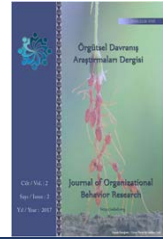




2528-9705

Örgütsel Davranış Araştırmaları Dergisi
Journal Of Organizational Behavior Research
Cilt / Vol.: 3, Sayı / Is.: S2, Yıl/Year: 2018, Kod/ID: 81S2303



IDENTIFYING DIMENSIONS AND COMPONENTS OF AN AUTONOMY UNIVERSITY FOR IRAN

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ABSTRACT

University autonomy is one of its structural and functional requirements, because the specialized complexity of knowledge requires universities to be autonomy. The intervention of external authorities such as government at the university has distorted the principle of loyalty to the scientific truth at the university and it damages the credibility of the knowledge that is produced and valued in the university. This research aims to identify dimensions and components of autonomy of the independent university in order to provide a model for the country of Iran. To this end, a qualitative study was conducted with a content analysis approach. Eight people of faculty members from state universities across the country, that from the perspective of students, were graduates, group managers and most competent colleague professors of their training group, they were placed in research sample by targeted sampling and snowball puppies. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Data processing was done using content analysis method using open source coding and MAXQDA12 software. Based on the findings, the main components of the university include financial autonomy, employee autonomy, academia autonomy and organizational autonomy, and five interfaces, 1 - government - university; 2 - university management – university staff; 3 - university staff - students; 4 - university - business; and 5. Internationalization of university was recognized that affects academic freedom and academic accountability.

Keywords: *Autonomy, University Autonomy, Scientific Freedom, Accountability.*

INTRODUCTION

Universities and higher education centers are institutions that they need to take a step forward more than other institutions in terms of knowledge, sciences, skills, and behavioral patterns and, due to role of universities in responding to social and universal expectations and needs, it is required that higher education and educational institutions improve their activities and process quality constantly (Pahlavan, 2015, p 18)

The basis of a university as a social system in which handling knowledge is considered the most important and critical issue has a very long history. One of the factors that contributed to the growth and dynamism of the world's leading universities was their autonomy. The association of society and how to meet its changing needs and achieve its goals requires academic and practical freedom of the university in the shadow of autonomy. It is expected that universities can contribute significantly to economic growth, national security and, in general, to solve the problems of the community, and it would be impossible without the strengthening and granting authority over the academic community. In higher education, many research and educational activities should be taken by faculty members; hence the autonomy of the faculty and ultimately the university is very important. That's why higher

education institutions are called as professional bureaucracy. But in addition to the granting of autonomy, accountability autonomy is also needed. Freedom of expression and education based on the findings of the project is an important justification for the autonomy of the universities. It promotes the dynamism of the institution. Freedom in the context of knowledge (research), knowledge dissemination (education), and the improvement of the lives of human beings are realized in the light of autonomy.

Different axis of knowledge in higher education centers is the core of activity. Different axis of knowledge constitutes the components of higher education and there will be no dynamism without institutionalizing scientific freedom and autonomy. And the faculty with its autonomy, based on its expertise, and, to a large extent, apart from other subsystems, performs its scientific activities in the organization. The university is an institution for the accumulation of professional skills, including the dominant groups on human sciences, which need of the association of skills and knowledge in the form of different groups make them autonomous and flexible. In an organization where the processes of acquisition, dissemination and development of knowledge are in different nature, dividing the plateau and, as a result, decentralized decisions are the most important tools of activity. When non-organization forces can expand their influence on higher education and divert it from their paths that reduce organizational diversity and university autonomy. In this case, the professional tasks of these organizations will be greatly damaged. The abusive laws and control of organizational behaviors and the human resources of the court result in the frustration and disillusionment of faculty members and their unwillingness will lead to innovate (Arraste, 2005, p. 11).

In most societies, there have always been various obstacles to the realization of university autonomy. Some of these barriers include:

- The laws and regulations that are in place in some countries to reduce costs;
- Taxpayers and legislators' expectations about the accountability of most universities;
- Increasing the rules and regulations about universities due to the plurality of legislative centers;
- Reviewing program in a repetitive way and budget of universities;
- The existence of multiple organizations to verify and confirm the purchases and costs of universities;
- Flexible structures in society (including institutions, fields, attitudes, practices, and cultures) (Frostkhah, 2010, p. 36).

