

# A Study on Examining Autonomy Provision in Higher Education

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## **Abstract**

Autonomy is the backbone of higher education in India. It encourages the colleges to innovate practices and achievement of excellence. Institutional autonomy denotes the power and capabilities of educational institutes to set their policies for teaching and learning, research, admission procedure, fee structure, evaluation procedure, and implementation. The college should practice autonomy at the grassroots level to address the need of the hour. An attempt has been made to analyze the history of college autonomy from ancient India to today's UGC's revised guidelines. Major recommendations of committees and commissions, their objectives, their implementation, drawbacks, and reasons have been discussed.

**Keywords:** Institutional autonomy, Higher education, UGC guidelines, National Education Policy

## **Introduction:**

The Greek word “auto” means “self” and “nomos” means “custom or laws”. Autonomy means being responsible and control own life. A person who governs his or her life by himself/ herself seems to be more responsible towards making decisions as well as leading a happy and independent life. In the field of education, autonomy denotes the capacity to take control of one's own learning, set his own goal, and achieve it with the minimum help of teachers. Autonomous learners are likely to be more efficient, effective, responsible, independent, reliant, and resilient than a learner who is dependent and reliant on the teacher. So, autonomy refers to the capacity of a person, group, or institute. accomplish a task without being influenced by others. Immanuel Kant, the father of autonomy, defined autonomy as “having authority over one's action”. According to Nietzsche “Autonomy means beginning responsible and having freedom in one's life”. According to Piaget “Rules should be chosen by the person's own choice and the person should have the choice to follow the rules or not”. According to Robert Audi “Autonomy and freedom, both are closely related yet stand apart from each other as autonomy comes with accountability, unlike freedom.” Little(1991) Autonomy refers to “planning, monitoring and evaluating the activities of self-direction of both the content and process of learning”. Saru (1988) Power to perform a duty without the control of the external world which might influence the person or institute. Institutional autonomy means the power and capabilities of educational institutes to set their policies for teaching, research, and implementation. An autonomous institution will bear the responsibility of academic programmes, content, quality of teaching, administration, and assessment of the students. The responsibilities of an autonomous college are the academic programmes running under the college or institution, the content relevance of the offered course, teaching and quality of learning, and the admission process of the students. Autonomous colleges would be responsible for the quality of education as well as the content that it provides. The students of an autonomous college seem to get

more individual attention to supplement their educational needs. It seems, to encourage the students to think, creatively, and critically to express themselves effectively.

### **Recommendations of committees and commissions about college autonomy-**

During British rule, several colleges exist in India in different parts such as Kolkata, Banaras, Bareilly, Hooghly, Madras etc. In 1857 there are 26 colleges in India which has the autonomy of designing their courses of study, evaluation procedures, awarding degrees, etc. But, the Indian Universities Act (1904) introduced by the then viceroy of India Lord Curzon reduced the college autonomy to total dependence and subservience to the universities by the concept of “standard of higher education” along with the introduction of the common examination conducted by the university based on the prescribed curriculum. It hampered the freedom of college and made them nonautonomous.

In 1949, Radhakrishnan Commission also known as University Education Commission was in favor of institutional autonomy to safeguard them against the control of the state as well as democratic prospects. It says in favor of government support in college as it is the duty of the state but against governmental control over such institutions.

Report of the Committee on College (1962) submitted its report in 1965. It states that the affiliated colleges under a university should follow the rules, prescribed syllabi, and examination system to maintain equal standards among the colleges. It also suggested that few colleges should be identified based on their academic standard, work quality, influence, and tradition and gave “autonomous status”. These autonomous colleges can have the freedom of syllabus framing, conduction of examinations, working on learners' personalities, playing with innovative ideas, etc.

All India Federation of University and College Teachers Association formed in 1962 has strongly opposed the idea of autonomous college and pointed out some drawbacks of the idea of college autonomy. Such as the state government didn't want to dilute its power over colleges. Universities don't want to lose control over affiliated colleges, no clear-cut guidelines by the Kothari Commission about the autonomy of colleges, lack of confidence and unwilling by the teachers to take the extra burden of ideological conflict because of the best colleges selection, fear for maintenance of standard of education, lack of infrastructure and finance for maintaining the required standard of the autonomous college.

Education Commission (1964-66) has recommended that an outstanding college should be given autonomous status, which would allow the college to conduct examinations, set syllabi, and frame rules. University will supervise the college whether the college is maintaining its standard or deteriorating it. But. It was not successful as the concerned teachers don't want to take the extra burden, and responsibility of curriculum design, examination, etc. as they are acquainted as well as comfortable with the system of the university.

Ministry of Education Committee on Autonomous College (1966) has prescribed a few steps to get autonomy of a college, at first autonomy should be given on a trial basis. the criteria for choosing the college to be autonomous is based on students' achievement, staffing, facilities management, and so on.

The concerned autonomous college should modify the syllabus, admission procedure, and assessment process. Grant should be provided to the subsequent college for further development.

