

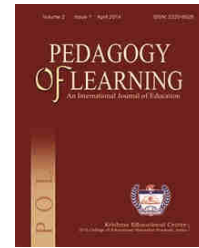
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Impact of College Autonomy on Quality in Higher Education: Parents' Perception Relating to their Satisfaction

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Abstract

The objective of the present study was to investigate the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education in terms of parents' perception relating to their satisfaction with students' achievement, curriculum, quality of teachers, physical facilities, examination system, co-curricular activities and parents' meeting. A sample of 60 fathers (mother in case of father's absence) 30 each of the students studying in autonomous and non-autonomous colleges was selected randomly using multi stage sampling technique. The Satisfaction Scale for Parents developed by the investigator was used to collect data. The 't' test used to analyze data revealed that i) the quality of autonomous colleges was better than the quality of non-autonomous colleges as parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were satisfied with the achievement of their children than the parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges; ii) the parents of students studying in both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges showed their satisfaction with the curriculum on similar line; iii) the teachers' quality in autonomous colleges was significantly better than the quality teacher in non-autonomous colleges; iv) the quality of physical facilities available in autonomous colleges were better than non-autonomous colleges; v) the quality of examination system in

autonomous colleges was significantly better than non-autonomous colleges; vi) the parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were more satisfied with the quality of co-curricular activities organized in the colleges than the parents of the students studying in non-autonomous colleges; vii) Organization of parents' meeting in autonomous colleges was significantly better than parents' meeting organized in non-autonomous colleges and viii) in autonomous colleges, student's achievement, curriculum, physical facilities, and examination system were better than the quality of teachers, co-curricular activities and organisation of parents' meeting.

Keywords: Autonomy, autonomous College, non-autonomous college, quality education, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Quality in higher education has turned out to be the leading task of countries worldwide. It is largely accepted that autonomy and quality are logically corollary. The national policy on education (MHRD, 1986) ensures quality and excellence in Indian higher education through grant of autonomy to potential colleges by the universities. These autonomous colleges are empowered with academic freedoms. The University Grants Commissions (UGC) in India has been providing considerable grants to autonomous colleges to boost the quality in education. The role of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in assessing the quality of autonomous colleges using prefixed criteria is no doubt desirable but not acceptable from research point of view. The trend, all over the globe, has been to evaluate quality of goods and services in terms of how far the goods and services satisfy customers' or stakeholders' needs and expectations. Since higher education had come under the service sector, its customers or stakeholders are mainly students, parents, teachers and principals. Therefore, the quality of college autonomy is to be studied in terms of how far the services provided by autonomous colleges meet parents' needs and expectations.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Grant of autonomy to potential colleges by the universities concerned has been the policy decisions of Indian higher education since the implementation of the National Policy on Education (MHRD, 1986) to ensure quality and excellence. The conceptual framework of quality upon which the present study has been designed as meeting, exceeding and delighting customers' needs and expectations (Deming, 1993; Downey, Frase and Petar, 1994). Thus, quality in education depends on the satisfaction of beneficiaries. A critical examination of studies conducted on autonomous colleges revealed that most of the studied were conducted to know the functioning of autonomous colleges. Vedanayagam under Association of Indian Universities (1988) studied examination system of autonomous colleges. Sudha Rao *et al.* (1999) studied organizational climate of the autonomous colleges. Reaction of students towards the examination system of autonomous colleges was studied by Panda (2002), Padhi (2004) and Dwibedi (2006). Some studies attempted to reveal teaching activities including methods followed, and skills and techniques used by teachers in autonomous colleges (Sahu, 1999; Bohidar, 2002). Some researchers studied problems of autonomous colleges and on the basis of research findings recommendations were made for corrective measures (Sudha Rao, 1990; Mohanty, 1992; Sahu, 1999). A little research has been conducted on the effect of college autonomy on quality of higher education in terms of parents' satisfaction. For which the present study has been design to study the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education in terms of parents' satisfaction.

Objective of the study

To study the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education in terms of parents' perception relating to their satisfaction with students' achievement, curriculum, quality of teachers, physical facilities, examination system, co-curricular activities and parents' meet.