University is an institution requiring scientific and organizational autonomy and academic freedom in which professors and researchers, students, experts and employees who enjoy intellectual, occupational, financial, political and social security, can develop their thoughts and knowledge and deepen their social commitments (Moin, 2014, p. 20).

In the past decades, universities have always been forced to maintain a delicate balance between their right of autonomy and the powers of the communities in which they operate, although they have not always been successful, but the ideals of their autonomy will never remove (Ghofrani, 2016, p. 77). And further, many universities found that the growing autonomy of the university represents an important step toward modernizing higher education in the 21st century (Stremen, 2015, p. 28).



Academic autonomy and self-management universities are defined by academics themselves, as academics themselves manage the university and control the academic system and make decisions about it within the university (Frosatkhah, 2010, p. 11).

In this regard, one of the most important issues is the "existence of scientific freedom" in universities. This means that members of the scientific community are immune from any discrimination in academic, research, training, education, and scientific sharing. And no interference or repression by the government or other organizations and resources threaten them (Rabi'i, 2012).

Another factor that closely correlates with university autonomy and its obvious effects is the university's discussion of accountability (Marandi, 2013, p. 139).

In the encyclopedia of higher education, six dimensions of university autonomy, which are collectively defined it are as follows:

- A. Release of non-academic interventions in the management of the institution
- B. Freedom of action in the allocation of funds, as the institution considers appropriate.
- C. Freedom of action in recruitment and employment requirement
- D. Freedom of action in the selection of students
- E. Freedom of design and presenting materials
- F. Freedom in determining the criteria and determining the method of evaluation (Tait, 1997, p. 70)

In line with Autonomy University, extensive research has been conducted inside and outside Iran that emphasize the importance and necessity of the autonomy of universities (Milani, 2015, Fath Allahi, 2015, Razaq Marandi, 2014, Raylei, 2016, Kerry, 2016, Stormman, 2015, Vargase, 2014, Camilla Flouritina, 2013).

The main functions of academic autonomy can be found in the following four sources: a- organizational autonomy; b- financial autonomy; c- employees' autonomy; d- academic autonomy (Sterman et al., 2011, P. 18).

Organizational Autonomy: It means the ability of universities to determine the structure and body of governance, the method of selecting executive directors, determining the competencies of executives, the administrative period of executive directors, their appointment and dismissing them.

Financial Autonomy: Universities cover two important areas. One is the general budgetary framework (which includes financial contracts, intermediate financial bodies, and financial reporting approaches), and another refers to the financial capacity of universities, which includes the following key elements:

- The extent to which the university can accumulate reserves and have more funds than the state budget.
- The university's ability to determine tuition
- The University's ability to borrow money from financial markets
- The University's ability to invest in financial products
- The university's ability to issue bonds and stocks
- The ability to own land and buildings that are seized.



Staff Autonomy: it focuses on ability and capacity of universities to hire their employees and bargaining and negotiating for employment. The ability of universities to decide on recruitment and employment contracts is largely determined by financial agreements between the university and its financial suppliers, and the financial regulations for recruiting staff directly affect the university's ability to hire specific staff. Therefore, it is necessary to study the autonomy of employees in relation to academic autonomy and financial autonomy of universities.

Academic Autonomy: it indicates to collect information about the ability of universities to determine the institution's strategy, to determine the academic profile, in particular the ability of the university to provide different levels of university (bachelor, master and doctoral) programs, decision making on the structure and content of the programs in various levels of the university and, ultimately, the size they can decide on admitting students. (Sturman, Nukala and Stenl, 2011)

Scientific freedom can be regarded as "the freedom of members of the scientific community as individually, collectively in the pursuit, development, and transfer of knowledge" (Frostkhal, 2004, p. 2)

Academic accountability is a systematic way of assuring the internal and external elements of the higher education system which colleges, universities and students move towards desirable goals (Abbaspour, 2014, p. 4)

Academic autonomy in Iran has also been faced with rising and falling. The following steps are considered for its evolution.

Phase I: From 1898 to 1960, universities and scientific institutions were practically responsible for the relative direction of scientific institutions.

The second stage involves the financial and employment autonomy of universities and higher education institutions before 1979, since they were independently governed by the year 1979 and were subject to the statutes approved by their trustees.

The third stage involves the declining direction of financial autonomy. Since the beginning of 1979, granted facilities to universities and higher education institutions have been abolished, and consumption of current, developmental and special credits have been subject to public regulation.

