



AUTONOMY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Indian higher education system is very complex with very less amount of autonomy. The institutional autonomy basically means giving Institution a large degree of freedom to steer itself to achieve its goals and objectives. The autonomy is expected to provide a better framework through a decentralized management culture. Creating successful universities needs a supportive governance structure in which they have autonomy to achieve objectives, whether research or teaching, with appropriate level of accountability. This paper discusses about the meaning of institutional autonomy, its different types, relation between autonomy and quality, key issues of autonomy, meaning of autonomy and current level of autonomy in Indian Universities.

Keywords: Institutional autonomy, Higher education institutions, autonomy and accountability

Introduction

The institutional autonomy basically means giving Institution a large degree of freedom to steer itself to achieve its goals and objectives. The autonomy is expected to provide a better framework through a decentralized management culture. Creating successful universities needs a supportive governance structure in which they have autonomy to achieve objectives, whether research or teaching, with appropriate level of accountability.

Different Types of Institutional Autonomy

Substantive autonomy	Procedural autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Curriculum design➤ Research policy➤ Entrance standards➤ Academic staff appointments➤ Awarding degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Budgeting➤ Financing management➤ Non-academic staff appointments➤ Purchasing➤ Entering into contracts

Literature Review

P. Aghion (2009) has looked at the relationship between autonomy and outcomes amongst the top World Universities as ranked by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) Rankings of Universities. The outcome variable of Aghion is research (as reflected by rankings under the SJTU ranking) and innovation (as reflected in the number of patents registered). They find that the autonomy factor is maximized for those European universities that share a number of characteristics including that they

- (i) do not need to seek government approval of their budget
- (ii) select their baccalaureate students in a manner independent of the government
- (iii) pay faculty flexibly rather than based on a centralized seniority /rank based scale
- (iv) control their hiring internally,
- (v) have low endogamy
- (vi) own their own buildings
- (vii) set their own curriculum

(viii) have a relatively low percentage of their budget from core government funds, and

(ix) have a relatively high percentage of their funds from competitive research grants

UNESCO study in 2014, covering five countries in Asia, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam, focused on institutional autonomy and the role it plays in governance and management of HEIs in enhancing the overall effectiveness of higher education systems Higher education institutions (HEIs) were progressively given authority to take decisions in academics and administration and financial aspects (mobilization of financial resources and their deployment)At the national level, in most of these countries, quality and educational outcomes are linked with industry and society need. They were also integrated with policy-making, regulating, facilitating and negotiating. Quality assurance agencies have thus become a key instrument for implementing Monitoring and Evaluation

In all these five countries, increased autonomy was accompanied by the introduction of new accountability measures. It was observed that the translation of autonomy from Concept to Governance, in operational practice, depends on institutional leaders. Institutions with strong leaders benefited more from autonomy than those with less effective leaders. In all cases, the governance reforms have further strengthened the role of the institutional head. It was also observed that delays in decision-making have been reduced, as a result of greater autonomy

Autonomy & Quality

Enhanced autonomy is intended mainly to decentralize decision making and create an enabling environment to improve the teaching – learning – evaluation processes. Studies of Higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world suggest that countries have been modifying their system-wide governance structures to devolve management and supervision of their universities to achieve the goals of autonomy, with accompanying levels of accountability. Increasingly, there is shift from being “state controlled” to “state supervised” systems across the world. The consensus among the higher education specialists that autonomy can ensure development of institutions that can be responsive and flexible, in line with the changing demands of the industry and society. Developing one set of rules of governance, without examining the contextual factors, may not be able to deliver the right balance of autonomy and accountability.

