

Review Article

## National Education Policy-2020 & Institutional Autonomy in Indian Higher Education System: Issues and Challenges in Implementation

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**Abstract:** Autonomy in higher education is a functional status given to colleges by University Grants Commission (UGC) for giving greater flexibility towards academic development with regards to improvement of academic standards and excellence. Institutional autonomy not only provide ample opportunity for colleges to take up innovations to bring quality and relevance in higher education but also brings statutory changes to the institutions as a whole. Attempted has been made in this study to discuss the concept of Autonomy, the notions of Institutional Autonomy in Higher Education and the Recommendation India's National Education Policy-2020 on Institutional Autonomy. Major challenges regarding the implementation National Education Policy-2020 on Institutional Autonomy have been discussed.

**Keywords:** NEP-2020, Institutional Autonomy, Higher Education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Etymologically autonomy means "self norm". Autonomy refers to freedom or liberty for self-governance. It is a freedom for assuming responsibility for itself. The basic philosophy behind autonomy is that a person or group enjoying freedom and autonomy becomes more efficient than a person or a group failing to enjoy such freedom and autonomy as democracy leads to greater creativity, than a dictatorship. Thus, autonomy refers to freedom given to person, group or institution to perform a task on its own without any external control. Autonomy has been described as the power to act without external control; and it is viewed as an organisational or managerial requirement for the fulfilment of responsibilities (Sarup, 1988). Bajaj (1989) defined autonomy in terms of independence in thought and action.

Autonomy simply means granting freedom to all those responsible for carrying out the work themselves. It provides a better framework through a decentralized management culture. Delegation of authority with accountability and associate management function is essential for the success of autonomy. Autonomy, when exercised with the sense of responsibility and accountability inevitably leads to

excellence in academics, governance and financial management of an institution.

### Institutional Autonomy in Higher Education

Autonomy in higher education may be defined as a functional status given to colleges by University Grants Commission (UGC) for giving greater flexibility towards academic development with regards to improvement of academic standards and excellence. An autonomous college is given freedom to be a norm to itself and for self-governance. College autonomy enables colleges to award degrees on behalf of the affiliating University by providing more academic and operative freedom to function better with credibility. The UGC guidelines for autonomous colleges (2018) highlighting the importance of autonomous colleges, indicates that the only safe and better way to enhance the standard of undergraduate education is to delink most of the colleges from the affiliate system. Further, it states that colleges with academic and operative freedom are doing better and have more credibility and the financial support to such colleges boosts the concept of autonomy.

UNESCO defines institutional autonomy 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". Autonomy offers a college to prescribe its own rules for admission, prescribes its courses of study, conduct examination and devise methods of teaching and evaluation. Autonomy and freedom (academic, financial and administrative) need to be accompanied by accountability. Academic autonomy is the freedom to determine academic matters such as curriculum, instructional methods, pedagogy, and students' assessment strategies. Administrative autonomy is the freedom of the organisation to conduct its own administration affairs in such a manner as to support and encourage programmes for the advancement of individuals working in the institutions and the institution itself. Financial autonomy is the freedom of the institution to use the financial capital at its disposal in a prudent manner that respects its objectives.

The Education Commission (1966) found out that exercising of academic freedom by teachers is a major prerequisite for the growth of our country's intellectual environment. It is impossible to pursue success in the higher education sector until such an environment prevails. Since students, teachers and administrators are co-partners in enhancing the quality of higher education, it is important that they share a significant responsibility. The Education Commission also proposed college autonomy, which is basically a mechanism to encourage academic excellence.

In the year 2018, the Revised Guidelines in the Scheme of Autonomous Colleges (UGC, 2018) states that an autonomous college will have the freedom to i) review existing courses/ programmes and, restructure, redesign and prescribe its own courses/programmes of study and syllabi; ii) to formulate new courses/programmes within the nomenclature specified by UGC as per the Specification of Degrees 2014 and amended from time to time; iii) evolve methods of assessment of students performance, conduct of examinations and notification of results; iv) to announce results, issue mark sheets, migration and other certificates; however, the degree shall be awarded by the University with the name of the college on the degree certificate; v) prescribe rules for admission in consonance with the reservation policy of the state government/national policy; vi) may fix fees of the courses at their own level; vii) constitute their own Governing Body, Academic Council, Board of Studies and Finance Committee; and viii) appoint their own administrative staff and teaching faculty including Principal. However, the staff will be appointed as per the UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers and other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations 2010 as amended from time to time.

