Road to Excellence: A Study on Autonomous Status in HEIs

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Abstract: *"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intension, sincere effort, intelligent direction, and skilful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives."*

- By Willa A. Foster

By 2030, India will be amongst the youngest nations in the world. With nearly 140 million people in the college-going age group, one in every four graduates in the world will be a product of the Indian higher education system. In 2030, India will be the pioneers of a higher education model that is not just the best in the world, but the best for the world, delivering social, economic and intellectual value par excellence. In order to realize the goals we envision for 2030, a transformative and innovative approach would be required across all the levers of higher education: from curricula and pedagogy to the use of technology to partnerships, governance and funding. Making rapid progress over the next decade would require a committed and concerted effort from all stakeholders involved i.e. academia, industry, and Government.

In this context the authors would like to make an attempt in understanding as to what would be the best in higher education system and the role of the status of autonomy to HEIs. The data for the study is collected through personal interviews and questionnaire being executed to the faculty of both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges. A secondary source such as journals, magazines and websites was extensively used in analyzing the role of autonomous status in bringing the best in Higher Education so as to lead the global economy in the field of education.

It is felt that one of the major changes that need to be best is internationalization of higher education in India i.e. we need to work on encouraging student mobility, enhancing quality and improving the quality and quantity of research.

It is felt that higher education has a unique role to play in preparing the torch bearers of tomorrow who will endeavor in different fields – from medicine to engineering, teaching, administration, business, politics and social service – to lead our nation to the high tables of global power and to achieve this it is time for bringing the best in higher education in India.

Key Words: *Higher Education (HE), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Autonomy, Innovations and Excellence.*

I. Introduction

Education is the most potent tool for socioeconomic mobility and a key instrument for building an equitable and just society. Education provides skills and competencies for economic well-being. Education strengthens democracy by imparting to citizens the tools needed to fully participate in the governance process. Education also acts as an integrative force in society, imparting values that foster social cohesion and national identity.

Need for Autonomy

The affiliation system which started in 1867 worked well during the early decades of 19th century, when the number of colleges affiliated to the universities was small and the universities had direct close association with the programmes and performance of its affiliated colleges. However, with the growing increase in the number of educational institutions, the system became unmanageable and started losing its governance. Now it is becoming increasingly difficult for any university to effectively attend to the varied needs of the affiliated colleges.

The affiliated colleges are required to follow the syllabus and academic calendar of the university. They do not have the freedom to modernize their curricula to make it relevant to the locale specific needs, resources and aspirations. Moreover, the colleges having capacity and capability for offering programmes of higher standards do not have the freedom to do so within the prevailing routine functioning of the university system.

Since 1968 when the first National Policy on Education based on Kothari Commission report was adopted, there has been continued emphasis on changing the affiliation system of colleges. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) has formally recommended college autonomy for the first time in India. In 1969, Dr. Gajendra Gadkar committee also suggested the concept of autonomy to the university department. Subsequently, in 1973, UGC sent a circular to all universities recommending them to set up Autonomous colleges. From 1978 onwards Autonomous colleges came into existence. The NPE-1986 suggested that autonomy should be available to the colleges in selection of students, appointment and promotion of teachers, determination of courses of study and methods of teaching and choice of areas for research and their promotion. The Programme of Action (PoA) for NPE-1986 recommended developing a large number of autonomous colleges as well as creation of autonomous departments within universities on a selective basis.

The Education Commission (1964-66) pointed out that the exercise of academic freedom by teachers is a crucial requirement for promoting academic excellence and the development of intellectual environment in the country. Consequently, it was decided to confer autonomous status to such institutions having the capability to design their own curriculum, evolve innovative teaching pedagogy. CABE Committee on Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions (2005), reported that "Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions is a pre – requisite for enabling them to achieve their goals and objectives. An honest exercise of autonomy- academic, Administrative and financial –will lead to making these institutions as centers of innovation, excellence and development".

II. Concept Of Autonomy

At the core of the concept of autonomy is the decentralized management culture. The delegation of responsibility with accountability for the academic, administrative as well as the financial management functions is essential for the success of autonomy.

