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Governance and Management of Higher Education

Policy Brief 6

Government and Universities and Within Universities
Relationship in India

Policy Brief 7

University-College Governance Relationships in India

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Government and Universities and Within Universities Relationship in India

Introduction

India is currently going through the phase of massification with a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education at 27.3 (in 2020-21). The governance and management of universities in India is becoming increasingly complex against the backdrop of the expansion and diversification. The diversification of the higher education system has occurred through the expansion from a unitary structure (universities) to a more flexible system that can accommodate the varying demands of different groups and regions within the country. The relationship between the government and universities has also evolved over the years and the role of the government in this new scenario has changed from exercising direct control to 'steering the process from a distance'. Further, the focus has shifted to performance and outcome-based measures instead of being determined by inputs. This new form of 'managerialism' has significant implications for autonomy and accountability in the higher education system.

Universities have always been perceived as collegial organisations governed and managed by a community of scholars. During the past decades, this very idea of a university has changed due to the emergence of new modes of managerialism. Some defend this change as being necessary due to the wave of globalization as well as the need for greater accountability towards both the governing boards and internal and external stakeholders. However, it is also argued that such changes have, in general, led to a decline in the power of the professoriate and collegiality. Consequently, a new relationship is developing between the government and universities.

India has a variety of higher education institutions. These include multi-faculty universities established by the Central and State governments, some of which have a

unitary structure while others have affiliating colleges. In addition, there are open universities established by the Central and State governments; professional and technical institutions; deemed universities that have been chartered by the University Grants Commission (UGC) but not established by Central or State Acts; private universities; and institutions of national importance established by various Acts of Parliament such as Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and Indian Institutes of Science, Education and Research (IISERs), among others, which offer professional undergraduate, post-graduate, and research programmes.

It is often pointed out that India has an over-regulated and under-governed higher education system. The Government is, therefore, taking multiple initiatives to ensure effective implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP), 2020. The crux of the plan for overhauling the higher education system lies in its structural reorganisation into large, multi-disciplinary universities and colleges. The NEP proposes the establishment of research-intensive universities, teaching-intensive universities, and autonomous degree-granting colleges.

This policy brief examines the changing dynamics of the relationship between the government and universities in India. It also delineates the intervention strategies that would facilitate greater autonomy for the institutions facing complex challenges pertaining to their governance and functioning vis-à-vis the concomitant role of the State. Simultaneously, it outlines the challenges of internal governance being faced by universities and the intervention strategies they have been adopting to ensure their improved day-to-day management and the growing accountability requirements for their smooth functioning.



Government-University Relationship

The governance of higher education in India has moved from State control to a model based on State supervision. Since Independence, the move to grant greater autonomy to higher education institutions has been taking shape in India, which has also been highlighted in the reports of various committees and commissions. Such a move basically accentuates new public management that signifies an administrative system focused on steering from a distance instead of direct control.

Such rapid expansion and massification in higher education is placing a substantial fiscal burden on the State, often compelling the latter to withdraw funding to higher educational institutions. A move towards "corporatisation" of public universities is also evident, whereby universities are being encouraged to become more managerial in approach and entrepreneurial in nature. In this context, the fundamental issue is whether the State would be able to finance public higher education institutions in the light of their unavoidable further massification and the constantly rising costs of advanced research activities. What is of importance in the relation between the Government and higher education institutions is as to how the latter interact with the Ministry of Education, Directorate of Collegiate Education, and the State Councils of Higher Education in the case of State universities. For the Central universities, what matters is their relationship with the Ministry of Education and UGC. There is a difference in the funding patterns for the State universities vis-à-vis Central universities, with the latter seen to have adequate funds relative to State universities that are facing a funds crunch. Most discussions on the notion of autonomy are thus located in the context of the relationship between public institutions and the government. However, this context can be equally applicable to the relationship playing out between managers/owners of private institutions and the government, especially in terms of the regulations imposed by the latter.

