UNIT 5 : EDUCATIONAL AUTONOMY

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to –

- describe the term Educational Autonomy;
- state the key aspects of Educational Autonomy;
- explain the present status of educational autonomy in India;
- explain the functioning of autonomous college; and
- understand the issues and concerns of educational autonomy in India.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

If you observe different higher education systems across the world, you will find that countries are modifying their governance structures and systems to ensure higher autonomy and greater accountability. Though higher education in India is highly centralised and institutions have limited autonomy, presently the system strives for providing greater autonomy for

its institutions. Evidences from different higher education systems of many countries suggest that creating successful universities requires a supportive governance structure in which universities or colleges have the autonomy to achieve their mandated objectives, whether research or teaching, with adequate accountability.

This unit introduces you to the meaning, concept and origin of Educational Autonomy along with the issues and challenges of Autonomous colleges in India. Further, you will also get a clear picture of the extent and effect of autonomy in Indian Education System.

5.3 EDUCATIONAL AUTONOMY – ITS MEANING AND CONCEPT

The term 'Autonomy' or 'Autonomous' means "self norm" or "self formulation of rules". The term may be applied both to the individuals and to a group or an institution. On the other hand, the term 'Autonomy' also implies freedom to *explore, innovate* and *excel.*

The etymology of the concept of Autonomy derives from the Greek word 'autonomous' which means 'having its own laws' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015).

The term "Autonomy" in education means that educational institutions should be free to take decision in their administration and academic affairs. Academic autonomy is the freedom to decide academic issues like curriculum, instructional material, pedagogy, and techniques of students' evaluation. Administrative autonomy is the freedom to manage its own affairs related to physical and human resources of institution.

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." Academic autonomy denotes self-governance of a university and is not limited to a narrow sense of designing the academic curriculum. Financial management and controls are also integral to the concept of autonomy at the institutional level. Institutional autonomy and academic freedom are highly interlinked.

Autonomy does mean self-governance of various degrees at all levels of an institution. It involves the selection of students; academic restructuring; ways to examine them; and all related aspects. Extrapolating autonomy to department level would involve the freedom to design and execute the quality of teaching, assessments, research, and extension. Autonomy to a student gives the flexibility of classes, gives ample time for developing skills required for the market as also getting involved in selecting major and minor specialisations, driving entrepreneurship and innovation, or other activities of their choice in a graduated manner. In short, it would amount to the freedom to make all strategic and operational choices (Sancheti and Pillai, 2020).

The prospects of autonomy can be presented as below:

1. Autonomy in respect of Academic Affairs: It includes the following points-
   - Curriculum development and course of the study.
   - Improving the examination system
   - Improving in teaching learning process
   - Promote extension activities and outreach programmes that would enrich the curriculum
2. Autonomy in respect of their administrative affairs.
3. It allows possibility for motivation and creativity to teachers and students. It will provide greater job satisfaction for them.
4. Autonomy will enhance the accountability and responsibility of institution.

5.3.1 Aims of Autonomy in Education

The aims of autonomy in education can be listed as below:

- To provide opportunity to the administrator, teachers and students to make innovation in education.
- To utilise their creative talent
- To improve the standards of teaching and examination.
- To improve quality of research in education.

- To provide academic innovations.
- To achieve academic excellence.

5.3.2 Aspects of Institutional Autonomy

Prakash (2011) elaborates aspects of institutional autonomy in India under three heads: academic autonomy, administrative autonomy, and financial autonomy.

- **Academic Autonomy:** It involves: a) designing academic programmes and curricula; b) autonomy to decide one's own procedure for selection of research fellows; c) adoption of choice-based credit courses; d) autonomy of departments; e) setting up of internal quality assurance cells; f) switching over to internal evaluation; g) performance appraisal of teachers with adequate weightage for research work based on quantifiable parameters; h) autonomy to establish linkages for academic and research collaboration in India and abroad; i) transparency and objectivity in the selection of faculty on an all-India basis; and j) quality of research with a focus on international benchmarks such as citation indices, and patents.
- **Administrative Autonomy:** It involves: a) management system in the university to encourage best practices of governance; b) head of the institution to have the autonomy to determine both the rank and the number of positions of professors, as well as associate and assistant professors; c) outsourcing of non-academic activities for efficiency and effectiveness; d) a central/state higher education tribunal for grievance redressal mechanisms; e) norms of accountability to be evolved which are open, participative and data-based; and f) charter of responsibility and devolution and delegation of authority defined for different levels within the higher education system.
- **Financial Autonomy:** It involves: a) provision of funds to individual institutions in a united manner to ensure greater

degree of freedom; b) mechanisms for deciding the fee structure; c) scholarships to meritorious and deserving students from the lower economic strata; and d) undertaking consultancy assignments and sponsored research projects.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1: Define educational autonomy.

