

**OLIY TA'LIM
TARAQQIYOTI ISTIQBOLLARI**

**PERSPECTIVES OF HIGHER
EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT**

**ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ
ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ**

**№10
2021**



with the support of the
Erasmus + Programme
of the European Union



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Ташкент 2021

NTM "NEO Hamkor"

OLIV TA'LIM TARAQQIYOTI ISTIQBOLLARI

O'zbekiston Respublikasi Erasmus+ ekspertlarining ilmiy-metodik jurnali, №10

2020 yilda tashkil etilgan. 2011 yildan boshlab ilmiy-uslubiy to'plam sifatida chop etilgan.

<http://www.erasmusplus.uz/ru/publication/expert-Publications/index.htm>

To'plam O'zbekistondagi Erasmus+ milliy ofisining va Oliy va o'rta maxsus ta'lim vazirligining tashkiliy ko'magi asosida nashr etildi.

Ushbu nashr Yevropa Ittifoqining Erasmus+ dasturi tomonidan moliyalashtirilgan.

Mazkur nashrda aks ettirilgan xulosalar Yevropa Komissiyasining fikrini ifoda etmaydi.

Jurnal O'zbekiston OAK tomonidan tavsiya etilgan ilmiy jurnallar ro'yxatiga kiritilgan

Google scholar va CYBERLENINKA-da indekslangan

Bosh muharrir – Professor Rakhmatullayev M.A.

NGEO "NEO Hamkor"

PERSPECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

Peer-reviewed scientific and methodological journal of Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform

Experts of the Republic of Uzbekistan, №10

Founded in 2020. It has been published as a scientific and methodological collection since 2011.

<http://www.erasmusplus.uz/ru/publication/expert-Publications/index.htm>

The journal is published with the organisational support of the National Erasmus+ Office in Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education of Uzbekistan.

The publication financed by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

The conclusions and views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect an official view of the European Commission.

It has been included to the list of publications recommended by Supreme Attestation Commission under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan

Indexed in Google scholar and CYBERLENINKA

Chief editor – Professor Marat Rakhmatullaev

НОУ "NEO Hamkor"

ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

Рецензируемый научно-методический журнал

экспертов Erasmus+ в области высшего образования Республики Узбекистан, №10

Основан в 2020 г. Издавался как научно-методический сборник с 2011 г.

<http://www.erasmusplus.uz/ru/publication/expert-Publications/index.htm>

Журнал издается при организационной поддержке Национального офиса Erasmus+ в Узбекистане и Министерства высшего и среднего специального образования Республики Узбекистан.

Издание профинансировано программой Erasmus+ Европейского Союза.

Материалы данной публикации не обязательно отражают мнения Европейской Комиссии.

Журнал включен в список научных журналов, рекомендуемых ВАК Республики Узбекистан.

Индексируется в Google scholar и CYBERLENINKA

Главный редактор – Профессор Рахматуллаев М.А.

ISSN 2181-2462

2021 NEO in Uzbekistan

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II. АВТОНОМИЯ ВУЗОВ

A WAY TOWARDS THE UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY: QUALITY OR CORRUPTION?

Pulatkhon Lutfullayev

Annotation. This paper is an attempt to comparatively assimilate the factors such as quality and corruption in condition the autonomy granted to public higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan. The paper highlights some definition and meaning of autonomy and its interdependence with accountability, responsibility and stakeholders' interest. At the end paper gives some recommendations for better performance in case of the autonomy is granted.

Key words: higher education, autonomy, quality, corruption, stakeholder, best practices, accountability and responsibility.

ПУТЬ К УНИВЕРСИТЕТСКОЙ АВТОНОМИИ: КАЧЕСТВО ИЛИ КОРРУПЦИЯ?

Лутфуллаев П. М.

Аннотация. В данной статье предпринята попытка провести сравнительный анализ таких факторов, как качество и коррупция в случае предоставления автономии государственным высшим учебным заведениям в Узбекистане. В статье разъясняется понятие автономии, даётся её определение и взаимосвязь с обязательствами, обязанностями и интересами групп, пользующихся высшим образованием. В конце статьи даны рекомендации по эффективной работе в случае автономности.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, автономия, качество, коррупция, заинтересованные стороны, лучшие практики, подотчетность и ответственность.

Introduction

Higher education in Uzbekistan is experiencing unprecedented reforms and urgent changes. These are forced by immediate expansion of campus dimensions, rapid rise of student numbers, higher demand for skilled faculty staff, new concerns by stakeholders and employers, internationalization and research. In this process models from leading foreign universities are adopting, best practices are

researching, quality assurance instruments are implemented, and fighting against the corruption policy are applied.