Given the funding models of higher education, particularly in India where State-funded and privately-financed models exist side by side, the issue of governance is really hard to de-couple from the question of autonomy in decision-making. Universities are fundamentally aware of the areas wherein they perceive that the exercise of

autonomy would most impact the heart of the institution, that is, the selection of students and lecturers, the design of the courses that are offered in the university, the assessment of the courses, and the management of research.

In India, organisations like the University Grants Commission (UGC) have introduced performance monitoring, while the use of external and internal quality assurance mechanisms has become common with the inception of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council. These buffer bodies have redefined the relationship between government and institutions. They have also been providing policy support, ensuring quality control, regulating the growth of private institutions, and implementing many accountability measures to promote better performance.

The concept of autonomy per se is, however, often misunderstood in India to signify complete freedom whereas in reality, autonomy must be accompanied with greater accountability, failing which it would defeat the very purpose for which it was introduced. Moreover, there is a need for core funding of public higher education institutions. Autonomy should not also be used as a means to withdraw government funding and encourage institutions to mobilise own resources. In higher education institutions, greater autonomy should in fact urge institutions to adopt more democratic processes, while leading to the introduction of committee systems, and fostering a process whereby the heads of department and deans are elected instead of being appointed in educational institutions. Thus, autonomy should help make the institutional management style more transparent, accountable, participatory, and inclusive. These would also necessitate changes in financial management and budgetary initiatives.

The Government's intervention in the form of introduction of regulations can be deemed necessary for enforcing accountability measures. The advent of these market principles in administration of higher educational institutions is enabling a redefinition rather than reduction in the role of the State. This role now also entails development of a framework for operation and regulation of the system over and above the traditional roles of financing, managing, and controlling institutions of higher education being performed by educational institutions.



It is also important for the higher education councils established in many States of the country to effectively coordinate with the UGC for the implementation of regulations for maintaining educational standards as well as for all the developmental functions of the universities and colleges at the State level. The State Higher Education Councils (SHECs) should also emerge as apex State-level institutions extending support to the respective State governments not only in planning but also in providing academic leadership to the higher educational institutions in the State. The SHECs should promote quality assurance and accreditation in the States while also promoting effective linkages with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the latter's regional accreditation centres.

In the context of the rapid expansion of the higher education system in the country, one of the major issues being considered by both educational institutions and the government during this phase is an assessment of the growth trajectory of universities whilst being able to maintain a functional system of management and governance. The NEP 2020 also aims to combine autonomy with good governance as a driver for establishing more universities in India that are recognised. This objective stems from the argument that the prevalence of block grants, implementation of strategic plans, fostering of academic freedom, and existence of independent governing bodies are indications of institutional autonomy. If they live up to expectations, academic institutions would be granted more autonomy. The new philosophy of the government aimed at steering change has thus opened the door to more noticeable competition. Universities are now expected to display more competitive managerial behaviour. There has also been a shift from input-based models to more output- and performance-based models. The massification of higher education has been led by non-State funding and is accompanied by market reforms like cost recovery measures in public institutions and permission for private institutions to operate.

Within-Universities Relationships

It is imperative to analyse not just whether autonomy is being granted but also how such autonomy needs to be implemented. As regards 'within-University' relations, what is being examined is the nature of internal governance structures, that is, the level of centralisation and/or decentralisation. Thus, it is critical to determine whether

decision-making is centralised or participatory, that is, the extent of the autonomy given to the universities being passed on to the teachers or whether the autonomy remains highly centralised and confined to the office of the Vice Chancellor.

The granting of autonomy is also accompanied by efforts to increase accountability measures. The various parameters for assessing the effectiveness of accountability measures include performance evaluation, performance-based contracts, performance-based funding, competitive funding, the functioning of external quality assurance agencies, and internal quality assurance processes. The concept of accountability entails the movement from input-based to more output- and outcomes-based measures. There is also a need to examine the composition of various governing bodies in terms of the number of their internal members and external members, and whether the external members are from government, academics, or industry.