Academic Autonomy

Academic Autonomy is the freedom to decide academic matters such as curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, instructional learning material, pedagogy, techniques of student's evaluation.

Administrative Autonomy

Administrative autonomy is the freedom to manage its own affairs in regard to administration. It is the freedom to manage the affairs in such a way that it stimulates and encourages initiative and development of individuals working in the institutions..

Financial autonomy

Financial autonomy is the freedom to the institution to expend the financial resources at its disposal in a prudent way keeping in view its priorities.

These elements of Autonomy are interrelated and inseparable as depicted in the (fig.1)

EUA's Lisbon Declaration (2007) sets out four basic dimensions of autonomy:

i. Academic Autonomy (deciding on degree supply, curriculum and methods of teaching, deciding on areas, scope, aims and methods of research);
ii. Financial Autonomy (acquiring and allocating funding, deciding on tuition fees, accumulating surplus);
iii. Organizational Autonomy: (setting university structures and statutes, making contracts, electing decision-making bodies and persons);
iv. Staffing Autonomy: (responsibility for recruitment, salaries and promotions).

Estermann, Nokkala & Steinel (2010) have enlisted the indicators of academic autonomy, organizational autonomy, staffing autonomy and financial autonomy for University system. These indicators are depicted in the table below:

Organizational autonomy	Financial autonomy	Staffing autonomy	Academic autonomy
• Selection procedure for the executive head • Selection criteria for the executive head • Dismissal of the executive head • Term of office of the executive head • Inclusion and selection of external members in governing bodies • Capacity to decide on	• Length and type of public funding • Ability to keep surplus • Ability to borrow money • Ability to own buildings • Ability to charge tuition fees for national/ EU students (BA, MA, PhD) • Ability to charge tuition fees for non-EU students (BA, MA, PhD)	• Capacity to decide on recruitment procedures (senior academic/senior administrative staff) • Capacity to decide on salaries (senior academic/ senior administrative staff) • Capacity to decide on dismissals (senior academic/senior administrative staff) • Capacity to decide on	• Capacity to decide on overall student numbers • Capacity to select students (BA, MA) • Capacity to introduce programmes (BA, MA, PhD) • Capacity to terminate programmes • Capacity to choose the language of instruction (BA, MA)

academic structures • Capacity to create legal entities		promotions (senior academic/ senior administrative staff	• Capacity to select quality assurance mechanisms and providers • Capacity to design content of degree programmes

Source: Estermann, Nokkala & Steinel, 2010

India has great potential to become a developed nation by 2030 if we refocus our attention on the system of Education. Academic freedom is essential for the success of educational institutions and the need of the hour is to encourage these institutions to raise standards to global relevance and competitiveness.

Survey Analysis

The present study focuses on institutional autonomy and the role it plays in governance and management towards enhancing the overall effectiveness of Higher education systems. The data for the study is collected through personal interviews and questionnaire executed to hundred faculty members of both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges, out of which eighty one questionnaires were found to be completely filed. It is found that 53.1% of the respondents were from autonomous colleges and the remaining from non-autonomous colleges. The focus of the study was to understand the perceptions of faculty members working in different environments and the hypothesis being there is no difference in the thinking of faculty members working in two different situations. For this purpose the collected data was analyzed using SPSS and chi-square test was conducted to test the hypothesis.

I.   Is quality education linked with autonomy and accreditation and is autonomy and accreditation linked with each other.

66.7% of the respondents were of the opinion that quality education is linked with autonomy and accreditation and almost the same percentage i.e.60.5% having also stated that autonomy and accreditation go hand in hand. The chi square value for the both the factors being .000 states that there is no association of the respondents working in various institutions and their perceptions with regards to quality education and the link between autonomy and accreditation.