Governments have to evolve alternate mechanisms of accountability, which are outcome based. These mechanisms may include encouraging HEIs to prepare strategic plans and monitor the outcomes and signing performance contracts, whereby incentives are provided to high performing institutions. A committee, constituted by Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in 2005 studied Autonomy of HEIs, covering academic, administrative and financial aspects

Recommendations

The recommendations given includes the measures to enhance the autonomy of HEIs having potential for excellence and to institutionalize regulatory provisions for promoting autonomy and accountability of the institutions, to link the degree of autonomy with the level of accreditation (by NAAC), which was considered to be indicative of the potential for excellence. Set up a National Testing Service (NTS), along the lines of ETS in USA, to evaluate the educational standards across the country. Some recommendations related to academic autonomy are being implemented by UGC, critical ones in financial and administrative aspects, with regard to approval number of posts (for teachers) and their recruitment in government funded universities are not yet implemented. This resulted in acute shortage of teachers, which has impacted the quality of education in most of the government funded universities

Issues Affecting Autonomy

Major issues fall under two categories – restrictions and limitations as per the regulations (University Acts and Regulatory/Guidelines from UGC) and operational decision making. They affect both government funded and private universities, though in different ways and to different degrees. In government funded universities, major issues include government’s influence on vital aspects like appointment of Vice Chancellor .Functioning of the governing bodies like Senate, Syndicate, Academic Council etc. and Government control on opening of new colleges or grant of affiliation to new colleges. Wide powers are vested in the Chancellor, which position is vested with Governor in State Universities, who find it unwieldy to exercise, due to preoccupation with other responsibilities. In the case of private universities, most of the issues are with regard to setting up the university, scope for expansion (geographical as well as mode of

academic delivery) and sources of funding. As per the current UGC guidelines, a private university can be set up only through a State Private University Act and has to be unitary in nature, thereby limiting the scope for expansion. A study of the Private Universities Acts of various states reveals the difference in governing mechanisms as well as operational guidelines, including admission of students. Besides, restriction on jurisdiction of the state, there are regulatory restrictions with regard to mode of delivery, like distance education. Restrictions on type of sponsoring institutions constraints the sources of funding. Need for compliance to guidelines of multiple regulatory bodies (Central and State government) affects governance.

What is Accountability?

The notion of accountability is difficult to define in precise terms. However, broadly speaking, accountability exists when Institutions and their functionaries are subject to information or justification for their actions. Therefore, the concept of accountability involves two distinct stages: **answerability and enforcement**.

Current Levels of Accountability

Currently, neither public nor private HEIs in India are required to develop strategy plans, although a few individual institutions do so voluntarily. All public and private HEIs are regularly expected to update performance, though most of them do not comply. Most allocations to public HEIs are for recurrent expenditure, which constitute about 90% of the funds. These funds are subject to external auditing on a line item basis. There are currently no mechanisms to allocate money on the basis of performance, for either public or private institutions. Hence, over a period of time, there is a tendency not to focus on predefined outcomes, unless driven by market forces.

On 20th March, 2018 UGC has approved the full autonomy for 62 higher educational institutions of India. Five central universities, 21 state universities and 26 private universities have been given this status. Eight colleges have also been given autonomous status under the autonomous colleges' regulation. These quality institutions will get complete autonomy by which they can start

- new courses
- new departments
- new programmes
- off campuses
- skill courses
- research parks
- appoint foreign faculty
- take foreign students
- offer variable incentive packages
- Introduce online distance learning
- institutes are also going to get into the academic collaboration with the world's top five hundred universities
- admission procedure
- fees structure and
- curriculum

Central Universities with Autonomous Status

- The central universities include
 - Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)
 - Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)
 - Banaras Hindu University (BHU)
 - University of Hyderabad and English and Foreign Languages University, Telangana.
-

Autonomous status to State Universities

The state varsities include

Jadhavpur University

Andhra University

Algappa University

National University of Law

Utkal University

Kurukshetra University

Osmania University

Guru Nanak Dev University

University of Jammu,

University of Mysore

Anna University

Punjab University and

University of Madras among others.

Conclusion

Previous researches show that the greater amount of autonomy to the universities provides fruitful results in term of their performance. The notion of accountability is difficult to define in precise terms. However, broadly speaking, accountability exists when Institutions and their functionaries are subject to information or justification for their actions. On 20th March, 2018 UGC has approved the full autonomy for 62 higher educational institutions of India. Five central universities, 21 state universities and 26 private universities have been given this status. Eight

colleges have also been given autonomous status under the autonomous colleges' regulation. This is a positive step taken for the development of Higher education institutions.

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