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Q. 2: Write two aims of educational autonomy.

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5.4 AUTONOMY AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The concept of university autonomy has been discussed in India almost for the past four decades. The Gajendragadkar Committee Report (UGC, 1971) states "The concept of University autonomy is often misunderstood. It is neither a 'legal concept', nor a 'constitutional concept'. It is an ethical concept and an academic concept. This concept does not question how in a democratic society like ours legislatures are ultimately sovereign, and have a right to discuss and determine the question of policy relating to education, including higher education. The concept of university autonomy, however, means that it would be appropriate on the part of democratic legislatures not to interfere with the administration of university life, both academic and non-academic."

The Kothari Commission was established in the year of 1964-64 under the chairperson of D.S. Kothari. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) considered autonomy a must for intellectual development and had recommended the following peculiarities:

- Freedom in curriculum design
- Adoption of new teaching – learning methods
- Revision of rules for admission
- Implementation of separate evaluation methods

- Introduction of specific programmes.

The National Policy on Education (1986) also suggests increasing the number of Autonomous colleges.

The Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on *Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions* (2005) has enumerated the strength of autonomy and accountability as below:

- Innovation
- Experimentation
- Expansion and maximisation of potential
- Quality improvement
- Societal relevance
- Full involvement of teacher in the entire system
- Confidence building between students and teachers
- Transparency in teaching and evaluation
- Increased scope for educational reforms
- Speedy implementation of programme

The benchmarks developed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for autonomy and accountability of HEIs are as below:

- Willingness to accept ownership on quality matters to be achieved by self and peer appraisal of teachers, students and programmes.
- Increase of peer opinion in higher education.
- Restructuring of curricula to update knowledge along with good communication, managerial and entrepreneurship skills and employability.
- Updated teaching-learning methods and modules.
- Improved documentation utilising the advances of information technology.
- Improved student services in IT based learning resources and support services.
- Healthy practices and greater involvement of students, parents and alumni.

Autonomy refers the dynamism and freedom that require to an

institution to change the course structure and curriculum to fit the demands of time or situation. But autonomy is not confined only in academic autonomy; the idea of 'university autonomy' may be truly defined as the freedom of an institution to run its affairs without direction or influence from any level of government. Autonomy will give an institution sufficient time to focus on ways to maximise excellence at par with global institutions. The recent changes in the Indian education system demand a relook at the concept of autonomy, incorporating the diversity of universities. Sancheti and Pillai (2020) have identified the following reason for that:

- Firstly, the current systems of regulation-based autonomy have ignored the recent demographic and compositional shifts in education. Though the number of private institutions is increasing day by day in India but the model of governance has been relatively slow to change.
- Secondly, wherever the central government has taken incremental steps, their implementation at the state level has been tardy or one of inaction.
- Thirdly, our understanding of autonomy does not always consider the interconnections across the related concepts like academic, managerial, administrative, and financial dimensions.
- Finally, most of the existing regulations are based on the affiliating model which does not seek to address the aspirational value of Indian institutions in quality and diversity.

In short, institutions of higher education (IHEs) in India need to be looked through a different lens to conceive the reality of autonomy. As such, the National Education Policy 2020 has recognised limited teacher and institutional autonomy as one of the major problems of higher education and suggests the following measures for the greater autonomy of higher educational institutions:

- moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy
- governance of HEIs by high qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy
- a stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation, will be established. Colleges will be encouraged, mentored, supported, and

incentivised 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.

- HEIs will have the autonomy and freedom to move gradually from one category to another, based on their plans, actions, and effectiveness.
- 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.
- Foster the 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.
- Increased faculty and institutional autonomy in setting curricula.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 3: Write two recommendations of Kothari Commission on autonomy of education.