Hypothesis of the study

There exists significant difference between perception of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with students' achievement, curriculum, quality of teachers, physical facilities, examination system, co-curricular activities and parents' meeting.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Design: Since the main objective of present study was to investigate the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education in terms of parents' satisfaction, the perception of parents, of both autonomous college and non-autonomous college with regard to different dimensions of higher education have been compared using causal-comparative method and ex-post facto research design.

Sample: A sample of 60 fathers (mother in case of father's absence) 30 each of students studying in autonomous and non-autonomous colleges was selected randomly using multi stage sampling technique.

Tools: The Satisfaction Scale for Parents developed by the investigator was used for collection of data. It was a five point scale that consisted of 14 items to assess parents' perception relating to their satisfaction with seven dimensions of higher education such as student's achievement, curriculum, quality of teachers, physical facilities, examination system, co-curricular activities and parents' meeting. The content validity of the scale was ascertained by experts' judgment and the reliability co-efficient of the scale was .94.

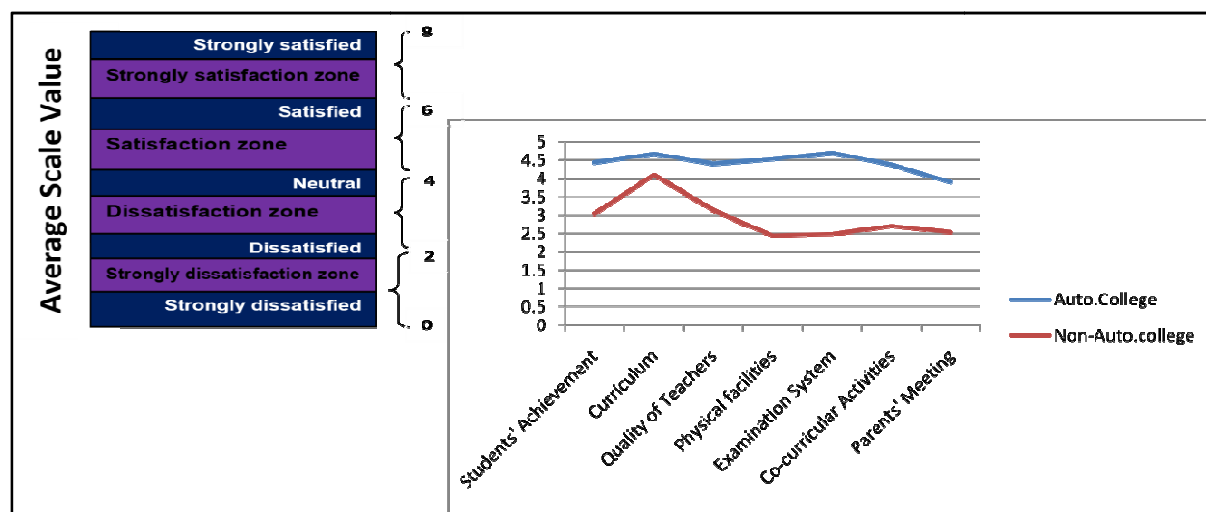
THE RESULTS

As it can be seen in Table 1, parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges differed significantly on perception relating to satisfaction with their children's achievement ($t = 4.1$; $df = 58$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=4.43 > M=3.03$). The Figure 1 (parents satisfaction and zone of satisfaction) shows that the parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were just satisfied with their children's achievement, as the average perception score of the parents was greater than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=4.43 > M=4.0$). Whereas, parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were dissatisfied with their children's achievement as the average perception score of parents was less than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=3.03 < M=4.0$). The finding was that, the parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were just satisfied with the achievement of their children; where as parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were dissatisfied with the achievement of their children. Table 1 shows no significance of difference between the perception of parents of students studying in autonomous college and non-autonomous colleges ($t = 1.67$; $df = 58$; $P > 0.05$) relating to their satisfaction with curriculum. Figure 1 shows that parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were satisfied with curriculum as the average perception score of

parents was greater than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=4.67 > M=4.00$). Similarly, parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were also satisfied with curriculum as the average perception score of parents was greater than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=4.10 > M=4.00$). The parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges showed their satisfaction with curriculum on similar line. Table 1 reveals that parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges differed significantly with regard to their perception relating to satisfaction with quality of teachers working in the colleges ($t=3.25$; $df = 58$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of the parents of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=4.4 > M=3.13$).

