

# **A PERSPECTIVE OF AUTONOMY OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INDIAN CONTEXT**

**Gulshan Singh<sup>1</sup>, Satbir Singh<sup>2</sup>, Mohit Bindlish<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry , Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce , Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt

---

## **ABSTRACT**

The academic and administrative autonomy of higher educational institutions is the key to ensure the quality of education in higher education institutions based on the experiences of foreign countries. In India, The National Education Policy, 2020 articulated the concept of autonomy of higher education institutions. This report is an attempt to foresee the possible impact of autonomy on various parts of higher education system in India with the help of a descriptive study. It has been found in the results of this study that academic and administrative autonomy are expected to increase the level of efficiency but side by side the threat of commodification of education is also the part of expected results. It was suggested by this research that autonomy policy should not be implemented on the cost of commodification of the education.

**KEYWORDS:** Academic Autonomy, Financial Autonomy, Academic Excellence, National Education Policy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is the prime pillar of a country which is accountable to all round development of a country on a global scale. Education develops good human resources which can transform society with their potential. Education

reforms are much desired steps to cope up with challenges for development with the progression of time. Education system is determined by education policies framed by its government from time to time which contributes to national development (Thakur and Kumar, 2021). Indian Education system-3rd largest in the world has also undergone three reform phases of national education policies.

The prime objective of the national education system is to provide affordable quality education with equal learning opportunities. Education system comprises four stakeholders which are the learner, the parent, the teacher and the employer which are mainly affected by the education policies. In an education system, higher education institutes play a significant role in intellectual, cultural, economic and social development of the country. Government framework of guidelines uniformly governs the working culture of an institution. But these policy instructions may not be very fruitful to every education institute because of the diversification of needs depending on the territorial demands. Thus, the concept of autonomy was introduced in the education policy which involves decentralization of the powers for more productive utilization of resources lying with the education institutes in the specific regions (Tarozzi, 2016).

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY:**

- To understand the concept and need of autonomy of higher education institutes.
- To analyse experiential outcomes of imposed autonomy in higher education institutes world-wide.
- To explore impact of autonomy on higher education institutions in India.
- To give some suggestions for better implementation of autonomy of higher education institutions in India.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Shamina (2016)** tried to find out the relationship between the professional autonomy and job performance of teachers working in the affiliated institutions (aided and self-financing colleges) under Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. For justifying the objectives of their study, a sample of 253

teachers was selected using simple random sampling. The data required in the study were gathered with the help of a questionnaire and the collected data were analysed using Pearson's correlation and t-test. As per the results of the study, a significant positive correlation between was observed between professional autonomy and job performance of the teachers. Further, the level of professional autonomy was found to be higher in case of the teachers of self-financing institution as compared to the teachers in aided institutions. **Aithal and Aithal (2019)** analysed the challenges and opportunities of present generation campus based universities considering their operational autonomy to aim for excellence. In the paper, the main discussions were on the nature and usage of autonomy by universities for academic, research, and technology based innovations, and autonomy for collaboration and expansion of campus based universities specifically considering the autonomy for stakeholders. Further, the anticipated concerns associated with the autonomy by public and private universities were also discussed in the study. In the results, it is observed that the decision regarding the use of autonomy for innovating university operations may give an opportunity to justify their existence globally. **Siddikov (2021)** in a study discussed various models of autonomy of higher educational institutions. Further, the relevance of academic freedom in confirming the quality of higher educational institution was also considered in the objectives of the research. In the results of the study, it was observed that autonomy of higher educational institution can be classified into three categories such as administrative autonomy, financial autonomy and pedagogical autonomy. When the models of autonomy at international level were explored, three models came forward namely The Market Model (provides legal autonomy and followed by US, Canada, Australia and Japan), The Directive Model (governance by central government and followed by South Korea) and The Mixed Model (mixed governance and followed by China). **Gupta and Choubey (2021)** made a statistical analysis of facilitating and impeding factors associated with the autonomy of higher education institutions. The study was based on primary data collected with the help of a google form and the collected data were analysed using weighted mean. In the results, the facilitating and impeding factors were found having influence on the implementation of autonomy. It was suggested to the institutions that the institutes should check both type of factors and strategies should be designed to use facilitating factors at the maximum and limiting the impeding factors.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The present study is descriptive cum analytical in nature. The study is based secondary data gathered from various research papers/reviews, newspapers, magazines, articles in magazines and policy documents. The collected data then converted into insights which are desirable to be considered by the policy makers and various stakeholders.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Autonomy in education**