Table no: 1: Status vs. Quality Education & Autonomy & Accreditation

Status (Respondents are from)	Quality Education			Autonomy & Accreditation		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Autonomous colleges	41	2	43	39	4	43
%	50.6	2.5	53.1	48.1	4.9	53.1
Non Autonomous Colleges	13	25	38	10	28	38
%	16.0	30.9	46.9	12.3	35.6	46.9
Total	54	27	81	49	32	81
%	66.7	33.3	100.0	60.5	39.5	100
Chi-Square test value	**.000**			.000		

Source: Primary Data

II. Perceptions of the respondents on existing curriculum, teaching pedagogy and evaluation pattern.

More than three-fourth majority have responded positively and stated as excellent and good to the existing curriculum and teaching pedagogy (18.5% & 49.4% stated excellent and good respectively).Half of the respondents (i.e. 11.1% excellent and 42% good) were happy with the existing evaluation pattern. The rest of the respondents were of the opinion that they need to be improved.

Out of 46.9% of the faculty members from non autonomous colleges majority of them (27.2%, 27.2% & 39.5%) feel that the existing curriculum, teaching pedagogy and evaluation pattern needs improvement.

Table no: 2 Status vs. Curriculum, Teaching Pedagogy & Evaluation Pattern

Status Respondents are from	Curriculum				Teaching Pedagogy				Evaluation Pattern			
	E	G	N.imp	Total	E	G	N Imp	Total	E	G	N Imp	Total
Autonomous	14	25	4	43	14	25	4	43	9	28	6	43
%	17.3%	30.9%	4.9%	53.1%	17.3%	30.9%	4.9%	53.1%	11.1%	34.6%	7.4%	53.1%
Non Autonomous	1	15	22	38	1	15	22	38	0	6	32	38
%	1.2%	18.5%	27.2%	46.9%	1.2%	18.5%	27.2%	46.9%	.0%	7.4%	39.5%	46.9%
Total	15	40	26	81	15	40	26	81	9	34	38	81
%	18.5%	49.4%	32.1%	100.0%	18.5%	49.4%	32.1%	100.0%	11.1%	42.0%	46.9%	100.0%
Chi-Square test value: .000				Chi-Square test value: .065				Chi-Square test value: .000				

Source: Primary Data

III. Opinion on autonomy with respect to the following

1. *Freedom to develop innovative curriculum* - 79.1% (48.1% & 37%) of the respondents agree and strongly agree.
2. *Development of new employment oriented courses* – 90% (i.e. 32.1% & 58%) opine that autonomy ensured development of employment oriented courses.
3. *Introduction of cost recovery measures* – only 68% of the faculty members are of the opinion that autonomy enables cost recovery.
4. *Strengthens Academic programs* – 88.9% of the respondents stated that autonomy strengthens academic programs.
5. *Improves access to & sharing of faculty resources* – 73% of the faculty members agree to this
6. *Leads to increased administrative workload for academic staff* – 60% of the staff agreed that autonomy increases administrative work.
7. *Reduces administrative costs* – only 44% of the respondents agreed that autonomy reduces administrative costs.
8. *Leads to increased academic workload* - 60% of the respondents felt that autonomy leads to increased academic workload.
9. *Leads to more monitoring and control of resources* – 62% of the members stated that autonomy leads to effective control of resources.
10. *Leads to strengthen accountability measures for staff* – 65% of the respondents agree that autonomy strengthens accountability of teaching staff.
11. *Enhances the freedom to decide on research priorities* – 52% of the total respondents felt that autonomy will strengthen research.
12. *More scope for research by students and staff* – 50% of the total respondents agree that autonomy of an institution will lead to more research by staff and students.