However, at times, practical application of new strategies that promote autonomy are hindered because of powerful factors such as corruption and incompetence of university managerial leaders. Corruption is undoubtedly a strong barrier that creates complicated obstacles to move towards quality. Therefore, the current government introduced a new decree which foresees evolutionally turning all public higher educational institutions (hereinafter HEIs) into self-financing and autonomic governance. At the ministerial level around 40 HEIs are preparing to carry out strategies that develop their own autonomy. What happens if all HEIs are given financial and managerial autonomy? Does corruption disappear or only gets more powerful? Does the managerial level think more about the quality and academic competence or do they lower the responsibility? Is the autonomy survival tool for improvement? These are the questions yet to seek the justified responses and to research by reviewing the international experiences.

First of all, it would be reasonable to clarify the definitions and meaning of university autonomy.

Autonomy provides the opportunity to self-govern and to create informed and, uncoerced decisions. Autonomy within the university is necessary for fertile teaching, effective research, and creative invention. Autonomy is an inherent trait of universities. Universities will have a unique position in a society when it has grown in its autonomy. The concept of “university autonomy” has a truly broad definition. It can cover a range of aspects related to HEIs operational activities. Autonomy means flexibility, freedom, effective decision making, quality of education and prestige for the universities. Thorence (1998) believes that university autonomy is the degree of autonomy required, given the economic, political, social and cultural state of the society concerned, to enable the university to best fulfil the role that society has assigned to it, experience demonstrating that the university cannot play this role if it does not have sufficient independence and freedom vis-à-vis society and particularly vis-à-vis State.³¹

University autonomy is broadly understood as the scope within which higher education institutions (HEIs) can take decisions without ex ante approval by an external agent (government or other organization).³²

According to Iwinska and Matei (2014), autonomy components are consisting of the following components:

³¹ Thorens, J.P. Academic freedom and university autonomy. *Prospects* 28, 401 (1998).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02736814>

³² Martinaitis Ž, Gaušas S, Paliokaitė A, Cultural and Constitutional Embeddedness of University Autonomy in Lithuania, November 2015. DOI: 10.1057/9781137388728_3

- Independence in human resources management, i.e., hiring the staff members and faculties, appointment of management staff through the selection process.
- Independence in student admission,
- Collegial decide the financial allocation, i.e., operational expenditure, salaries, equipment, research development, etc.
- Setting the academic curricular and educational standards.

Reillt et al., (2016) divides the components into government-university, university management-university staff, academic staff-students, university-business, university-internationalization³³. In this paper we propose more modified version of the autonomy components (Figure 1). The 8 key basic components which are the key factors influence to autonomy.