The educational institutes which are governed by “law unto themselves” to answer the wider demands of the society are termed as autonomous (Berka et. al., 2000). The concept of autonomy is widely used in education policies and practices which revolve around the ability and capacity to self-rule (Wermke and Salokangas, 2015). In other words, autonomy of higher education institutions is referred to as an institutional form of academic freedom (Warnock, 1992). Institutional autonomy consists of two dimensions which are academic and administrative/financial, respectively. Both types of autonomy dimensions contain factors and variables. Administrative/financial autonomy bears four factors-Revenue flexibility, expenditure detail flexibility, budget detail flexibility and tuition fee flexibility. Academic flexibility is defined by six factors-program flexibility, standards, accountability requirements, disciplinary flexibility, department flexibility and degree requirements. All the factors in both types of autonomy also contain variables (Volkwein and Malik, 1997). In India, University Grants Commission (Conferment of Autonomous Status Upon Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Autonomous Colleges) Regulations, 2018 were laid down for all Colleges/Institutions which are affiliated to, or are constituent colleges of universities in the country seeking the conferment of autonomous college status with the objective to allow colleges to frame courses of study and syllabus, explore and improve teaching methods and conduct self-evaluation and assessment. India in its current status has total 871 autonomous colleges affiliated to 118 universities including private and public universities of 25 states. India in its National Education Policy launched in the 2020 has introduced the concept of autonomy to the colleges for 15 years to grant graded degree.

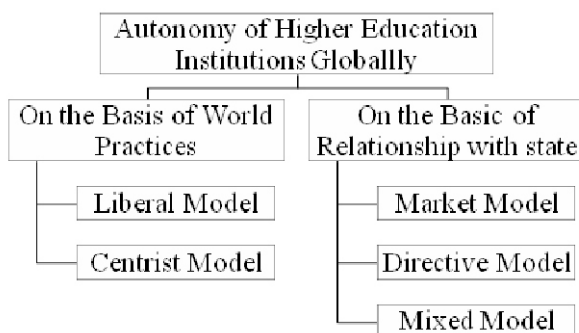
## **Autonomy in Education: A Historic Perspective**

Institutional autonomy is defined by UNESCO as “a degree of self-governance, necessary for effective decision making by institutes of higher education regarding their academic work standards, management, and related activities” (Vlasova, 2019). When the 19th century began, state system of governments in main land Europe took on a “regulatory” role, indeed regulating every aspect of university activities. Thus, university autonomy came to be defined as the relative powers of academia and the state system of government in making decisions regarding activities of the university. After that the university system remained unchanged and in the year 1965, “The International Association of Universities” defined university autonomy as the power to take decisions about who will teach, what will be taught, who will be taught, who will graduate, and what will be researched (Gürüz, 2012). In the late 1970s, “OECD-CERI (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Centre for Educational Research and Innovation)” conducted a research in 52 of higher education institutions in Europe regarding the decision-making structures being used by them. As a result of the survey, an index of autonomy was constructed considering 20 main issues relating to the decision making. The OECD carried out another survey on university autonomy in the year 2003, imitated the shifting scene of higher education at global level. In this survey, eight well defined instead of twenty defined indices were used to find out autonomy. “These were institutions' authority to own buildings and borrow funds, set academic structure and course contents, employ and dismiss academic staff and set salaries, decide size of student enrolment and level of tuition fees, and freedom to spend budget according to institutional mission and objectives.” (Gürüz, 2012). Higher education worldwide is in the process of becoming more international and more competitive year by year. These new realities regarding autonomy of higher education is creating various new challenges in defining and implementing academic freedom in a dynamic environment.