A governance structure in a university in India consists of a Board of Governors/Governing Board (GB) chaired by the Chancellor, who may be the Governor in case of State universities, or the nominee of an eminent academic in the government in Central universities, a Syndicate, a Senate, an Academic Council, a Finance Committee, or a Board of Studies, among others. The GB provides broad policy guidance, whereas the Syndicate takes decisions on administrative and financial matters pertaining to the institution. The Senate or Academic Council is the academic decision-making body in a university. The meetings of both the Syndicate and Senate are chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. At times, the Minister is the chairperson of the University Council or governing body. This trend is changing whereby an eminent educationist is now being selected as the chancellor of a university.

For example, the considerable autonomy now being enjoyed by many of the institutions of national importance and Central universities usually emanates from the Governing Bodies of these institutions. The governing boards of the IITs, IIMs, Central Universities, IISERs, and NITs, among others, comprise a large number of academics and only a limited number (one or two) of government officials. Many of these institutions are headed by eminent educationists. The Boards in these institutions have the autonomy to design academic programmes, lay down the research priorities, and decide on staffing issues, among other functions. In other words, though these



institutions are funded by the government, they face minimal interference and control by the government and in reality, enjoy substantial autonomy.

However, certain other Centrally-funded institutions with governing bodies have a larger number of government officials as members. The situation is similar in State-funded institutions, wherein interferences by the State in all aspects of the university administration are highly visible in many institutions and in many situations the nature of governing bodies and their authority to take decisions on crucial issues are important elements pertaining to the concept of autonomy at the institutional level. In some cases, a large number of Board members are closer to the ministries than to the academic fraternity. Such Boards can possibly exercise less autonomy as compared to Boards wherein most members are closer to academics.

There is a substantial variation between the governance structures of State and Central universities. Further State universities are subjected to two layers of control, including by the Central Government and State-level agencies. Examples of increasing accountability measures in Indian universities include external quality assurance agencies, internal quality assurance mechanisms, and the ranking of higher education institutions. The advent of new reforms such as graded autonomy and funding mechanisms also poses challenges to institutions of higher education. A growing consensus seems to be emerging in favour of granting greater autonomy, increasing accountability measures, decentralisation of power, and increased participation of faculty and students in institutional decision-making process. However, it is found, that at times even when higher autonomy is granted by the government, decision-making is increasingly centralised at the institutional level. Thus, an ecosystem of command and control seems to permeate down from the offices of Vice Chancellors to the teachers and students.

Areas of Intervention

- Universities should move towards self-governance with independent governing boards comprising a significant number of external members.
- Buffer organisations need to be made fully independent instead of functioning as extended arms of the government. The SHECs should emerge as apex State-level institutions for supporting the State government not only in planning but also in providing academic leadership to universities.
- There should be greater autonomy in the selection and election of university leaders.
- The implementation of the concept of autonomy necessitates participation of the students, teachers, and the management in the decision-making process.
- There is need for reform in governance and a form of "managerialism" is perceptibly gripping the institutions under study. Thus, the institutional management style should become more transparent, accountable, participatory, and inclusive.

Conclusion

Governance becomes effective and leads to improved institutional performance when decisions are translated into operational practices accompanied by implementation of accountability measures at the institutional level. Institutional autonomy is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for decentralisation of decision-making within the university. Over-centralisation of power and decision-making is observed in Central and State universities at the level of offices of Vice Chancellors. This shows that the autonomy enjoyed by the university has not necessarily translated into a decentralised and participative decision-making process within the university.

This policy brief is prepared by **Garima Malik**, Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi.

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University-College Governance Relationships in India

Introduction

One of the highly distinct features of the higher education system in India is the concept of affiliated colleges. The main governance functions of the universities vis-à-vis the affiliated colleges are related to admission, examinations, curriculum management, and teacher recruitment and development. Government colleges are administered under the government service rules whereas affiliated private colleges are governed by their respective Governing Bodies. A number of governance practices in colleges need to be examined closely to enable them to achieve their full potential. These include: (i) the governance structure as a result of which government colleges suffer from lack of autonomy; (ii) the acute shortage emanating from the implementation of certain teacher recruitment practices; (iii) issues regarding internal governance in many affiliated private colleges; and (iv) prevalence of a weak accountability and monitoring mechanism. This policy brief examines the tenuous relationship between the university and colleges in the context of their governance systems.