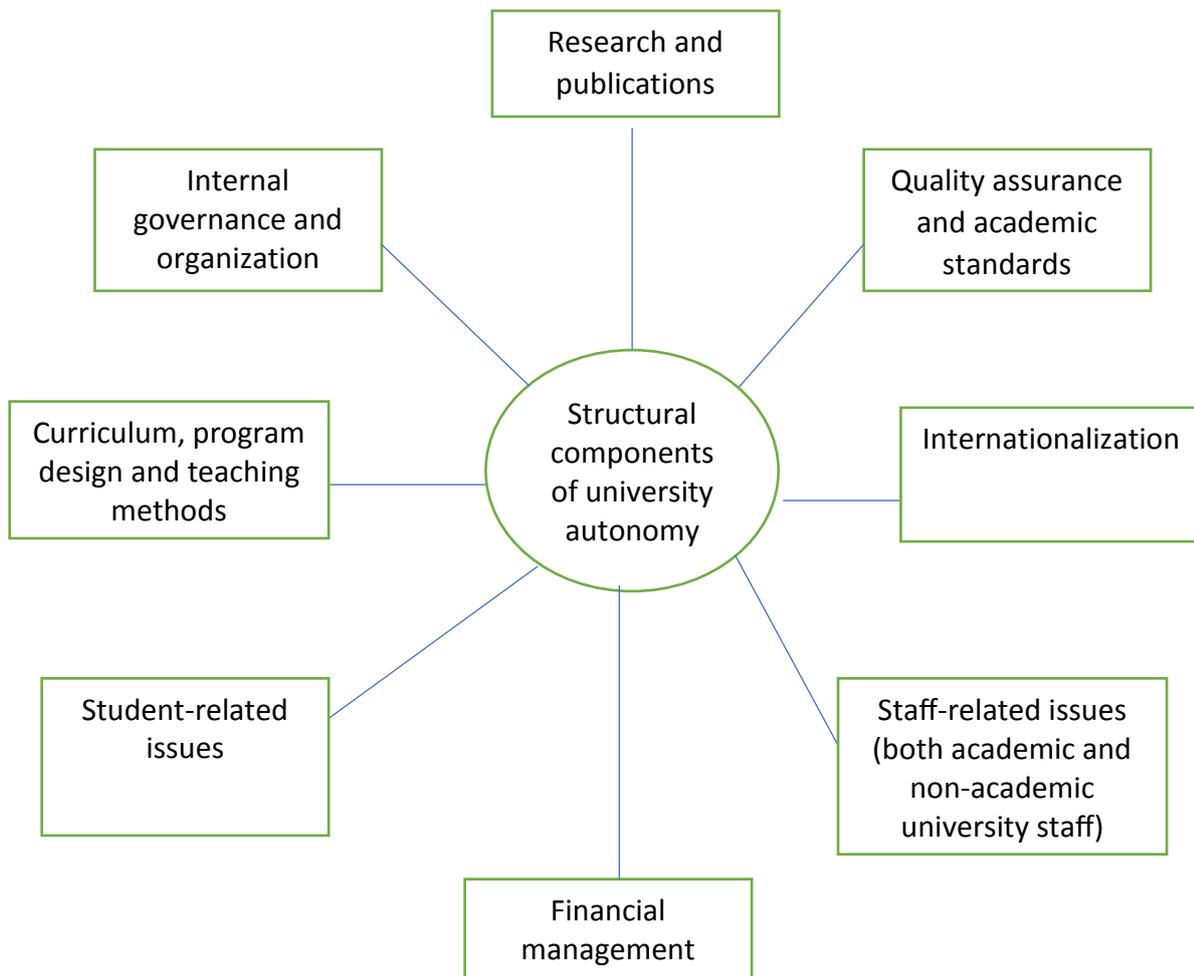


Figure 1. Structural components of university autonomy

³³ Reilly J.E., Turcan R.V., Bugaian L. (2016) (Re)Discovering University Autonomy. In: Turcan R.V., Reilly J.E., Bugaian L. (eds) (Re)Discovering University Autonomy. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137388728_16

Curriculum or program design is considered one of the major aspects in HEIs which faculty staff or a team of scholars have to take care of. The programs offered by HEIs must conform to the needs of consumers, society and employers. Programs can be exclusive, combined, interdisciplinary, joint or dual. However, the programs shouldn't be too specific or narrow hence the graduate students can find a job in society. In curriculum design, public HEIs rely on "State Educational standards" whereas the program design bases on higher education classifier. The "Leading" HEIs are considered to share the materials with "Follower" ones. For each curriculum or even per subject can be chosen the specific departments in "Leading" HEIs. How does it work if the autonomy is given? In the autonomic case curricular must be a common or individual? The current centralized system creates best platform to share the practices under the leadership of the ministry. Even though, after the decentralization, the platform of cooperation or benchmarking units should be retained in terms of curriculum or program design. Organization the often conferences or seminars could also be a solution. It is advisable to preserve the ministerial system until the HEIs successfully transform into autonomy.

State educational standards and classification

Iwinska and Matei (2014), concludes that the basic function of universities is the pursuit of truth, the production and transmission of knowledge, and that this function cannot be fulfilled in the absence of university autonomy³⁴.

However, in the case of Uzbek higher education, autonomy is obviously interdependent with responsibility and accountability. If the financial resources are spent correctly and efficiently, if the higher educational consumers such as students and parents are satisfied with the quality of education, and such other questions are a major concern of responsibility. To meet the employers and society overall demands are considered accountability. On the other hand, HEIs in Uzbekistan have strong obligations of developing the research and innovation to keep the equal position with the rapid pace of scientific and technological advancements. The presidential degree №5847 on "Approving the development concept of higher education till 2030 in the Republic of Uzbekistan" in 2019, underlines to introduce the KPI (Key Performance Indicator) method for HEIs' management staff, to increase the number of highly referred publications by teaching staff, participation in international ranking programs, implementation the credit module system of ECTS raises more responsibility. Currently, HEIs are obliged not only within the country but also to compete at region and world level. Within the article, some of the practitioners in public HEIs interviewed whether

