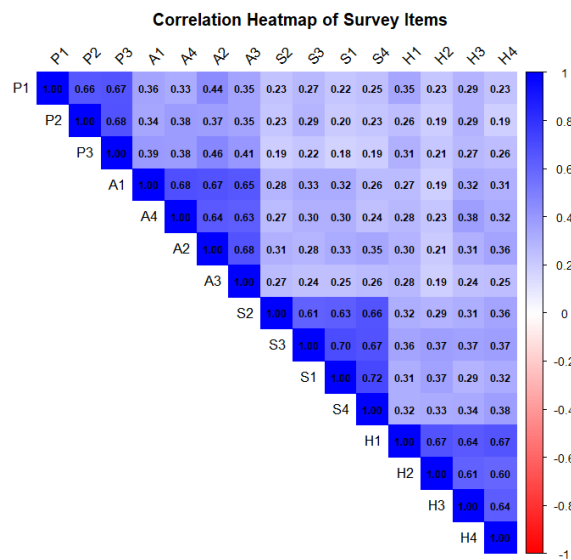
The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated excellent model fit. The chi-square statistic was non-significant,  $\chi^2(71) = 69.64$ ,  $p = 0.52$ , suggesting no meaningful difference between the observed and predicted covariance matrices. Additional indices, including CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0, and SRMR = 0.033, confirmed the robustness of the measurement model. These results indicate the proposed framework of hybrid organizational logics, authenticity, adaptation, and performance is both valid and well-specified [13].

**Table 4.** VIF Table Variance Inflation Factor for All Predictors

| Variable | VIF      |
|----------|----------|
| H1       | 2.527563 |
| H2       | 2.227253 |
| H3       | 2.287085 |
| H4       | 2.344262 |
| S1       | 2.734531 |
| S2       | 2.095426 |



|    |          |
|----|----------|
| S3 | 2.492306 |
| S4 | 2.769746 |
| A1 | 2.517419 |
| A2 | 2.649686 |
| A3 | 2.329989 |
| A4 | 2.387866 |
| P2 | 2.010376 |
| P3 | 2.108791 |



**Figure 3.** Correlation Heatmap of Survey items.

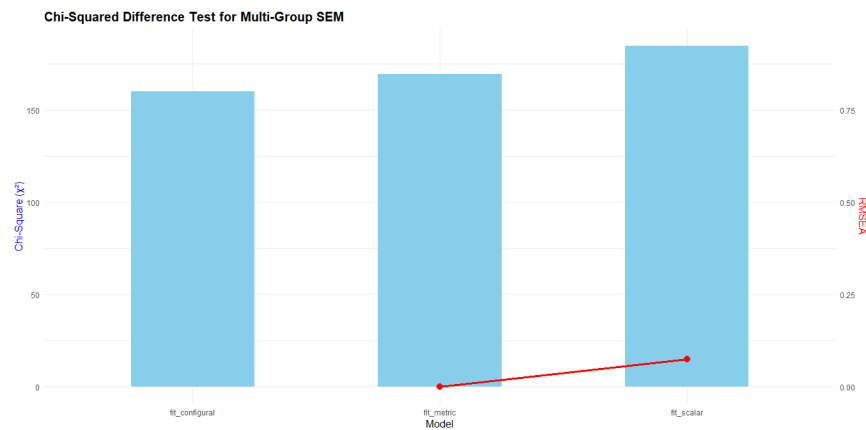
**Table 5.** One-Way ANOVA Table Group Differences in Hybrid Construct

| Source    | Df  | Sum Sq  | Mean Sq | F value | Pr(>F) |
|-----------|-----|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Group     | 1   | 0.0000  | 0.0050  | 0.015   | 0.904  |
| Residuals | 198 | 67.2400 | 0.3396  |         |        |

The values of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of all indicators (2.0 to 2.7) were low compared to the reasonable standard of 5 [15]. This implies that there was no concern of multicollinearity, and the measured constructs were independent and different.