Table 3 Perceptions of teaching faculty on aspects of Autonomy

S.No	Aspects of autonomy	Status of respondents	Response					Total	Chi-Square Value
			1	2	3	4	5		
1	Freedom to develop innovative curriculum	Autonomous	3(3.7%)	6(7.4%)	2(2.5%)	22(27.2%)	10(12.3%)	43(53.1%)	.013
		Non Autonomous	1(1.2%)	0(.0%)	0(.0%)	17(21.0%)	20(24.7%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	4(4.9%)	6(7.4%)	2(2.5%)	39(48.1%)	30(37.0%)	81(100%)	
2	Development of new employment-oriented courses	Autonomous	1(1.2%)	4(4.9%)	1(1.2%)	19(23.5%)	18(22.2%)	43(53.1%)	.019
		Non Autonomous	1(1.2%)	0(.0%)	1(1.2%)	7(8.6%)	29(35.8%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	2(2.5%)	4(4.9%)	2(2.5%)	26(32.1%)	47(58.0%)	81(100.0%)	
3	Introduction of cost-recovery measures,	Autonomous	-	1(1.2%)	14(17.3%)	22(27.2%)	6(7.4%)	43(53.1%)	.008
		Non Autonomous	-	1(1.2%)	10(12.3%)	9(11.1%)	18(22.2%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	-	2(2.5%)	24(29.6%)	31(38.3%)	24(29.6%)	81(100.0%)	
4	Strengthens academic programmes of the HEIs	Autonomous	1(1.2%)	1(1.2%)	4(4.9%)	29(35.8%)	8(9.9%)	43(53.1%)	.581
		Non Autonomous	1(1.2%)	0(.0%)	2(2.5%)	23(28.4%)	12(14.8%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	2(2.5%)	1(1.2%)	6(7.4%)	52(64.2%)	20(24.7%)	81(100.0%)	
5	Improves access to and sharing of faculty resources	Autonomous	1(1.2%)	-	2(2.5%)	33(40.7%)	7(8.6%)	43(53.1%)	.776
		Non Autonomous	1(1.2%)	-	4(4.9%)	28(34.6%)	5(6.2%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	2(2.5%)	-	6(7.4%)	61(75.3%)	12(14.8%)	81(100.0%)	
6	Leads to an increased administrative workload for academic staff	Autonomous	2(4.7%)	2()4.7%	8(18.6%)	20(46.5%)	11(13.6%)	43(53.1%)	.129
		Non Autonomous	0()0.0%	2(2.5%)	7(8.6%)	26(32.1%)	3(3.7%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	2(2.5%)	4(4.9%)	15(18.5%)	46(56.8%)	14(17.3%)	81(100.0%)	
7	Reduces administrative costs	Autonomous	1(1.2%)	2(2.5%)	19(23.5%)	11(13.6%)	10(12.3%)	43(53.1%)	.050
		Non Autonomous	0(.0%)	5(6.2%)	10(12.3%)	19(23.5%)	4(4.9%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	1(1.2%)	7(8.6%)	29(35.8%)	30(37.0%)	14(17.3%)	81(100.0%)	
8	Leads to increased academic workload	Autonomous	2(2.5%)	1(1.2%)	6(7.4%)	16(19.8%)	18(22.2%)	43(53.1%)	.003
		Non Autonomous	1(1.2%)	11(13.6%)	0(.0%)	15(18.5%)	11(13.6%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	3(3.7%)	12(14.8%)	6(7.4%)	31(38.3%)	29(35.8%)	81(100.0%)	
9	Leads to more monitoring and control of	Autonomous	2(2.5%)	3(3.7%)	9(11.1%)	18(22.2%)	11()13.6%	53.1%	.089
		Non Autonomous	0(.0%)	1(1.2%)	4(4.9%)	13(16.0%)	20(24.7%)	38(46.9%)	

	resources	Total	2(2.5%)	4(4.9%)	13(16.0%)	31(38.3%)	31(38.3%)	81(100.0%)	
10	Leads to strengthened accountability measures for staff	Autonomous	1(1.2%)	5(6.2%)	4(4.9%)	23(28.4%)	10(12.3%)	43(53.1%)	.470
		Non Autonomous	1(1.2%))	1(1.2%)	4(4.9%)	26(32.1%)	6(7.4%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	2(2.5%)	6(7.4%)	8(9.9%)	49(60.5%)	16(19.8%)	81(100.0%)	
11	Enhances the freedom to decide on research priorities	Autonomous	1(1.2%)	5(6.2%)	2(2.5%)	30(37.0%	5(11.6%)	43(53.1%)	.000
		Non Autonomous	2(2.5%)	4(4.9%)	15()18.5%	9 (11.1%)	8(9.9%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	3(3.7%)	9(11.1%)	17(21.0%)	39(48.1%)	13(16.0%)	81(100.0%)	
12	More scope for research by students and staff	Autonomous	1(1.2%)	7(8.6%)	7(8.6%)	22(27.2%)	6(7.4%)	43()53.1%	.029
		Non Autonomous	2(2.5%)	0(.0%)	14(17.3%)	15(18.5%)	7(8.6%)	38(46.9%)	
		Total	3(3.7%)	7(8.6%)	21(25.9%)	37(45.7%)	13(16.0%)	81(100.0%)	