University- College Relationship

The system of affiliations, which has been part of the higher education ecosystem in India since Independence, has now become detrimental to the growth of higher education. There are universities in the country with nearly 1000 affiliated colleges. These universities suffer from the diseconomies of scale, as despite the small average size of the affiliated colleges, the maximum enrolment of students takes place in these colleges. The teachers in government colleges are recruited under a centralised system which makes them civil servants whereas their counterparts in private aided and unaided colleges are recruited by the university. A large number of these affiliated colleges do

not have the requisite minimum infrastructure. The curriculum for these colleges is laid down by the universities, and consequently the affiliated colleges enjoy little autonomy in devising the syllabus. The principals of the colleges serve on some of the university committees but this phenomenon is not always sufficient to ensure that the interests of the particular colleges are served. The State and the directorates of higher education seems to exercise substantial control in most areas of activity within the colleges. The latter are thus subjected to significant over-regulation and control by the government.

The affiliated colleges conduct examinations and carry out all the related paper work but the degrees for these examinations are awarded by the university. The largest number of autonomous colleges exist in the State of Tamil Nadu, followed by those in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Despite the notable drawbacks in the system of affiliated colleges, the scheme of setting up autonomous colleges has not made the desired progress. This lack of progress can be attributed to the following reasons: (i) The State governments are not ready to give up their control over government-run colleges. (ii) The managements of the private colleges worry that they would lose their power. (iii) Teachers are not willing to assume the full responsibilities tantamount in autonomous institutions, which, in many cases, have led to an increase in their workload. (iv) There are concerns as to whether a college degree will be granted the same status as a university degree.

The majority of the enrolment in higher education in India is currently taking place in State universities. One of the major concomitant problems is the presence of the affiliating structure, wherein universities have many affiliating colleges under them, which leads to acute governance



problems. The proposal to make colleges autonomous has often been raised as a solution towards addressing the governance challenges but this has so far remained confined on paper. Further, even after a particular college gains autonomy, the university continues to exercise control over its functioning. It is recommended that any kind of autonomy, be it administrative or academic or financial autonomy, should be used productively to promote new ideas in the sphere of higher education, reflecting a sense of responsibility, complete ownership, and the incentives for ensuring productive work and diligence among the faculty of the colleges concerned. In the absence of such a commitment, the possibility of misuse of freedom persists and the social purpose of education may not be achieved. Thus, autonomy and accountability have to go hand in hand. The purported misuse of autonomy could foster mistrust between the authority and the faculty, in turn leading to even greater control by the former. The present system, is characterised by excessive bureaucracy, hierarchy, and the scarcity of resources in colleges. In such a situation, biased decisions are taken and imposed by the university in a top-down manner. The resultant lack of freedom and opportunity prevents the faculty members from building their capacity and nurturing a commitment to work.

The present system of control by a centralized authority also creates constraints with regard to the curriculum, syllabus, and conduct of examinations, with the college administration being expected to implement the teaching-learning aspect on its own, without any support from the university. On its part, the university often does not have an adequate structure for advising and supervising the colleges that conduct large-scale undergraduate programmes. Unless the university administration is equipped to carry out a dialogue and discussion with the affiliated colleges on how well to run a high-quality educational structure, no amount of regulation and accountability will deliver a successful programme. Hence, there is need for investment of time and money to create an organisational culture that encourages discussion, engagement, resource planning, and management. In addition, the curriculum should be designed to facilitate better employability of graduates with a more productive synergy among the teaching faculty, research institutions, and industry. Adequate recognition should also be given to innovative inventions and skills. Thus, there is a need to revisit the requirements for

admissions to incorporate more holistic measures, including better designed tests, more quotas for students performing extra-curricular activities, and greater attention to participation of the college students in external activities and skills.