Autonomy in the country is not something new to higher education institutions. For quite a long time, the University Grants Commission, based on the recommendations of the National Education Commission in 1964-66, has had a well-laid structure for the grant of autonomy status to colleges in India. However, the overall number of autonomous colleges is less than 2% out of some 40,000 colleges (AISHE, 2018). There has not been a very encouraging growth in the number of autonomous institutions in the country despite autonomous colleges has freedom to restructure, redesign and prescribe its own courses, to formulate new courses, evolve methods of assessment of students, announce results, issue mark sheets, prescribe rules for admission, may fix fees of the courses, constitute their own Governing Body, Academic Council, Board of Studies and Finance Committee. Among the HEIs in the country, affiliated institutions have the largest share.

### **Indian National Education Policy-2020**

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020, outlines the vision of India's new education system. The new policy replaces the previous National Policy on Education, 1986. The policy is a comprehensive framework for elementary education to higher education as well as vocational training in both rural and urban India. The policy aims to transform India's education system by 2021. The Policy is based on the Draft National Education Policy 2019 chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan, former chairman of the Indian Space Research organisation, submitted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development on December 15, 2018.

The four parts of National Education Policy covers school education (Part-I); Higher Education (Part-II); Other Key Areas of Focus (Part-III) such as adult Education, online education, Promoting Indian languages; and Making it Happen (Part-IV), which discuss the policy's implementation.

### **Recommendation National Education Policy-2020 on Institutional Autonomy**

Significant importance has been given to the concept of institutional autonomy reflected in the National Education Policy (2020) which calls for the establishment of a stage-wise mechanism for granting "graded autonomy" to colleges through a transparent system of graded accreditation. Each college is expected to be developed into either an autonomous degree-granting college or a constituent college of a university.

The importance of "graded autonomy" has been expressed by Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi in the following words: "The "graded autonomy" concept in the National Education Policy (NEP) aims to encourage healthy

competition between universities and reward those institutions which perform better than the others.”

As it is envisaged in NPE, 2020, all Higher Education Institutions (HEI) shall strive to become large multidisciplinary universities and HEI clusters. Over a period of time all HEIs will be classified into 1. Research Intensive Universities 2. Teaching Universities and 3. Autonomous Degree granting colleges. The Autonomous degree granting colleges may or may not be a part of a university. Affiliated colleges will get phased out over a period of fifteen years through a system of graded autonomy.

A stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation, will be established. All Colleges will be encouraged, mentored, supported, and incentivized to gradually attain the minimum benchmarks required for each level of accreditation. Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous degree-granting College, or a constituent college of a university - in the latter case, it would be fully a part of the university. With appropriate accreditations, Autonomous degree-granting Colleges could evolve into Research-intensive or Teaching-intensive Universities, if they so aspire (10.4.).

Single-stream HEIs will be phased out over time, and all will move towards becoming vibrant multidisciplinary institutions or parts of vibrant multidisciplinary HEI clusters, in order to enable and encourage high-quality multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary teaching and research across fields. Single-stream HEIs will, in particular, add departments across different fields that would strengthen the single stream that they currently serve. Through the attainment of suitable accreditations, all HEIs will gradually move towards full autonomy - academic and administrative - in order to enable this vibrant culture. The autonomy of public institutions will be backed by adequate public financial support and stability. Private institutions with a public-spirited commitment to high-quality equitable education will be encouraged. (10.11)

The new regulatory system as envisioned by the Policy will foster this overall culture of empowerment and autonomy to innovate, including by gradually phasing out the system of ‘affiliated colleges’ over a period of fifteen years through a system of graded autonomy, and to be carried out in a challenge mode. Each existing affiliating university will be responsible for mentoring its affiliated colleges so that they can develop their capabilities and achieve minimum benchmarks in academic and curricular matters; teaching and assessment; governance reforms; financial robustness; and administrative efficiency. All colleges currently affiliated to a university shall attain

the required benchmarks over time to secure the prescribed accreditation benchmarks and eventually become autonomous degree-granting colleges. This will be achieved through a concerted national effort including suitable mentoring and governmental support for the same. (10.12.)

Large multidisciplinary universities and colleges will facilitate the move towards high-quality holistic and multidisciplinary education. Flexibility in curriculum and novel and engaging course options will be on offer to students, in addition to rigorous specialization in a subject or subjects. This will be encouraged by increased faculty and institutional autonomy in setting curricula. Pedagogy will have an increased emphasis on communication, discussion, debate, research, and opportunities for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking. (11.6.)

