



AUTONOMY AS DETERMINANT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM LEADING TO EMPLOYABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Education truly can be “the great equalizer.”

The above statement holds true to a great extent especially in case of higher education(HE) in any country. Students passing out from HE generally emerge as economic contributor within any society as a professional, entrepreneur or leader. But low percentage of students’ enrollment in HE can challenge the social and economic sustainability of a society.

Autonomy in higher education is subdivided into various sections, institutional, academic, staffing and financial autonomy respectively. So institutional autonomy initially was established through framework determining rules and regulations for HE followed by academic autonomy. Academic autonomy is critical for HE especially when we are developing academic programs to meet market needs. Interdependence of different dimensions of autonomy can be ignored. Academic freedom is considered as a social responsibility which contributes towards social good by developing economically employable workforce. Meeting the challenges of Employability through the teaching- learning processes to prepare students for evolving market based skills will be final outcome of autonomy in HE.

Key Words: Education, autonomy,

Education truly can be “the great equalizer.”

The above statement holds true to a great extent especially in case of higher education(HE) in any country. Students passing out from HE generally emerge as economic contributor within any society as a professional, entrepreneur or leader. But low percentage of students’ enrollment in HE can challenge the social and economic sustainability of a society. While on flip side, successful placement of key stakeholders, the students in the existing economic scenario determines the viability and competitiveness of HE and long term development of a society. “Education, in general, and higher education, in particular, plays a key role in the realization of India’s extraordinary potential and aspirations for economic and technological development.(George 2012)” Employability of educated youth of India can become a springboard to embrace the development paradigm where many countries, developing and developed economies face challenge of aging population. Hence accountability of HE institutions is strictly monitored in terms of student learning and employability. “American colleges and universities are facing increased external scrutiny of the effectiveness of undergraduate education. Outside pressure is mounting on institutions to document student learning, in much the same way that the elementary and secondary education sectors document learning through assessments linked to standards of what students should know and be able to do. Of course, the challenge of demonstrating student learning is much more difficult in higher education because of the diversity of the curricula(Eckel and King 2004).”

With the globalization, reforms were undertaken especially in South -Asian region to position HE to cater to the needs of market economy rather than centralized implementation. Centralized governance and political influence has been quite dominant factors influencing HE institutions owing to its contribution in economic development. “Political changes in the region in the 1990s marked an end to centralized planning, a marked reduction in public funding, rapidly declining academic standards, and high levels of unemployment among university graduates. Curricular reforms were introduced to reflect changing market orientation, while courses on economics, accounting, financial analysis, marketing, business administration, law, information systems, international relations, psychology, and so on, mounted in cost. The transition from state to market in higher education was frequently mediated through higher education institutions. Many

governments transferred part of their authority and responsibility to institutions of higher education in the form of increased institutional autonomy(Varghese and Martin 2014).” In other countries educational reforms which special emphasis on research has been done to increase autonomy in HE. While, in Japan and some countries of Europe, a corporatization policy or CEO type concept was followed to increase autonomy in management and structure(Estermann and Nokkala 2009, Varghese and Martin 2014).

Autonomy leading to Academic Freedom

Autonomy in higher education is subdivided into various sections, institutional, academic, staffing and financial autonomy respectively. Institutional / organizational autonomy defines a framework within which HE institution should evolve.“While universities in almost all the systems under review have external regulations which provide a framework for their organisational autonomy (and at the same time provide the regulatory frame for their accountability), the number and detail of these regulations differ quite significantly. In most cases national legislation contains some kind of guidelines for the formation or structure of the decision-making body/bodies, as well as the groups represented in them and the selection of their members.(Estermann and Nokkala 2009)” “In order to mediate effectively between the ministry and higher education institutions, many countries have created established ministries of higher education, national quality assurance agencies and quality monitoring mechanisms, buffer institutions such as National Commissions for Higher Education(Varghese and Martin 2014)”. “The accountability of a system is ensured through involvement of external members within HE and accountability of HE are considered to be important parameters towards performance of HE. Membership of decision-making bodies at the national and institutional levels has been opened up to representatives of the corporate sector and industry.(Varghese and Martin 2014)” So autonomy initially was established through framework determining rules and regulations for HE and this was made more sturdy by involvement of external members to foster transparency in HE institutions whether under private or public undertakings.