³⁴ Julia Iwinska, Liviu Matei. (2018). University Autonomy-A Practical Handbook, Central European University Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education, Budapest, Hungary.

autonomy gives opportunity or boosts corruption? Result of study shows, giving autonomy is inevitable but it should be gradually transited by applying the international best practices. In 2022 approximately 40 HEIs are expected to reach full autonomy. Respondents believe that fairly allocating the financial and budget sources is highly important. The HEIs Council Committee or collegial decision making is crucial in the approving process. Moreover, HEIs should have the authority of electing the Rector independently. HEIs should have the opportunity of hiring experienced international faculty staff. However, most of the legislations which are connected to financial expenditure are still yet to be updated due to the fact that the public HEIs are still dominated by the state treasury department and every budget outgoing goes through their approval. Therefore, if autonomy is granted, HEIs may start to generate income not only from the tuition fees but also other sources. In this way each public HEI may start to think about diversifying its financial income in order to greatly promote and stimulate growth.

As Julia and Liviu (2014) concludes, moving towards greater financial independence from the public funds is a long process, which can only begin once key dimensions of university autonomy have been implemented and are being exercised over a period of time.

“Difficult way out” concept

Currently a widely spread concept, it appeared based on the experience of universities in western countries. The idea is about the student admission policy to HEIs which means they may be able to get the admission but the graduation hasn't to be easy. Students are welcome to be admitted if they are ready to fulfill the academic requirements and due well on the semester exams. However, the current system is not capable of holding such discipline due to external pressures and lack of knowledge and insight of teaching staff.

Based on the Input-process-output model by Jackson and Lund (2000) we recommend the following modified model to attain the “Difficult way out” concept (Figure 2)³⁵. So, in this picture student admission as an input has to be based on entrance exam (or application), i.e. if the requirements are met then he/she proceeds to start the first semester, if not then it is subject to attending the foundation study. In the process step if the student's performance below the requirements then it is subject to repeat the certain course or semester. However, implementing this model may face strong resistance because of the corruption in exams or mistrust towards the faculty by the students. Moreover, the foundation study method is still yet to be introduced. There is a proposal to minimize the

³⁵ Jackson N., Lund H. Benchmarking for Higher Education. 2000. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press. – 33 p.

bachelor degree program to 3 years and only in such cases introducing the foundation study might be useful.