First, in order to promote creativity, institutions and faculty will have the autonomy to innovate on matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment within a broad framework of higher education qualifications that ensures consistency across institutions and programmes and across the ODL, online, and traditional ‘in-class’ modes. Accordingly, curriculum and pedagogy will be designed by institutions and motivated faculty to ensure a stimulating and engaging learning experience for all students, and continuous formative assessment will be used to further the goals of each programme. All assessment systems shall also be decided by the HEI, including those that lead to final certification. The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) will be revised for instilling innovation and flexibility. HEIs shall move to a criterion-based grading system that assesses student achievement based on the learning goals for each programme, making the system fairer and outcomes more comparable. HEIs shall also move away from high-stakes examinations towards more continuous and comprehensive evaluation. (12.2.)

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. Measures will be taken at all HEIs to ensure leadership of the highest quality and promote an institutional culture of excellence. Upon receiving the appropriate graded accreditations that deem the institution ready for such a move, a Board of Governors (BoG) shall be established consisting of a group of highly qualified, competent, and dedicated individuals having proven capabilities and a strong sense of commitment to the institution. (19.2)

### Major Challenges in Implementation

The classification of institutions into research-intensive universities, teaching-intensive universities, and autonomous colleges will require major transformations in the respective institutions. Limiting the number of affiliated institutions with a university and granting autonomy status to multidisciplinary higher education in every district might be challenging milestones to be achieved within 2035.

Majority of colleges in India are affiliated colleges, which are completely free from the responsibility of developing and implementing institutional rules and academic regulation like admissions policies, academic timetables, classes, framing of syllabus, review, conduct of assessment and evaluation, which is at present carried out by the concerned affiliating universities. The colleges are only focussing on teaching-learning process. With ambition for autonomy status, the colleges will require to take more burden and responsibility which further required more responsible, professional and trained personnel. They need to access to knowledge resources, facilities, human resource, and ICT network of the University. Further they require rigorous preparation to have teachers and requisite infrastructure support for extending education in different disciplines.

NEP-2020 recommended that, through the attainment of suitable accreditations, all HEIs will gradually move towards full autonomy - academic and administrative - in order to enable this vibrant culture to the classification of the HEIs based on graded autonomy. The objective of granting full autonomy to each HEI will be thwarted, if the evaluation and accreditation process of each HEI will not be carried out with integrity, honesty and without any biases and prejudice.

Affiliated University gets ample fees from affiliated colleges in the form of exam fees, affiliation charges, etc. by giving autonomy status to many colleges university will lose such financial resources. There will be also increasing burden for affiliating university who will be responsible for mentoring its affiliated colleges to become autonomous degree-granting colleges.

An effective regulatory mechanism will required to establish by the UGC to monitor the functioning of the colleges. Before extending Autonomous status to other colleges, objective evaluation and revamping of the existing Autonomous colleges will require. Further a Regional / State level monitoring mechanism through networking will require to provide practical solutions to many of the problems being encountered by the colleges during the implementation of the scheme.

The facilities for carrying out autonomous functions such as innovations in curricular content, systems of examination and evaluation, teaching methods, supplementary learning, etc. will require not only sufficient financial resources but also continuous training and upgradation of teachers.

Under institutional autonomy special grants is provided to colleges to incur expenditure relating to purchase of books and journals, purchase laboratory equipments, conduct seminars and workshops, organise staff training programmes, invite guest faculties, redesign curriculum and syllabi, construct and renovate buildings etc. This requires adequate Government financial support to each autonomous college to carry out developmental activities.

For giving institutional autonomy to a large number of institutions within a small period of 15 years, there need a huge number of skilled, professional and knowledgeable persons for transparent system of graded accreditation.

Giving administrative autonomy to intuitions without continuous government monitoring may lead to misuse of such freedom in selection and appointment of faculties and staffs in the institutions.

There may be a lack of standardised and uniform syllabus, pedagogy and methods of assessment and evaluation in the country if all colleges will be granted academic freedom. Furthermore, a big partnership and collaboration between all the HEIS in the country will require for this.

### CONCLUSION

Institutional autonomy not only provide ample opportunity for colleges to take up innovations to bring quality and relevance in higher education but also brings statutory changes to the institutions as a whole. Hence, the NEP targeting all affiliated colleges becoming either an autonomous college or constituent college of the University in the coming fifteen years is a very big challenge that needs to be strategized effectively.

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