## **Autonomy in Higher Education: An International Perspective**

Autonomy in higher education at international level is not a new concept. Various researchers and academicians are continuously working on this aspect and it is also a truth that this concept of autonomy should always be

the part of research worldwide. When the autonomy is considered by the researchers at international level, two broad based have been found on the basis of which a better understanding regarding the international practices in respect of autonomy may be created. Siddikov (2011) has analysed the autonomy at world level and find out various models of autonomy of higher education institution. On the basis of the results of the study, the following figure 1 shows a brief idea about the autonomy of higher education institutions at global level:



**Figure:1**

As per the above figure 1, the models of autonomy at international level can be divided into two broader segments: on the basis of world practices and on the basis of relationship with the state. When the study the autonomy of higher education on the basis of world practices, it has two main models known as The Liberal Model and The Centrist Model. The Liberal Model is being utilized by the countries like United State of America, United Kingdom and Canada etc. In this model, ministry of education and the authorities in this field formulate strategies for the promotion of higher education. On the other hand, The Centrist Model is being followed by France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine etc. where the higher educational institutions have the status of legally autonomous institutions. In Centrist Model of autonomy, institutions are free to formulate strategic priorities regarding teaching, research, financial and administrative activities. On the basis of relationship with the state, three main model can be seen worldwide namely, The Market Model, The Directive Model and The Mixed Model. The Market Model is associated with the legally autonomous status of higher education institutions and a strong decentralization in governance is seen in

this model. The Directive Model is opposite to The Market Model where higher education institutions are regulated by the central government. The Mixed Model is the midway between The Market Model and The Directive Model. In this case, the higher education institutions have a particular degree of autonomy which is limited by the government regulations. In most of the European countries, school autonomy measures are defined by a national legislative framework and are imposed on all schools. The “top down” approach of school autonomy is confirmed by the fact that school staff rarely stayed at the origin of this process (Iftene, 2014).

### **Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions: An Indian Perspective**

As per international experience autonomy may be of three types such as Academic Autonomy, Administrative Autonomy and Financial Autonomy. Academic Autonomy is also called Pedagogical Autonomy and it considers the development of curriculum and programs. Further in the Academic Autonomy, the institutions may have freedom in selective areas of research, evaluation criteria and the provision of final certificates. Second type of autonomy is Administrative Autonomy and under this institutions are given freedom regarding staffing function and formation of internal structures of the institution such creation of organizational structure of the institution. The Financial Autonomy is associated with the freedom to use public as well as private funds provided to the higher education institutions. Further, it may provide freedom to use the funds raised from the independent activities as per their own discretion. Autonomy provides a large amount of freedom to the institutions but side by side it gives birth to various responsibilities. Success or failure of the concept of autonomy is dependent on the balance between the autonomy and answerability.

When the autonomy is studied in Indian context, the autonomy of higher education institutions in India was one of the recommendations of Education Commission (1964-66) for promoting academic excellence. After that the matter remained the part of discussions of various political parties forming Indian Government. Under the provisions of National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP, 2020), academic, administrative and financial autonomy will be given to higher education institutions on the basis of their accreditation status. As per the provisions of National Education Policy, 2020, the higher education institution will be divided into three types namely, The Research Intensive

Universities, The Teaching Intensive Universities and The Degree Granting Autonomous Colleges. The Research Intensive Universities will offer undergraduate and post graduate programs with a special focus on research activities and The Teaching Intensive Universities will be working with special focus on teaching and a significant amount of research. The Autonomous Colleges will have a special focus on the provision of multidisciplinary undergraduate programs with graded autonomy. It has also mentioned there in the policy document of National Education Policy, 2020 that The Degree Granting Autonomous Colleges with the help of the improved accreditation may evolve into The Research Intensive University or The Teaching Intensive University. Through a suitable system of graded accreditation and graded autonomy, and in a phased manner over a period of 15 years, all HEIs in India will aim to become independent self-governing institutions pursuing innovation and excellence.” (Bania, 2021)

### **Anticipatory Impact of Autonomy on Higher Education Institutions in India**

With the help of autonomy of higher education institutions, it is expected that the quality of higher education will improve as the universities and the currently working affiliated colleges will have a higher degree of freedom regarding academic, administrative and financial aspects. Academic autonomy of higher education institutions in India will give more freedom to the institutions regarding the design of curriculum and evaluation method. As a result of it, different institutions will prepare their own curriculum and evaluation method which may lack of uniformity or standardization in the curriculum design, pedagogy and evaluation method. As far as the administrative autonomy is concerned when given to the institutions, there may be possibilities of unfair use of the freedom given in the field of staffing function.