Academic autonomy is critical for HE especially when we are developing academic programs to meet market needs. “Autonomy in principle enables a college to develop and propose programmes relevant to that college, to its immediate environment as well as the country as a

whole. In other words, a college should be able to identify the aspirations of the community that is around it and effectively translate those aspirations into a viable academic programme. Academic autonomy is the freedom to decide academic issues like curriculum, instructional material, pedagogy, techniques of students' evaluation.(George 2012)” Academic autonomy leads to academic freedom. “Academic freedom is sometimes confused with autonomy, thought and speech freed from all constraints. But academic freedom implies not just *freedom from* constraint but also *freedom for* faculty and students to work within a scholarly community to develop the intellectual and personal qualities required of citizens in a vibrant democracy and participants in a vigorous economy. Academic freedom is protected by society so that faculty and students can use that freedom to promote the larger good(Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility 2006).” Society should emerge as a final beneficiary as result of autonomy percolating through governance structure to teaching-learning processes involving faculty members and students. “In terms of academic autonomy as per European higher education, key issues include the ability of universities to decide on their academic profiles, especially educational responsibilities, introducing and terminating programmes and the ability to select students(Estermann and Nokkala 2009).” But still academic freedom, the core mission of universities, is difficult to define. “From the medieval times, it has meant the freedom of professors to teach without external control, and it has implied the freedom of students to learn. In the early nineteenth century, when research became a part of the academic mission, the Humboldtian idea of academic freedom— freedom to teach and learn—became widespread. Academic freedom gave professors special protection and academia claimed special rights because of their devotion to pursue knowledge and truth(Schmidt and Langberg 2007-08)”.

“The right of academic freedom carries with it responsibilities to pursue scholarship with the highest standards of professional practice and ethics. Institutional autonomy does not in any way abrogate the responsibility of colleges and universities to strive for the highest level of professional quality and to effectively serve key public purposes(Broad 2010).” Interdependence of different dimensions of autonomy can be ignored. “The introduction of new programmes usually requires some form of approval by the relevant Ministry or by another public authority and is often tied to budget negotiations, which shows again(Estermann and Nokkala 2009).” Any kind of political influence or interference can stall the learning process. “Academic freedom in a college or university is a dedicated social place where a variety of competing claims to truth

can be explored and tested, free from political interference. The persons who drive the production of knowledge and the process of education are highly trained professors, and they, through an elaborate process of review by professional peers, take responsibility as a community for the quality of their scholarship, teaching, and student learning(Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility 2006).” “Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning(1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure 1970).”

“The question of accountability becomes critical in the context of growing commercialisation of education which has also undermined academic freedom. Promoting greater understanding of academic freedom has a significant bearing on the purpose of higher education. It will also have an impact on determining all policies relating to higher education, including curriculum development, programme administration, recruitment of faculty members, teaching pedagogy, assessment regimes and professional engagement of educational institutions(Raj Kumar 2011).”

Academic freedom is considered as a social responsibility which contributes towards social good by developing economically employable workforce. First Global Colloquium of 40 University Presidents that met at Columbia University, New York defined academic freedom as “Academic freedom benefits society in two fundamental ways. It benefits society directly, and usually immediately, through the impacts and benefits of applied knowledge, the training of skilled professionals, and the education of future leaders and citizens. It benefits society indirectly and usually over longer periods of time, through the creation, preservation, and transmission of knowledge and understanding for its own sake, irrespective of immediate applications(Raj Kumar 2011).”

Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics in the early 1990s in reference with African higher education systems was a solution to serious, multidimensional and longstanding crisis. “Hand-in-hand with the imbalances and troubles that shackled African economies, the crisis in academia was characterised by the collapse of infra-

structures such as libraries, bookstores and laboratories, inadequate teaching personnel and poor staff development and motivation (Chachage & Codesria, 2008).”

Academic freedom is experienced with faculty members and students involvement in intellectual debates, pedagogical innovations, deciding on latitude of courses, indulge in research to constantly evolve human knowledge and history, freedom of expression and in particular saving faculty members from reprisals in case of disagreement with administrative policies or proposals. But on the other hand, it does not protect faculty members from professional or scientific misconduct, opposing educational philosophy, challenging the legal regulations or underperformance(Nelson 2010). As per Cannadian asociation of university teachers, academic freedom fosters independent thinking, “to freedom to teach and discuss; freedom to carry out research and disseminate and publish the results thereof; freedom to produce and perform creative works; freedom to engage in service to the institution and the community; freedom to express one's opinion about the institution, its administration, and the system in which one works; freedom to acquire, preserve, and provide access to documentary material in all formats; and freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies. Academic freedom always entails freedom from institutional censorship(Academic Freedom 2011).” “Academic freedom is necessary not just so faculty members can conduct their individual research and teach their own courses, but so they can enable students—through whole college programs of study—to acquire the learning they need to contribute to society(Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility 2006).”