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Q. 4: Write two recommendations of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on *Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions.*

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5.5 RECENT INITIATIVES BY MHRD AND UGC FOR EDUCATIONAL AUTONOMY

There are different kinds of Universities in India as per the rules of government. In India Universities are recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC). Apart from UGC, there are 15 Professional Councils which control various aspects of accreditation. At present, the following types and numbers of Universities are there in India (see Table 5.):

Table 5.1: Types and Numbers of Universities in India

Type of University	Number of Universities
Central University	48
Central Open University	01
Institution of National Importance	135
State Public University	386
Institutions under State Legislature Act	05
State Open University	14
State Private University	327
State Private Open University	01
Deemed University-Government	36
Deemed University- Government Aided	10
Deemed University- Private	80
Grand Total	**1043**

Source: AISHE, 2019-20, Ministry of Education, Govt. of India

Many committees and recommendations in India have stressed upon the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions. In this regard, recently the Rashtriya Ucchhatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) (MHRD, 2013) has given the following suggestions:

- It suggested amendments or legislations to ensure the existence of state universities as autonomous independent entities.
- It recommended the withdrawal of the state from the management functions of the university.
- It suggested the creation of bodies or agencies like State Higher Education Councils to carry out some of the detailed policy, planning,

and supervision functions in the sector. Providing sector wide services and allowing institutions to adopt new funding models that give them greater freedom to explore new sources of income are also recommended.

- It suggested new forms of accountability through reporting on performance and outcomes in achieving nationally-set targets for the sector.
- It also suggested gradual withdrawal of the state from decisions on the appointment of Chairpersons of the Executive Council or Vice Chancellor and members of the Executive Council.
- Grant of special status through Graded Autonomy to institutions and Institutions of Eminence (IoE) are two special moves in this regard.

Notwithstanding, arguments are going on in favour and against autonomy of education in our country. For example, when the government of India decided to grant 'autonomy' to some twenty educational institutions, including many in the private sector in early 2018, many people criticised this move and expressed their apprehension that the government was converting education into a trade with market forces taking away the real 'public' from education. There is, however, another side of the story too. The issue of granting autonomy to institutions may be seen in another context too, i.e. efforts to internationalisation of Indian higher education. For that, autonomy is pivotal to promote and institutionalise excellence in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). It can help to transform the HEIs institutions of the country to achieve global excellence. It is in this rationale that the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) came up with the idea of Institutions of Excellence of two categories – Grade I and Grade II – depending on an institution's standing as assessed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Autonomy to select institutions when granted may result in 'freedom' in several areas—to start new courses, new programs, hiring of foreign faculty, and admitting foreign students on a different and yet undefined fee structure (Sancheti and Pillai, 2020).

Establishment of Autonomous College is also another important

scheme of UGC to ensure autonomy to colleges. We are going to discuss about the autonomous colleges in the following section:

5.5.1 Autonomous Colleges

The UGC has a scheme for granting autonomous status to colleges. Some of the objectives were to allow colleges to exercise freedom in framing courses of study and syllabus, devise appropriate teaching methods and conduct evaluation and assessment independently. The colleges recognised under Sections 2(f) and 12(B) of the UGC Act with sufficient academic and non-academic resources are eligible to apply for the conferment of autonomy by UGC.

The National Policy on Education (1986-92) formulated the following objectives for autonomous colleges. An autonomous college will have the freedom to:

- Determine and prescribe its own courses of study and syllabi and restructure and redesign the courses to suit local needs
- Prescribe rules for admission in consonance with the reservation policy of the state government.
- Evolve methods of assessment of students' performance, the conduct of examinations and notification of results.
- Use modern tools of educational technology to achieve higher standards and greater creativity.

Highlighting the importance of autonomous colleges, the UGC document on the XII Plan profile of higher education in India clearly states that: "The only safe and better way to improve the quality of undergraduate education is to delink most of the colleges from the affiliating structure. Colleges with academic and operative freedom are doing better and have more credibility. The financial support to such colleges boosts the concept of autonomy."

Draft of National Educational Policy of India (MHRD, 2018) observes:

"Colleges are unable to chart their own courses, controlled as they are in many significant ways by the affiliating university. Higher Education Developments of the State and other such bodies often tend to treat universities and colleges as an extension of their hierarchy. All this deeply undermines institutional autonomy."

The UGC guidelines for Autonomous Colleges are as follows:

UGC grants freedom to:

- Determine and prescribe its own courses of study and syllabi.
- Prescribe rules for admission in consonance with the reservation policy of the state government.
- Introduce innovative methods of assessment of student work, the conduct of examinations and notifications of results.
- Use modern tools of educational technology to achieve higher standards and greater creativity.