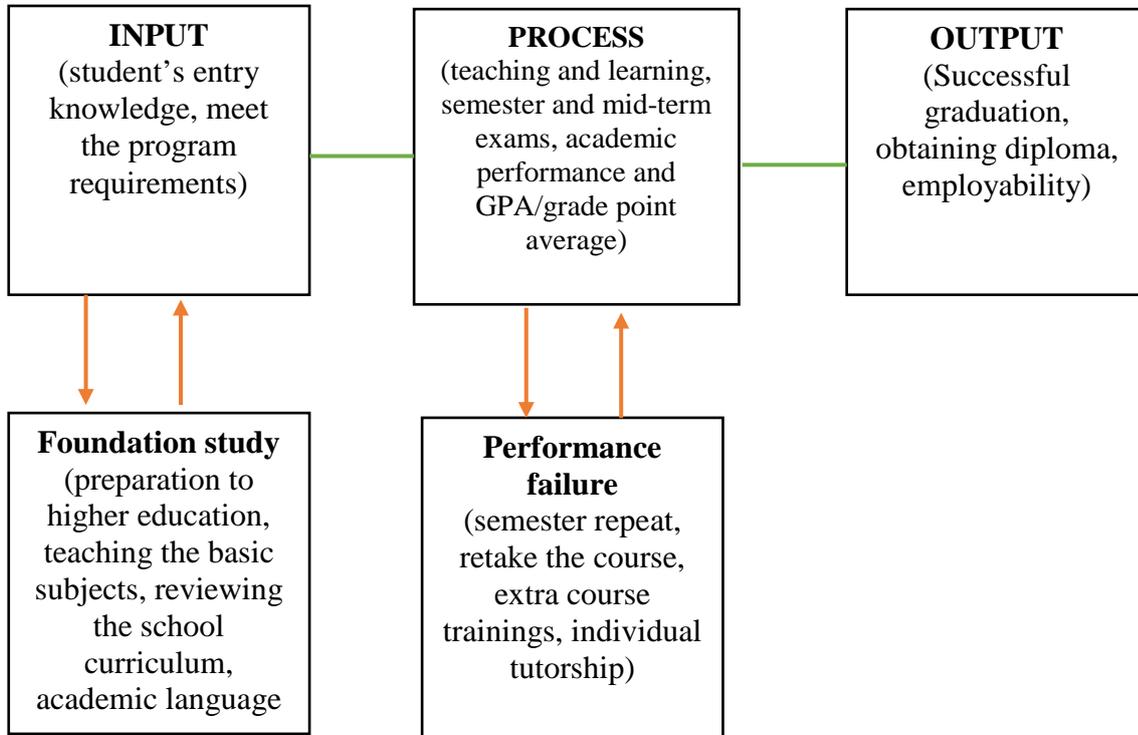


Figure 2. Modified model to attain the “Difficult way out” concept

What is more, the current system doesn’t allow you to retake the single course or single semester in case of academic failure. Instead, students have to repeat the whole one-year course by paying the tuition fee which is considered unfair. The credit module ECTS system may solve this issue which takes another couple of years till fully implemented.

Autonomy versus stakeholder’s interest

As we mentioned above autonomy is highly complex and multidimensional because of the stakeholder’s interest. Each stakeholder has different perspective and vary expectation from HEIs. Therefore, autonomy has to take account the stakeholders groups. Seungchan Choi (2018) tries to reconcile two different perspectives and come up with a more comprehensive conceptualization of university autonomy by adopting a stakeholder approach in identifying indicators of university autonomy. One perspective views university autonomy as a protection of academic freedom and the other as a performance enhancer.³⁶ We form the following groups based on current condition of Uzbek higher education

³⁶ Seungchan Choi, Identifying indicators of university autonomy according to stakeholders’ interests, November 2018, Tertiary Education and Management 25(3).

system (Figure 3). How can HEI manage to create a competitive organization by harmonizing the different stakeholder’s perspectives? Can corruption be precluded?

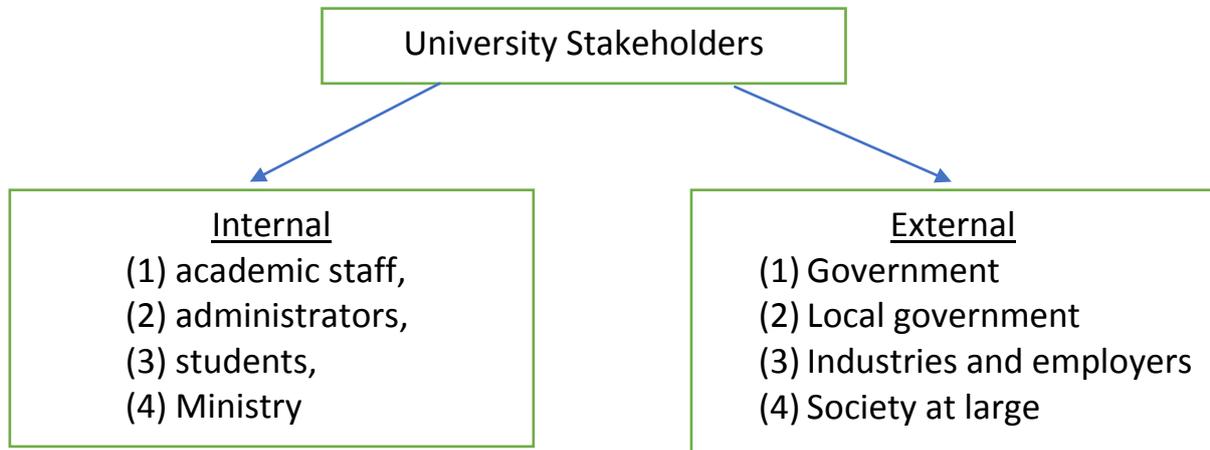


Figure 3. Group of Stakeholders in Uzbek higher education.

We think there should be a strong accreditation or quality control agency to monitor the HEI performance. The functioning organization “State inspectorate for supervision of quality in education under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan” must readjust the policy towards the public HEIs.

Conclusion

In the field of higher education, the concept of “autonomy” can have various meanings. It is considered important pre-requisite for the efficiency of the university performance especially for the countries in transition such as Uzbekistan. HEIs plays major role to contribute to economic and social development, forming the “Think tanks”, new types of structures, institutions, and ties in the society. Countries that wish to play key role in international scene, that to wish more integration, need to improve their higher education. Gradually all HEIs must experience of autonomy and at the latest they have to be able to manage the their own financial resource, to provide the academic freedom, individually design their own curricular, take of the quality and abolish the corruption.

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