We observe that in those countries in which the administrative and financial autonomy of the institutions is limited, and in which there is not sufficient accountability, scientific output, as determined by the number of peer reviewed and highly cited publications per million of population, is lower than in the countries in which these institutions enjoy higher autonomy and at the same time face higher accountability(Mitsopoulos & Theodore, 2008). The effect of funding on university autonomy is conditioned by the nature of university autonomy in a given country. While university autonomy involves more than a financial tie, greater efforts on the part of universities to diversify their funding bases may well not enhance, at least directly, their autonomy(Nyeu,2013).

Figure1: Relationship between autonomy, academic freedom and employability



Challenges of Employability

1. The syndrome of unemployability is a rising concern for the emerging Indian economy, creating an alarming scenario for the educated youth. . It is thus, in order to focus on HE to be a programme that enables a student to be skilled, productive and competitive from day one.
2. Talent scarcity is another problem stemming out of unemployability. However, inability of HE programmes to foster this level of preparation has made the stakeholders enter into a tirade. Industry has incessantly complained about the prevalent skill gap among the pass outs.
3. The policy decision to allow private sector in education sector, especially in management and technical education was undertaken to make India a successful corporate entity. The past decade therefore saw mushrooming growth of educational institutions to fulfill the demand of aspiring students. But rising unemployability among the educated youth and bureaucratic regulatory mechanisms turned this spin into a tailspin.
4. Confusion arising out of managing third generation with process and systems crafted by second generation and guided by the mindset of first generation has created this imbalance.
5. Key stake holders must earmark policies and practices to create opportunity for graduating millennial to boost their productivity and competitiveness. Heightening of employability is now a social responsibility.
6. The need to train the selected personnel is taking away productive time and adding to the cost. Skilling must be deeply ingrained within the education process to assuage talent scarcity. This situation is grave concern for practitioners, industry professionals, students,

policy makers and academicians and must be addressed before it becomes a perpetual reality.

7. People resource has emerged out as a critical determinant of success and in building resilient organizations. Enforcement must be placed to create a favorable ecosystem for addressing the employability gap. With India on its way to become youngest country by 2020, this demographic advantage will be springboard to create employment opportunities for Indian youth across the globe.

Focus on Teaching –Learning processes

The teaching- learning processes are important processes to ensure that autonomy resulting into

Learner autonomy has been linked to a number of psychological constructs, particularly motivation, locus of control and self-esteem (Fazey and Fazey, 2001). Hence preparation of an individual student to take be productive and self driven is also required.

“Problem based learning appears to be an effective learning and teaching strategy for sport and exercise science students in HE, leading to the development of learner autonomy, content knowledge and employability skills. These kind of approaches at all levels to encourage development of lifelong learning skills, while taking into account the perceived barriers of time-management, groupwork and effective tutor support and facilitation. Practitioners may also wish to consider whether the apparent use of traditional pedagogic learning styles is reducing students’ ability to become autonomous by focusing on outcome rather than process(Martin, West and Bill 2008).”

Project based learning is another way to develop a range of employability skills implemented in management development curriculum as Live Projects. “Employability is one of the institutional strategic aims, as part of the “enterprising university” agenda. This agenda regards developing skills in life-long learning, the business environment and entrepreneurship as key outcomes from students’ experience at university. University engagement with the local community is a strategic aim, in recognising that many of our students go out to contribute locally after graduation(Whatley 2015).”

Academic advisers are best placed to offer advice and guidance on a personalised level. Some students lack the confidence or motivation to engage with their employability. Academic

advisers in form of faculty members, alumni network or industry practitioners should make use of their relationships with students to really tailor their discussions and reflections to encourage and motivate advisees appropriately. Academic advisers can help students to get started in thinking about employability, encourage them to continue to be proactive and to make concrete plans (Academic Advising 2015).

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