The main features of Autonomous College are as below:

- Enjoy full autonomy in deciding courses, syllabus, admission and fees.
- May or may not grant diploma or degree to students.
- More academic freedom to changes courses and syllabus etc.
- Fall under the administrative control of Department of Higher Education, MHRD.
- It allows possibilities for innovation and creativity to teachers and students so that it will provide job satisfaction for them.
- There are four dimensions of autonomy i.e. Academic Autonomy, Administrative Autonomy, Financial Autonomy and Managerial Autonomy.
- The Administrative patterns of Autonomous Colleges Are:
    1. Statutory Bodies
        i. Governing Body
        ii. Academic Council
        iii. Board of Studies
        iv. Finance Committee

2. Other Committees
    i. Planning and Evaluating Committee
    ii. Curriculum Review Committee
    iii. Appeals and Grievance Committee
    iv. Admission Committee
    v. Library Committee
    vi. Students Welfare Committee
    vii. Academic Audit Committee
    viii. Research Committee
    ix. Extra Curricular Activities Committee etc.

- The Parent University will award degrees to the students evaluated by Autonomous Colleges. The degree certificates will be in a common format implemented by the University. The name of the college will be mentioned in the degree certificate as wished by colleges.

The advantages of Autonomous Colleges can be enumerated below:

- Autonomous colleges get better flexibility in designing courses in accordance contemporary need and relevance
- The announcement of result is not time consuming in comparison to other universities.
- Autonomous college frames their own rules and regulations on the basis of the students' needs.
- It can design the curriculum and courses of study according to the need of the present society.
- It added the facilities of extra-curricular activities, innovative method of teaching etc.

Present Status of Autonomous Colleges in India

There are 827 colleges across 25 states and 117 universities conferred with autonomy status. The largest numbers of autonomous colleges are presently situated in the state of Tamil Nadu (227), followed by those in Maharashtra (117) and Andhra Pradesh(114) (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: List of UGC Approved 827 Autonomous Colleges as on date 31.03.2021

Sl. No.	State	No. of Universities having Autonomous Colleges	No. of Autonomous Colleges (as of **31.03.2021**)
1	ANDHRA PRADESH	12	114
2	ASSAM	02	03
3	BIHAR	02	02
4	CHHATTISGARH	04	13
5	GOA	01	01
6	GUJARAT	05	05
7	HARYANA	01	01
8	HIMACHAL PRADESH	05	05
9	JAMMU & KASHMIR	02	04
10	JHARKHAND	02	05
11	KARNATAKA	12	79
12	KERALA	04	22
13	MADHYA PRADESH	09	44
14	MAHARASTRA	11	117
15	MANIPUR	02	02
16	NAGALAND	01	03
17	ODISHA	07	48
18	PONDICHERY	01	04
19	PUNJAB	04	12
20	RAJASTHAN	04	07
21	TAMIL NADU	12	227
22	TELANGANA	05	74
23	UTTAR PRADESH	07	12
24	UTTRAKHAND	02	04
25	WEST BENGAL	04	18
	Total	**117**	**827**

Source: www.ugc.ac.in



ACTIVITY 5.1

How will institutional autonomy help your local college in achieving excellence in its functioning? Analyse the different aspects of institutional autonomy in the context of your local college and make a plan for the college as an autonomous institution.

5.6 ISSUES AND CONCERN OF EDUCATIONAL AUTONOMY IN INDIA

- India has taken bold initiative by granting autonomy to select institutions to compete globally. The four pillars of educational autonomy- academic, managerial, administrative, and financial should be practiced in true sense in all the autonomous institutions. But it is not easy to implement in reality, for instance, without adequate finances and financial autonomy, the other three would become dysfunctional over some time.
- Further, in the current scheme of things, it is extremely difficult to define the exact roles of different stakeholders of autonomy. For example, in a university setting, how would one define the roles of the Vice Chancellor, Board of Management, Directors, Deans, and students? As such, practice of autonomy in institutions is a difficult exercise to handle.
- The government has granted Institute of Excellence (IoE) status to both public and private institutions in India. Though many institutions have been given autonomy but still unable to get rid of various regulators or regulations while functioning.
- There is also another set of problems arising out of some autonomous institutions in terms of abusing the privileges of autonomy. It would result in the re-introduction of curb, control, and addition of more regulations to prevent the misuse of autonomy. There is evidence that many higher educational institutions having autonomous status

functioning without necessary compliances or approvals from regulatory bodies.