Committee on the Governance of Universities and Colleges (1971) reported that there was a lack of conceptual clarification about how autonomous colleges would work, process, and the relationship between universities and colleges. No progress happened by the Committee for Autonomous Colleges. Central Advisory Board of Education endorsement for autonomy to college (1972) reported, there were no colleges given autonomy status in the fourth 5-year plan and at least 5% of total colleges should be given autonomous status in the next 5-year plan by 1979.

UGC Guidelines on Autonomous Colleges in 1974 came up with a new document called Autonomous Colleges Criteria, Guidelines, and Patterns of Assistance, which has guidelines for the selection of colleges and its procedures to get autonomous status. But most institutes did not show interest to get autonomous status, as they did not want to lose control over subsequent colleges and colleges also did not want to be overburdened by making syllabi, conducting examinations, and admission procedures.

The National Policy of Education (1986) also acknowledged the need for autonomy in the affiliated colleges. The university should create a free and creative association with affiliated colleges, rather than a rigid one, to give them more freedom to act.

UGC's revised guideline on the scheme of the autonomous college stated that innovation and modernization in affiliated colleges are not possible due to the lack of decision-making power given by the concerned University. An autonomous college can bring about innovation more effectively due to the decision-making and implementation power. If the policymakers would act upon the policy, it would be more fruitful.

In the year 2018, on February 12<sup>th</sup>, University Grants Commission released a revised guideline on Autonomous Colleges. It allows both restructuring as well as developing their own courses, study programs, and syllabus and it needs to be revised from time to time to cope-up with the advancement of techniques of evaluation, holding examinations, and result announcement. It would be done under UGC's specification of degree 2014 nomenclature. The newly granted autonomous college needs to pay a one-time charge instead of an annual affiliation fee to the concerned university. The autonomous college has the power to form its own governing bodies, academic council, board of studies, finance committee course fee as well as choose persons for administration, teaching, and principal. It should be done under the regulation 2010. The autonomous college will get funding from UGC.

NEP 2020 has stated that autonomy is the backbone of education especially higher education. Institutions will become autonomous, which will be done in enough phased manner depending upon their contribution and their performance. Some of the colleges will get autonomy, but some would be working under the mentorship of the universities. Autonomous colleges will be free to decide and divert, design the curriculum for these subjects, and also perform at degrees as design subjects and teach them. Autonomous colleges will have a Board of Governors head of the institution will be heading the Board

of Governors like the college principal will be the head of the Board of Governors. The previous principal will be a member of it. Those who employ graduates, alimony students, staff, and teachers will all be part of it. The measure criticism of the system has been that those who are not part of the institution or system decide on issues, appointments, or curriculum. The affiliated institution and the university would decide on the curriculum and else the colleges to transact it. The college will have its committees at the top will be the Board of Governors and then would be there will be the department committee which will be the Board of Studies where the teacher in the college in collaboration with experts from outside the vicinity and other areas for will be members of the board of studies. The Board of Governors will approve this and that will become part of it ultimately, they will be able to award degrees as well. Initially, they will be allowed to transact but perhaps they may not be able to award degrees as their performance increases and they become from teaching institution to teaching and research institution and from teaching and research to researching the situation, they will be allowed to award degrees as well. The students through their clubs can decide on new courses and new curriculum in any area of knowledge it has been made wide open. If things are College in the hinterland in the far-flung Indian rural area, perhaps they can have agriculture or sericulture horticulture as clubs. Ultimately, they will become courses and curricula. Then start teaching these subjects and the faculty would be developed through these exercises. Once that is there, they will have a board of studies that will approve the curriculum and they would be able to transact and ultimately, they will be able to award degrees as well. At the university level, the university grants commission has been the apex body for higher education, but then there has been a lot of criticism. The University Grants Commission was initially stabilised to disburse the grant that was demarcated for higher education. Slowly this body had to take up all the responsibility of governance, regulation, and all but in the process, there are so many regulatory bodies also created specialised bodies like the National Council for Teacher Education and the All India Council for Technical Education. The experience has been that these institutions slept. We had a Justice JS Verma Commission in 2012 Which was not very kind to the National Council for Teacher Education it mentioned that there are about 10,000 degree awarding and situations in teacher education with sell degrees for money they do not undertake any extensive exercise in teaching-learning. It says we will close down such institutions which have not been able to perform in there about dozen regulatory bodies in different areas like agriculture, horticulture, architecture, technical education, and teacher education. So these bodies will be closed by taking back these acts to the parliament and requesting the parliament to repeal these acts. The University Grants Commission will be converted into a Higher Education Commission of India and all the powers will be vested in this regulatory body. Which will be a very strong and powerful body is will have 4 verticals. One of the verticals will be the regulatory vertical. The other would be accrediting vertical. The 3<sup>rd</sup> would be financing, fourth will be the General Education Council which will work on the general quality of education. The institutions that will have the autonomy to decide cannot fuss with the curriculum. They cannot dilute the syllabus because the General Education Council of the Higher Education Commission of India will give them guidelines. These 4 verticals, the regulatory, the accrediting, the financing, and the general education will not be statutory and regulatory bodies as such. But they will be lite but tight bodies or verticals under the Higher Education Commission of India. The members of these regulatory bodies will keep working as standard-setting bodies. For example, India Council for Technical Education or National Council for Technical Inter-Teacher Education, these bodies will remain which will be designing or working on the standards that must be made in these areas. The NCTE work on what should be the