In the ecosystem of university-college relationships, it is imperative to clearly define the level and nature of the autonomy to be granted to the colleges. This should also apply to the system of teacher recruitments. As mentioned earlier, in the government colleges, teachers are often recruited as part of a central system, making them civil servants, who can be transferred from one affiliated college to another, which is distinct from the recruitment procedure implemented by the university. This has implications for the management of the teaching fraternity by the colleges and the level of autonomy they can exercise in such management.

Another important aspect to be considered is that of leadership, that is, the manner in which the appointments of Principals and Heads of Departments are made at both the university and college levels.

The main difference between the colleges and universities lies in their respective institutional and academic management structures. While universities enjoy considerable freedom in their institutional and academic affairs, and management, the public colleges function as typical government organisations bound by rigid administrative and financial regulations. Even private colleges, while enjoying somewhat greater administrative autonomy than government colleges, are mandated to follow the rules of financial management laid down by the government.

It has also been observed that the main focus in colleges is on teaching rather than research. Even the facilities available in the colleges are also not conducive for carrying out research. Feedback from students is not taken into account in the assessment of teaching practices. Further, in most colleges, no awards are given to the teachers in recognition of their appreciable teaching practices. There is no institutionalised mechanism for assessing the accountability of the offices and faculty/staff. There is a notable lack of transparency in both the recruitment and promotions of teachers in the colleges.



The Principal and the Heads of various Departments play the most critical role in governance as integral constituents of the governing council. However, the participation of other faculty members in governance is virtually non-existent and the Heads communicate the decisions taken in the council meetings to the teachers, who have no role or say in such decision-making.

Thus, the communication completely percolates in a top-down manner with the total absence of a bottom-up approach in most of the colleges.

In the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, the term 'autonomous degree-granting college (AC)' refers to a large multi-disciplinary institution that offers undergraduate degrees and primarily focuses on undergraduate teaching, though without being restricted to the latter. The NEP proposes the establishment of a stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation. It also suggests that higher education institutions should have the autonomy and freedom to gradually move from one category of institution to another, based on their plans, actions, and effectiveness.

Areas of Intervention

The following areas of interventions are proposed to enable policy-makers to effect changes in governance at the college level:

- Authority over issues of personnel and resource allocation should be transferred from the central administration to various colleges.
- In order to create an atmosphere of shared governance, senior administrators should include individual academics from colleges at all levels in the functioning of the Senate with regard to academic and personnel matters. Such shared governance would ensure that decisions related to curriculum development, programme review, and academic standards are made collectively by the faculty and academic administrators.
- Decision-making should be participative and democratic for laying down all processes and procedures in colleges, as well as their implementation, to ensure transparency and democratic functioning in institutional management.

- Autonomous functions such as introducing innovations in the content of the curricula, systems of conducting and evaluating examinations, and teaching methods necessitate not only the allocation of more financial resources but also the continuous training and skill upgradation of teachers.
- The introduction of norm-based, transparent, and merit-based systems for the recruitment and transfers of the faculty will not only reduce the possibility of malpractices but also improve teacher morale and the credibility of the higher education system.
- It has been observed that the recruitment of teachers has not taken place for several years in some colleges, resulting in excessive reliance on ad hoc and guest teachers in these colleges. This situation needs to be addressed urgently by putting in place a more efficient recruitment system.

Conclusion

The issue of governance in the higher education system is of particular relevance for the current framework of development in India. Although it represents only one aspect of a set of larger issues faced by the country, its importance in terms of creating an efficient education system calls for significant and radical reforms.

Although the general understanding is that we should move towards ensuring greater autonomy for all colleges in India, in reality, we observe large-scale top-down interference at all levels of the education system, particularly in the appointments of key functionaries in the decision-making bodies of universities. This compromises the accountability of the institution. It is thus important to put in place a sustainable and independent framework for guiding the senior management of the university in taking key decisions. Also, greater decentralisation could be ushered in within the university hierarchy, which would help empower the university deans while also according more autonomy to the individual departments. In addition, the responsibility for regulating courses, conducting examinations, and awarding degrees should be given to the affiliated colleges, and post-graduate programmes and research should be encouraged at the college level. Greater efforts should also be made to recruit permanent teachers to alleviate acute teacher shortages in institutions of higher education.



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