The fourth stage involves the revival of university autonomy. Since 1988, universities and institutions of higher education and research, through the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, tried to regain financial, administrative and employment autonomy. The adoption of the law on the formation of trustees' boards of universities and institutes of higher education and research, adopted by the 181 and 182 meetings dated 13/03/1989, approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, can be regarded as the first step towards the revival of the above-mentioned institutions.

The fifth stage; it is after the adoption of paragraph A of Article 49 of the Law of the Fourth Development Plan in 2004. It states that universities and institutes of higher education and research as well as specialized academies licensed by the Council for the Development of Higher Education and the Ministries of Science, Research and Technology, and Health, Medicine and Medical Education, and other related legal authorities, solely on the basis of the administrative, financial, employment and special regulations of the relevant board of trustees



or health and medical education and medical training, without the obligation to comply with the law of general calculation and public employment and other general administrative, financial, and employment rules and regulations (Fath allahi, 2015, p. 28).

In the studies of Iran's Science and Technology Development Plan, which was completed in 2008, the subcategory of higher education legal environment has been evaluated as a meta-analysis. The study shows that most of the components are subject to multiple weaknesses in university autonomy. Among them are: the lack of transparency of the accountability of higher education directors, the non-alignment of laws and regulations with the requirements and conditions of higher education, the lack of sufficient authority of the Board of Trustees, and the lack of coordination of legislative decisions with the law on the formation of trusteeship committees including the regulations for the recruitment of a country to universities, lack of necessary legal mechanism to support students and faculty members in the judicial authorities... (Khodadad Hosseini et al., 2008, p. 41)

Although the legal processes of acquiring university autonomy in Iran in recent years, especially since 2004, achieved good stages. But in this way, challenges still remain. If the components of the autonomy of Iran's universities are well-identified and understood, and in terms of management, the challenges are well managed, the development of university autonomy and its achievement to the point of equilibrium and stability is existed. The main issue of the present study is two points: first, a deep comparative study of independent universities in the world in order to identify the components of the autonomy of the universities of Iran; secondly, the introduction of a national pattern in this regard.



METODOS

In this research, first, by desk study, autonomy components are reviewed and then, using the qualitative method, the latent dimensions of the phenomenon are studied and the theoretical model is completed. After reviewing the field by using the content analysis method and interviewing the experts with snowball method, the studied variables were identified and coded and structure model was designed. The statistical population consists of all countries that have a program in the field of university autonomy and the statistical sample includes the universities of countries in the five continents (America, Asia, Australia, Europe and South Africa). Data analysis was analyzed by content analysis method and MAXQDA12. In order to determine the reliability of the findings, in addition to documenting and recording step-by-step of various stages of the research, reviewing method of research participants and two associates of research and successive reviews were used. Also, the criterion of acceptability, which is equivalent to content validity, through the application of various strategies such as: the diversity of research participants (in terms of age, gender, study major), the use of various methods of data collection data from various sources, sequential review and revision, reviewing research partners and the review of research partners were promoted.

FINDINGS

Under study professors in this study were 8 people. In terms of sex, six persons were male and two were female and in terms of age, distribution was 40-60 years old. In terms of academic rank, 1 person was professor, 6 associate professors and 1 assistant professor (Table 1)

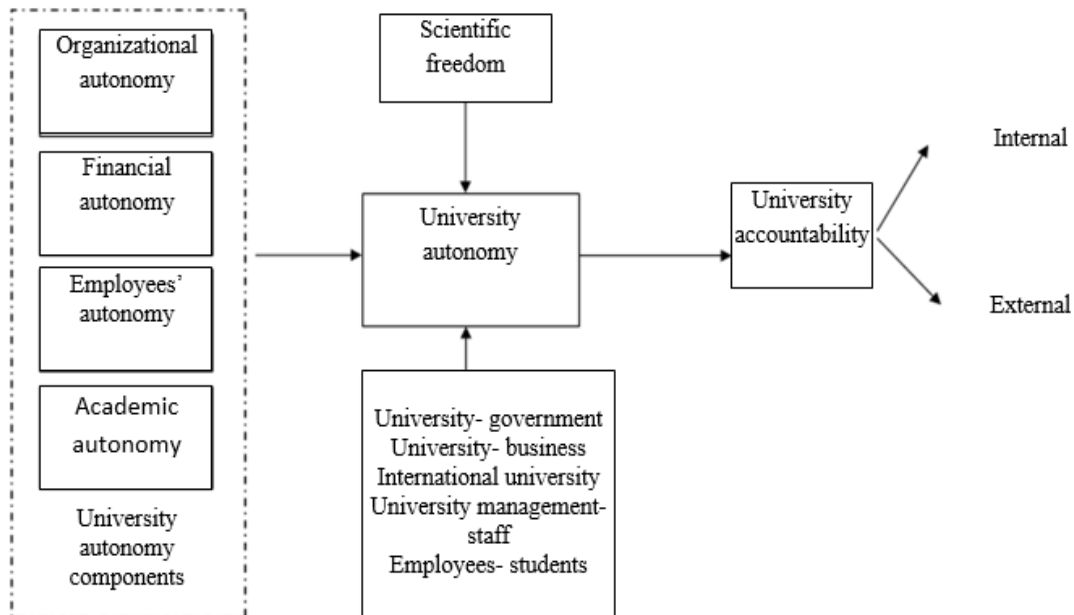
Table 1: professors' demographic data of sample group