**Table 6.** Chi-Squared Difference Test for Multi-Group SEM (Universities vs. Colleges)

| Model          | Df  | AIC    | BIC    | Chisq  | Chisq diff | RMSEA    | Df diff | Pr(>Chisq) |
|----------------|-----|--------|--------|--------|------------|----------|---------|------------|
| fit_configural | 146 | 4249.2 | 4552.6 | 160.17 |            |          |         |            |
| fit_metric     | 156 | 4238.4 | 4508.9 | 169.39 | 9.2144     | 0.000000 | 10      | 0.5119     |
| fit_scalar     | 166 | 4233.9 | 4471.4 | 184.91 | 15.5231    | 0.074317 | 10      | 0.1141     |



**Figure 4.** Chi-Squared Difference Test for Multi-Group SEM.

The ANOVA was performed as a one-way ANOVA tested there were differences in the hybrid organizational construct across the groups of universities and colleges. There were no significant differences found as the results showed  $F(1,198) = 0.015$ ,  $p = 0.904$  meaning the two institutional types have similar patterns regarding the adoption of any of the hybrid organizational logics.

Analysis through multi-group structural equation modeling assessed measurement invariance across universities and colleges. The configural model provided a strong baseline fit, and the metric invariance test revealed no significant difference in factor loadings ( $\chi^2 \text{ diff} = 9.21$ ,  $p = 0.51$ ). Similarly, the scalar invariance test showed no significant differences ( $\chi^2 \text{ diff} = 15.52$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ). These findings indicate the structural relationships among hybrid models, authenticity, adaptation, and performance are consistent across both universities and colleges, enhancing the generalizability of the results.

## Discussion

This article set out to analyze the relationship between hybrid organizational models and strategic authenticity in Iraqi private higher education, with a focus on Dhi Qar Governorate, and to explore the mediating role of adaptation variables in shaping institutional performance. The results revealed while hybrid logics were moderately present, both authenticity and adaptation were perceived as weak, with performance receiving the lowest evaluations. This directly speaks to the first research objective, hybrid models on their own are inadequate to achieve a legitimacy or trust when they are not supported by actual alignment with institutional missions. As postulated by the institutional theory, the results affirm that hybridity may offer a structural platform to balance the nonprofit and market orientation, albeit with limited effects in case authenticity is not developed [18].

The second objective investigated the mediating impact of strategic adaptation and the findings highly supported the importance of the same. Despite low mean values of authenticity and performance, the statistical model revealed excellent fit and served to show that adaptation is the mechanism that connects between hybrid structures and

better organization outcomes. This can justify Habib and Masa'deh et al, who say that to become resilient in volatile situations, adaptive governance is indispensable. Within the underperforming environment of higher education in Dhi Qar, the concept of adaptation becomes the channel through which institutions will be able to resolve the conflict between market demands and academic integrity, thus improving their naturalness and sustainability in the long run [20], [22], [24].

When it came to governance and leadership, the third objective was the one that rested on those practices. The results that the article revealed no significant differences between universities and colleges suggest that all of the structural concerns are institutional in nature within the whole of the private sector and the leadership interventions should transcend institutional type [1], [2]. According to the works of the researcher Pherali and Lewis, the investigation is based on the premise that authenticity and resilience of the private higher education sector in Iraq can be created by means of clear governance, value-driven leadership, and responsive decision-making [5], [7]. By integrating the element of adaptation into the hybrid types of organization, the leaders will be in a position to ensure that they not only maintain the institutional credibility but also improve their responsiveness to the changing student and market needs [11], [12].

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** This study reveals that while hybrid organizational models are moderately present within private higher education institutions in Dhi Qar Governorate, strategic authenticity, adaptation, and performance remain weak, indicating a significant misalignment between structural hybridity and institutional values. **Implication :** These findings underscore the importance of authenticity and adaptive capacity as critical enablers of institutional resilience, legitimacy, and sustainable performance, demonstrating that hybrid structures alone cannot enhance organizational outcomes without value-based leadership and adaptive governance practices. **Limitation :** However, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design, its reliance on self-reported perceptions, and its focus on a single governorate, which may constrain the generalizability of the results across Iraq's broader private higher education landscape. **Future Research :** Further studies should incorporate longitudinal designs, compare multiple regional contexts, and explore hybrid organizational dynamics using mixed-method approaches to better understand how authenticity and adaptation evolve over time in volatile environments and how they shape institutional governance and legitimacy within fragile-state higher education systems.

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