- Many autonomous institutions are facing financial constraints in its operations, as such, achieving financial autonomy is the most difficult hurdle for both government and private institutions. Though self-financed institutions are slightly better controlled, some have shown an inclination for unwanted overheads and little exposure to good financial practices.
- Condition of affiliated colleges is another concern. Ravi et al (2019) observe that under the affiliating university model, the supervisory authority for most colleges is the university or a government authority—both lack the capacity to effectively regulate their constituent colleges and hold them accountable.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 5: Write two features of Autonomous College.

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Q. 6: Write two advantages of Autonomous College.

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

- The term 'Autonomy' or 'Autonomous' means "Self norm" or "self formulation of rules".
- The term Autonomy in education means that educational institution should be free to take decision in their administration and academic affairs.
- Autonomy does mean self-governance of various degrees at all levels of an institution.

- There are four dimensions of autonomy i.e. Academic Autonomy, Administrative Autonomy, Financial Autonomy and Managerial Autonomy.
- The UGC has a scheme for granting autonomous status to colleges.
- Autonomous college could themselves develop courses in accordance with global employability.
- There are 827 colleges across 25 states and 117 universities conferred with autonomy status.
- Many autonomous institutions are facing financial constraints in its operations, as such achieve financial autonomy is the most difficult hurdle for both government and private institutions.



5.8 FURTHER READING

1) Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of Secondary and Higher Education (2005): *Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions.* New Delhi: Government of India.

2) Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) (2013): *Report of the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan, National Higher Education Mission.* New Delhi: Government of India.

3) Prakash, Ved (2011). Concerns about Autonomy and Academic Freedom in Higher Education Institutions", Economic and Political Weekly, 46(16), pp. 36-40.

4) Ravi, Shamika; Gupta, Neelanjana and Nagaraj, Puneeth (2019). *Reviving Higher Education in India,* Brookings India Research Paper No. 112019-01 ISBN 978-81-941963-4-1.

5) Sancheti, S. & Pillai, L. (2020). *"Institutional autonomy in Indian Higher Education System- need for a serious debate"* Reimagining Indian Universities, AIU, New Delhi.

6) Sharmah, Shelija. (2012). *Problems and Issues in Indian Education*. New Delhi: Vikash publishing House Private Limited.

7) University Grants Commission (UGC), (1971): Report of the Committee on Governance of Universities and Colleges, Part 1, *Governance of Universities*, New Delhi: UGC.

5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No. 1: The term "Autonomy" in education means that educational institution should be free to take decision in their administration and academic affairs. Academic autonomy is the freedom to decide academic issues like curriculum, institutional material, pedagogy, techniques of students' evaluation. Administrative autonomy is the freedom to institution to manage its own affairs related to physical, human resources of institution. It includes financial autonomy too.

Ans. to Q. No. 2: The two aims of autonomy in education are as below:

- To provide opportunity to the administrator, teachers and students to make innovation in education; and
- To improve the standards of teaching and examination.

Ans. to Q. No. 3: Two recommendations of Kothari Commission on autonomy of education are as below:

(i) Freedom in curriculum design; and

(ii) Adoption of new teaching – learning methods

Ans. to Q. No. 4: The two recommendations of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee on *Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions* are as below:

- Full involvement of teacher in the entire system; and
- Confidence building between students and teachers.

Ans. to Q. No. 5: The two features of Autonomous College are as below:

(i) Enjoy full autonomy in deciding courses, syllabus, admission and fees; and

(ii) More academic freedom to changes courses and syllabus etc.

Ans. to Q. No. 6: The two advantages of Autonomous College are as below:

(i) Autonomous college could themselves develop courses in accordance with global employability; and

(ii) Autonomous college frames their own rules and regulations on the basis of the students' needs.



5.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (answer each question in about 150 words)

Q. 1: What do you mean by Autonomy in education?

Q. 2: Write the objectives for autonomous colleges suggested by the NPE (1986-92).

Q. 3: Write the benchmarks developed by the NAAC for autonomy of HEIs.

Q. 4: Describe the UGC guidelines for Autonomous Colleges.

B) Long Question (Answer each question in about 300- 500 words)

Q. 1: Discuss the aspects of institutional autonomy in education.

Q. 2: Discuss the Rashtriya Ucchhatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) suggestions on institutional autonomy.

Q. 3: Write in details about Autonomous College.

Q. 4: Discuss the issues and concerns of autonomy in higher education in India.

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