Variable	Variable levels	Frequency	Percent
Age	40-45	1	12.5
	46-50	3	37.5
	51-55	3	37.5
	56-60	1	12.5
Gender	Man	6	75
	Woman	2	25
Academic rank	Assistant professor	1	12.5
	Associate Professor	6	75
	Professor	1	12.5

Based on the research findings, four components of organizational autonomy, financial autonomy, employee autonomy and academic autonomy were identified as influencing on academic freedom and academic accountability. And also, there are five interfaces that determine external and internal interactions of modern universities and their main stakeholders. These interfaces are: 1- government - university; 2- university management - university staff; 3- university staff - students; 4 - university - businesses; and 5- Internationalization of university.

CONCLUSION

As indicated in the findings, the findings of the research eventually led to the introduction of a model that the components of an independent university, including organizational, financial, staffing and academia autonomy, along with academic freedom, would lead to university accountability. And five interfaces 1 - government - university; 2 - university management - university staff; 3 university staff - students; 4- university - business; and 5 - university internationalization affects them. It is in consistent with the findings of (Stooman, 2011; Raylei, 2016; Zakir Salehi, 2010).

**Figure 1:**

The issue of academic autonomy in Iran has a complex and overwhelming process and has been accompanied by a steady raising and falling instead of a steady decline.

Financial autonomy plays a significant role in helping to administrative and executive autonomy. Partial diversification into new financial resources through communication with industry and services sectors, as well as encouraging people to devotion is useful. Emphasizing the training of professional skills tailored to the needs of the community and contributing effectively to solve social problems is one of the ways to increase financial autonomy.

One of the ways to increase the autonomy of employees is to delegate the legal authority of planning and management of human resources by the ministry to the university, to determine the conditions of work of faculty members and staff by the university outside the national employment regulations, and this will lead to academic flourishing and university accountability to the outer environment.

Emphasizing the priority of supporting committed and accountable executives and emphasizing Islamic values will increase accountability and scientific freedom.

The issue of the autonomy of universities in Iran, according to Article 49 of the Fourth Development Plan (Zakir Salehi, 2010) and Article 20 of the 5th Development Plan (Zakir Salehi, 2013), is also worthy of consideration. Accepting that the emphasis on maintaining the freedom of science in universities can be the basis for the promotion of creativity, critical thinking and the spirit of research (Javdani, 2007), and that scientific freedom is realized alongside organizational autonomy (Arrast, 2004).

Regarding university autonomy, it should be said that the policy making of universities should go toward self-reform and equilibrium, and in the meantime, extremes approaches are not solutions in giving authority and oversight of universities. Even in the developed European and American countries, the supportive and regulatory role of governments, along with the maintenance of autonomy in the functioning of the university administration and higher education institutions, is respected (Varandzad, 2002).

The comparison between decentralized and centralized higher education systems shows that some universities, including higher education institutions in the UK, have institutional autonomy, but in Iran, the institutional separation between the institution of politics, the government and the institution of culture, education, and universities is still unclear. Higher education and scientific thinking in England are critical and analytic, but in Iran it is descriptive and praiseworthy. Responsiveness and academic autonomy consists of intellectual freedom. Doubtful moral requirements are not existed in England. The absence of links and hidden implications is one of the hallmarks of the British universities, but in Iran it is usually the opposite. The traditional university is institutionalized and the new university moves toward decentralization and personalization (Fazeli, 2014).

Universities of the country should take responsibility of independency, decision-making and policy-making in finance, interaction, administrative, employment and scientific affairs of the country.

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