As per the provisions of National Education Policy, 2020, when the affiliated college will be converted into degree granting autonomous colleges, the sources of funds for the affiliating university will reduce but the affiliating university will have to be there for the degree granting autonomous college as mentor in improving their accreditation status. It looks like unethical and an injustice with the affiliating universities as on one side the sources of funds for affiliating will be declining and on the other side, affiliating



universities will have to make payments for the arrangements regarding the mentoring of degree granting autonomous colleges.

The National Education Policy, 2020 suggests that with the improved accreditation, The Degree Granting Autonomous Colleges may have the status of The Research Intensive University or The Teaching Intensive Universities. As per the results of implementation of this provision, it may be said that there will be a large number of universities in the country. The word, “University” shows diversification and when we have universities in every corner of the country as an output of evolvement of The Degree Granting Autonomous College into universities, the essence of the university word will degraded as the enrolment of diversified students will be affected negatively.

The policy regarding autonomy of higher education says about the incentives to the big institutions who are working quite well in the field of education but there are many small in size institutions in India which are providing educational services to the deprived areas. This provision of incentives according to accreditation, will lead to the higher funding to already well funded and reputed institutions and lesser funding to the less reputed institutions. It may contribute in making the big institutions into bigger institutions and the possibility of difficult access to education may enhance.

What autonomy earns to the institutions is their smooth functioning with lesser influence by the external entities but it does not talk much about the other stakeholders like students and their parents and teachers. Autonomy may lead to the commoditisation of education and as a result the cost of education may increase to the students. This cost of education in majority of the cases in India is paid by the parents of the students in India. So, this increased head of expense may lead to imbalance in their economic budget. The persons working in the organizations can be treated as the foundation of the successful organization as their honest and hard efforts are the reasons behind the big names of the organizations. In the name of autonomy and higher efficiency, the exploitation of work force may be there.

### **Suggestion for Better Implementation of Autonomy in Indian Higher Education Sector**

If the policy regarding autonomy is implemented in India, it alone may not

give guarantee of improvement in the quality of higher education. For the desired outcomes, the positive attitude of the students, commitment from the side of the teachers, strong and positive thinking of the political parties framing Government are highly required. Autonomy of higher education institutions should not be forced, instead it should be applied with consultation with all the parties who are going to be affected due to the provisions of autonomy. The National Education Policy, 2020 suggested the grant of autonomy to a huge number of institutions within a small period of time i.e. 15 year. It is suggested here that instead of the wide implementation, the policy of autonomy should be implemented in phased manner so that timely review and effective control may be possible and corrective actions may be taken in time. It is also suggested here that the autonomy to the higher education should be granted not on the cost of compromise with the quality of education but be kept for the achievement of excellence. The basic infrastructure is the most relevant determinant of quality in higher education institutions in India. The foremost effort that should be taken into consideration is to take steps for the improvement in infrastructure which will be required for the implementation of autonomy policy in a better way. It is suggested that proper arrangements must be undertaken regarding the welfare of the students and their parents and teachers before the implementation of autonomy policy.

## **CONCLUSION**

With the issue of National Education Policy, 2020 in India, one concept is a part of large number of discussions. There are various views of different researchers on this concept of autonomy of higher educational institutions in India and worldwide. This paper is also an attempt to study various dimensions of autonomy of higher educational institutions in India. In the results of the present study it has been found that there are many parties who are going to be affected by the introduction of this concept in India. So, before implementing it in India, efforts must be undertaken to ensure the welfare the higher educational institutions and the society. It may be conclude here that with the help of autonomy to higher education institutions, the efficiency is expected to be increased but it should not be on the cost of commodification of education.