Source: Primary Data

IV. Ranking by respondents on F*reedom in Governance, Need Based Curriculum* and I*ncreased Research and Consultancy*

Table4 Status vs. F*reedom in Governance, Need Based Curriculum* and I*ncreased Research and Consultancy*

Status Respondents are from	Freedom in Governance				Need based curriculum				Increased research & Consultancy			
	I	II	III	Total	I	II	III	Total	I	II	III	Total
Autonomous	13	19	11	43	27	16	0	43	7	7	29	43
%	16.0	23.5	13.6	53.1	33.3	19.8	.0	53.1	8.6	8.6	35.8	53.1
Non Autonomous	7	10	21	38	17	15	6	38	14	13	11	38
%	8.6	12.3	25.9	46.9	21.0	18.5	7.4	46.9	17.3	16.0	13.6	46.9
Total	20	29	32	81	44	31	6	81	21	20	40	81
%	24.7	35.8	39.5	100.0	54.3	38.3	7.4	100.0	25.9	24.7	49.4	100.0
Chi-Square test value: .024					Chi-Square test value: .018				Chi-Square test value: .003			

Source: Primary Data

1. 54.3% of the respondents have ranked Need based curriculum as top most priority under autonomy.
2. 25.9% of the faculty members have given first priority to increased research and consultancy under autonomy.
3. 24.7% have ranked freedom in governance as the foremost factor for autonomous institutions.

Best Practices in Higher Education Institutions
India should be able to create a "globally relevant and competitive" higher education system that serves the requirements of both the domestic as well as global economy.

Globally relevant and competitive in the Indian context implies the following:
✓ India prominently placed on the global higher education map in terms of more globally-reputed Indian institutions, significant student and faculty mobility, presence of / collaborations with quality international institutions
✓ India as a hub for talent that is able to drive competitiveness of the Indian economy and is fit to work in or serve international markets
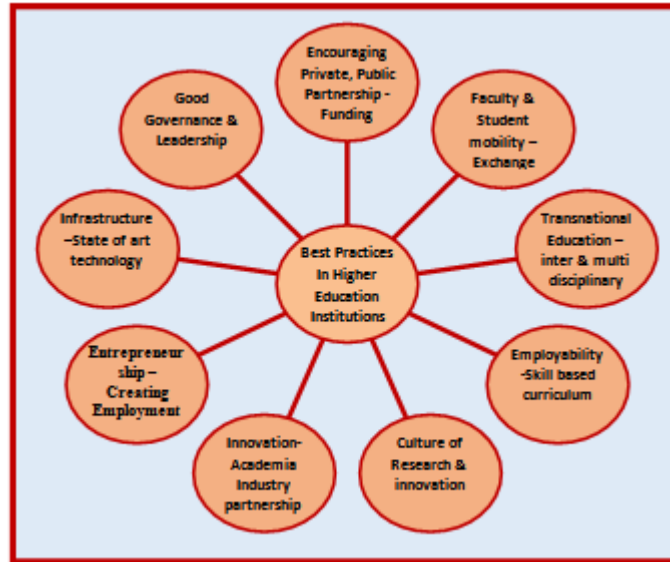✓ A culture of research, innovation and entrepreneurship that can power high economic growth in the country

Chart 2: Best Practices in HEIs

III. Conclusion

The Indian Prime Minister, in his Independence Day speech, referred to *"Make in India"*, which will encourage international players to set up manufacturing bases in the country. These global and domestic economic changes will require a significantly increased number of sophisticated workers, innovators, and thinkers who can thrive in a globally-connected, technologically-advanced world. Innovation will need to drive the next phase of economic growth. In this scenario Autonomous status to higher education institutions is the only answer to pace with the *"Higher Education in India – Vision 2030"*.

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