quality of teacher education through distance, mode through face to face, online education for special education, etc. This will go into the Council of the Higher Education Commission of India where the members of these, standard-setting bodies will also be members. Presently the autonomy that is snatched from the higher education body will be vested and reinstalled in these bodies. This is how the system always works but then its role is flipped because UGC assumed a lot of powers and these bodies were also created through acts of parliament and they have their regulation.

University Grants Commission has released a revised regulation on autonomous colleges in 2023. It reviews existing courses, restructures as well as redesigns them, and also formulates new courses within the nomenclature specified by UGC. Evolve, the method of assessment, conduct examination, and result publication. Autonomous Colleges need not pay affiliation fees to the parent university it can fix. It can be a fixed fee for students, constitute their own governing body, academic council, Finance Committee, and board of studies, and the appointment of principal and staff according to UGC norms. Ph.D. programs can be offered as per UGC regulations. Autonomous status shall be guaranteed initially for 5 or 10 years and further extended up to 5 to 10 years. The eligibility criteria for college autonomy have been simplified in the new revision. The college tends to be autonomous and must have 10 years of existence along with NAAC or NBA accreditation for at least 3 programmes. A college having less than 3 programs must be accredited. Though constituent colleges shall have undergone independent accreditation. The college has a unique discipline, Indian knowledge system, yoga, defence studies, addressing the strategies needs of the country, engaging in preservation of Indian cultural heritage, preservation of the environment, skill development, sports, language or doesn't need to have 10 years of existence or accredited by NAAC or NBA to be an autonomous college. A new provision has been introduced as an autonomous college can merge with another autonomous college(s) run by the same parent body of the autonomous college, with prior approval of the parent university. IQAC shall be established in an autonomous college for regular monitoring of the college. Offered courses are, an autonomous college free to start a certificate on diploma course with salary issued under the seal of autonomous college degree programme at undergraduate and postgraduate level, PhD programs, rename UG or PG programme. Autonomous colleges shall have an examination cell that shall maintain all the records of the student evaluations and examinations. The provision of an autonomy grant is removed. The autonomous college shall have governing body, academic council, board of studies, finance committee, and non-statutory committees.

## Conclusion

Autonomy is the backbone of education, especially higher education. Institutional autonomy not only allows change to pursue innovation that improves the quality and relevance of higher education, but it also brings statutory reforms to the institution as a whole. Autonomy is an old practice in the field of education in India. There were so many ancient educational institutions that were autonomous for example Takshashila, Nalanda, Valanbi, and so on. Before independence, there were 26 colleges in India in 1857 which has autonomous status. But Indian University Act 1904 by Lord Curzon had reduced the college autonomy to some extent. In 1949, Radhakrishnan Commission also known as University Education Commission says in favour of college autonomy. In 1962 Committee of Colleges talked in favour of autonomous status. All India Federation of University and College Teacher Association in 1962 has strongly opposed the autonomous college and pointed out some drawbacks of the idea. In 1964.

Kothari Commission stated that colleges should have autonomous status but he didn't provide any clear-cut idea and recommendation for it. Ministry of Education Commission on autonomous college 1966 has recommended a few steps to get autonomy status to colleges completely based on a trial basis. The Committee of Governance of Universities and Colleges 1971 reported that, In India, there is a lack of conceptual clarification about college autonomy and its work process and till now there is no colleges have achieved autonomy status. The Central Advisory Board of Education endorsement for autonomy to colleges has submit a report in 1972. It stated that in the last 5-year plan there was no college giving autonomous status and the next 5-year plan which was the 5<sup>th</sup> 5-year plan should get at least 5% of the total colleges' autonomy status. UGC Guidelines on Autonomous Colleges in 1974 insisted upon colleges should get autonomous status. But, till that time the colleges and the teachers were no more interested and didn't want to be overburdened by the extra work of autonomous college. The National Policy on Education, 1986 has acknowledged the need for autonomy to affiliated colleges. In 2018 University Grants Commission's revised guidelines were suggested in favour of autonomous colleges. According to it an autonomous college would develop and restructure its course of study syllabus, study programmes and examination system under the UGC specification of degree 2014. NEP 2020 has strongly in favour of college autonomy and prescribed a clear court guideline for colleges to get autonomous status. University Grant Commission 2023 has released a new regulation of autonomous colleges. It is in the favour of colleges to get autonomy status to colleges.

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