

# **Autonomy in the Academic, Administrative and Financial Spheres of Autonomous Colleges: - An Evaluative Study**

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## **Objectives**

1. To study the organisational structure of autonomous colleges.
2. To study the policies and plans formulated by the Govt/ Universities/ UGC to strengthen Autonomous Colleges.
3. To study the linkages of autonomous colleges with the Govt/ University/ UGC.
4. To study the changes taken place in the colleges after autonomy has been granted.
5. To study the accountability of teachers and principals in such colleges.

## **Sample, Tools and Data Collection**

The sample for the study consisted of four colleges. The sample included 20 teachers each from these colleges and the Principals. Three tools were prepared namely structured interview schedules for the Principals, questionnaire containing 36 items for the teachers and a comprehensive Observation Schedule for the college. The case studies have been prepared for two colleges. Data analysis was mainly qualitative. The study did not probe into the autonomy from the perspective of the students or of the managements.

The colleges are headed by the Principal. There are various heads of the Departments, teaching and non-teaching staff. This is not in much variation from the normal college administration. The decision making bodies in the college are Governing Body, Academic Council, Board of Studies, Finance Committees and the Examination Committees. In this respect these colleges resemble the universities. The membership of these bodies is taken seriously by the teachers and they (72.5%) feel that their suggestions are taken note of.

There are various agencies related to the autonomous colleges. UGC sanctions the autonomy grant for the autonomous colleges. It gives preference to the autonomous colleges in the selection of Colleges with Potential for Excellence. There are proposals to give them the status of degree awarding colleges. The analysis by NNAC proved that autonomous colleges are definitely better performing than the affiliated colleges. The Universities are the key players in the success of autonomy and should guide the colleges. Of late, as the concept attained clarity there evolved a spirit of cooperation and coordination. However, the universities do not take any proactive role in furthering the spirit of autonomy. The state governments are still not very receptive and enthusiastic about the idea.

The autonomy has a very strong impact on the academic sphere of the colleges. About two thirds of the teachers were found to be guiding research at various levels. All the teachers were reported to be members in some decision making committees. Though they feel overburdened, teachers did not feel the administrative responsibility having a negative impact on discharging their academic responsibilities.

All the colleges were found to be free to update their syllabus periodically. The colleges can start any new courses provided there will not be any burden on the government for appointing the teachers. This leads to introduction of new courses in the self-financing stream. All the colleges have non-conventional courses and new papers in the existing courses. The Board of Studies meets at least once a year and decides on the changes in syllabus. There are members co-opted from the industries.

All the colleges have introduced the Continuous Internal Evaluation. The weightage varies from 20% to 50%. Assignments, unit tests, presentation, monthly tests, quiz, mid-term examination and model examination are the most widely used methods of evaluation. The arbitrariness in the CIA is minimised by prescribing the objective criteria for the marking. There are grievance redressal mechanisms in place in all the colleges.

There are various methods of teacher-evaluation followed in these colleges. This include self-evaluation, evaluation by students and Principals. More than half of the teachers have reported that there are some quality control checks in the colleges. All the colleges were found to be providing opportunity for professional development.

The college use mainly lecture methods (94%), assignments (86%), seminars (66%), demonstration (50%), field trips (35%) and projects (36%). Projector (44%), charts and maps (35%), computer (28%), models (21%) and visual aids (21%) are the mostly used teaching aids used in these colleges. The autonomy had resulted in certain innovative ideas like compulsory community services. Increased workload was cited as the major hassle due to autonomy. The teachers perceived that the autonomy had a very big role in the development of the college in all the spheres like building, library, books, teaching aids, courses, papers and teaching methods.

Some good practices were noticed during the course of study. These include Jan Bhagidari system and teacher guardian system in MP, colour coding for library in Madurai, Standing Committee on Academic Affairs and quality assurance cell in Erode, complaint boxes and in-house development of the software for the examination in Model Science College, Jabalpur, peer counselling and collaboration with international institutions in Madurai.

Some extensions activities are noted in these colleges. The students union and politics is controlled in these colleges.

There is no financial autonomy given to the colleges. At the same time, the regressive role of the government in the higher education is moving towards the total financial autonomy for all kinds of colleges. The colleges are now free to start any courses in the self-financing stream.

Finally, it turns out that the colleges really enjoy autonomy in the academic spheres. This is being utilised by the colleges to the fullest in certain states. They have revised their syllabus and made the courses more application oriented and job oriented. The examinations are conducted regularly and results are published promptly. This is the only way to survive in the upcoming competition in the era of opening up of the higher education to the global players. What we need in these circumstances is continued updating of the skills and preparedness to cope up with the international developments. Moreover, the networking of colleges and sharing of the resources are also necessary. The investigator proposes to put a word of caution that the autonomy should not be seen as a panacea for all the ills of our higher education system