## REFERENCES:

- Aithal, P. S., & Aithal, S. (2020). Analysis of the Indian National Education Policy 2020 towards achieving its objectives. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS)*, 5(2), 19-41.
- Bania, S. (2021). National Education Policy-2020 & Institutional Autonomy in Indian Higher Education System: Issues and Challenges in Implementation. *East African Scholar Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature*, 4(6), 260-264.
- Bassan, G. (2019). Autonomy and Accountability of Higher Education Institutions of India: Tracing the roots in History of Higher Education in Independent India. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 9(1), 260-282.
- Berka, W., De Groof, J., & Penneman, H. (Eds.) (2000) *Autonomy in education* (Vol. 3). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Bjork, C. (2004). Decentralisation in education, institutional culture and teacher autonomy in Indonesia. *International review of education*, 50(3), 245-262.
- Guruz, K. (2011). University autonomy and academic freedom: A historical perspective. *International Higher Education*, (63).
- Hand, M. (2006). Against autonomy as an educational aim. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(4), 535-550.
- Iftene, C. (2014). Educational systems' autonomy. Facts and analysis. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 142, 47-53.
- Lee, P. (1994). History, Autonomy and Education or History Helps Your Students Be Autonomous Five Ways (with apologies to PAL dog food). *Teaching History*, 77, 6-10.
- Mai, A. N. (2022). The Effect of Autonomy on University Rankings in Germany, France and China. *Higher Education for the Future*, 9(1), 75-92.
- Prakash, V. (2011). Concerns about autonomy and academic freedom in higher education institutions. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36-40.

Prasad, M. (2005). Autonomy and the commercialization of higher education. *Social Scientist*, 43-48.

- Priya, L. (2020). How Does the National Education Policy Accelerate the Privatisation of Higher Education?. *Economic & Political Weekly Engage*, 55.
- Rukhis, T. M., Hatem, F. A., & Al-Abdali, M. J. (2020). State Control and Autonomy of the Higher Education Institutions in Iraq: A Competitive Analysis. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(6), 14972-14981.
- Sankaran, K., & Joshi, G. V. (2016). Autonomy for excellence in higher education in India. *Nitte management review*, 10(2), 1-10.
- Shamina, H. (2016). Relationship between professional autonomy and work performance of teachers in higher educational institutions-at a Glance. *International Journal in Management & Social Science*, 4(2), 463-471.
- Siddikov, I. B. (2021) Modern Models of Providing Autonomy of Higher Educational Institutions (Analysis of Foreign Countries Experience) *Current Research Journal of Pedagogics*, 2(05), 25–31.
- Tarozzi, M. (Ed.) (2016) Global Citizenship Education in Europe. A Comparative Study on Education Policies across 10 EU Countries. *Research deliverable issued within the European project "Global Schools"*, Trento, Italy.
- Thakur P. & Kumar P. (2021) Educational Policies, Comparative Analysis of National Education Policies of India and Challenges, *International J. Multidisciplinary Educational research*, 10, 13-16.
- Vlasova and Inna. (2019). University Autonomy: Analysis of the International Documents. The Pedagogical Process: Theory and Practice. 100-105. 10.28925/2078-1687.2019.1-2.100105.
- Volkwein, J. F., & Malik, S. M. (1997). State regulation and administrative flexibility at public universities. *Research in higher education*, 38(1), 17-42.
- Warnock, M. (1992). Higher Education: The Concept of Autonomy.

*Oxford Review of Education*, 18(2), 119–124.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049979>.

- Wieland Wermke & Maija Salokangas (2015) Autonomy in education: theoretical and empirical approaches to a contested concept, *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2015:2, 28841.
- <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43258156>
- <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/todays-paper/blueprint-of-institutional-autonomy-in-higher-education-in-india>
- [https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/2838506\\_182734.pdf](https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/2838506_182734.pdf)
- [https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/0062368\\_Latest-832-Auto-Colleges16-062021.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*maajd2\\*\\_ga\\*MjAxMjU3NjEwMS4xNjQ2MjgwNDYy\\*\\_ga\\_FGHYECNLXB\\*MTY0NjYyNzEwOS4yLjEuMTY0NjYyNzc5NC4w](https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/0062368_Latest-832-Auto-Colleges16-062021.pdf?_gl=1*maajd2*_ga*MjAxMjU3NjEwMS4xNjQ2MjgwNDYy*_ga_FGHYECNLXB*MTY0NjYyNzEwOS4yLjEuMTY0NjYyNzc5NC4w)