Table 1: Summary of 't' values for perception of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with different dimensions of quality in higher education (N = 60)

Type of College Quality Dimensions	Autonomous College		Non Autonomous College		't' value	Level of Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Student's Achievement	4.43	1.45	3.03	1.22	4.1	.01
Curriculum	4.67	1.42	4.1	1.21	1.67	N. S.
Quality of Teacher	4.4	1.54	3.13	1.54	3.25	.01
Physical Facilities	4.53	1.66	2.43	1.72	2.03	.01
Examination System	4.70	1.50	2.47	1.72	5.43	.01
Co-curricular Activities	4.37	1.37	2.70	1.12	5.21	.01
Parents' Meeting	3.9	2.00	2.53	1.28	3.26	.01
Total	31.0	8.09	20.40	6.22	5.70	.01



(Figure-1: Line graph on perception of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with different dimensions of quality in higher education)

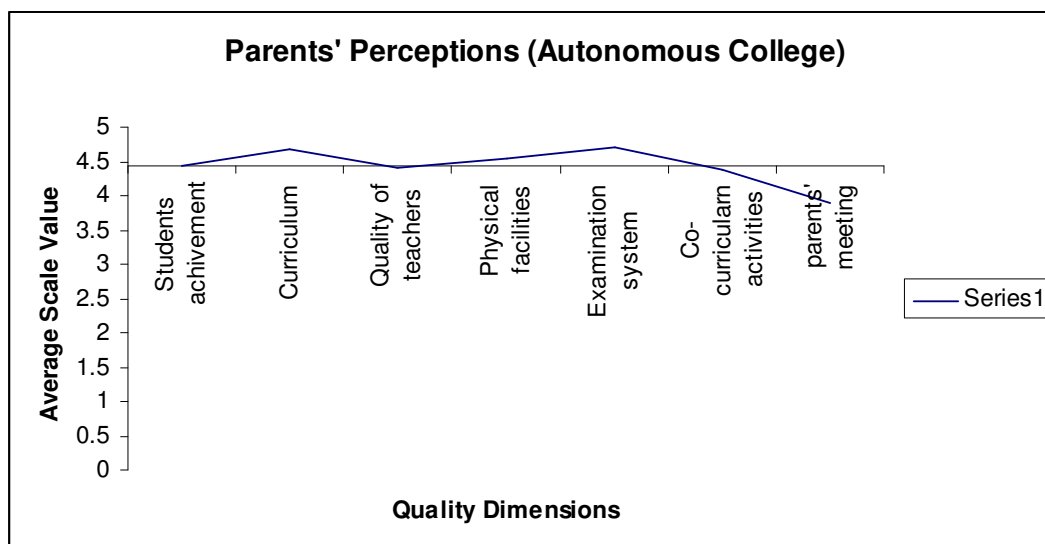
Figure 1, shows that the parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were just satisfied with the quality of teachers working in the colleges as the average perception score of parents was greater than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=4.43 > M=4.0$), whereas parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were dissatisfied with the quality of teachers working in the colleges as the average perception score of parents was less than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=3.13 < M=4.03$). The teachers' quality in autonomous colleges were significantly better than the quality of teachers in non-autonomous colleges, because teachers working in autonomous colleges were competent in taking classes and caring students as perceived by parents. There also found significance of difference between the perception of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges ($t = 2.03$; $df = 58$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of parents of the students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=4.53 > M=2.43$) relating to their satisfaction with physical facilities in colleges. Figure 1, shows that parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were just satisfied with physical facilities in colleges as the average perception score of the parents was greater than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=4.53 > M=4.0$), whereas parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were dissatisfied with physical facilities in colleges as the average perception score of parents was less than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=2.43 < M=4.0$). Physical facilities like library, laboratory and class room was better in autonomous colleges than non-autonomous colleges. As it can be seen in the Table 1, there found significance of difference between the perception of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges ($t = 5.43$; $df = 58$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=4.70 > M=2.47$) relating to their satisfaction with examination system. Figure 1 shows that parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were satisfied with the quality of examination system as the average perception score of parents was greater than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=4.70 > M=4.0$), whereas parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were dissatisfied with examination system as the perception score of parents was less than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=2.47 < M=4.00$). The examination system in autonomous colleges was better than the examination system in non-autonomous colleges as the examination system in autonomous colleges was conducted more smoothly and children's performance was evaluated properly as perceived by parents. Table 1 shows significance of difference between the perception of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges and parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges ($t = 5.21$; $df = 58$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of parents of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=4.37 > M=2.70$) relating to their satisfaction with co-curricular activities organised in colleges. Figure 1 shows that parents of the students studying in autonomous colleges were satisfied with co-curricular activities organised by the colleges as the average perception score of the parents was greater than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=4.37 > M=4.0$), whereas parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were dissatisfied with co-curricular activities as the average perception score of parents was less than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=2.70 < M=4.0$). The quality of co-curricular activities in autonomous colleges was better than the quality of co-curricular activities in non-autonomous colleges, because autonomous colleges treated co-curricular activities as an important activity in the college and students were motivated to participate in those activities as perceived by parents. As it can be seen in Table 1, there found significance of difference between the perception of parents of students

studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges ($t=3.26$; $df=58$, $P<0.01$) in favour of parents of the students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=3.9 > M=2.53$) relating to their satisfaction with parents' meeting organized in colleges. Table 1 shows that the parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with parents' meeting organised in colleges as the average perception scores of the parents were equivalent to the average scale values for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=3.90 \approx M=4.0$), whereas parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges were dissatisfied with the parents' meeting as the average perception score of the parents was less than the average scale value for neutral level of satisfaction ($M=2.53 < M=4.0$). The finding was that organisation of parents' meeting in autonomous colleges was significantly better than organisation of parents' meeting in non-autonomous colleges, although parents of the students studying in autonomous colleges maintained neutrality in the level of satisfaction. Quality of higher education from the view of parents' perception with regard to their satisfaction with college autonomy differed significantly from the quality of education in non-autonomous colleges ($t = 5.70$; $df = 59$; $P < 0.01$). From the Table 1, it was made clear that the quality of higher education in autonomous colleges was significantly better than the quality of education in non-autonomous colleges ($M= 31.0 > M=20.40$).

Table 2: Average perception scores of parents on different quality dimensions of higher education in autonomous colleges as compared to combined average score (i.e. 4.42) (N=30)

Sl. No.	Areas	Scores less than 4.42	Scores above than 4.42
1	Students' achievement		4.43
2	Curriculum		4.67
3	Quality of teachers		4.4
4	Physical facilities		4.53
5	Examination system		4.70
6	Co-curricular activities	4.37	
7	Parents' meeting	3.9	

The intra comparison made within different dimensions of higher education in autonomous colleges such as student's achievement, curriculum, quality of teachers, physical facilities, examination system, co-curricular activities and parents' meeting on average perception score with combined average perception score of parents relating to satisfaction, as can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 2, reveals that student's achievement ($M=4.43 > M=4.42$), curriculum ($M=4.67 > M=4.42$), physical facilities ($M=4.53 > M=4.42$), and examination system ($M=4.70 > M=4.42$), were better than the quality of teachers ($M=4.40 < M=4.42$), co-curricular activities ($M=4.37 < M=4.42$) and organisation of parents' meeting ($M=3.9 < M=4.42$).



(Figure 2: Average perception scores of parents on different quality dimensions of higher education in autonomous colleges as compared to combined average score)

Major Findings

- i) The quality of autonomous colleges was better than the quality of non-autonomous colleges as parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were satisfied with the achievement of their children than the parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges.
- ii) The parents of students studying in both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges showed their satisfaction with the curriculum on similar line.
- iii) The teachers' quality in autonomous colleges was significantly better than the quality teacher in non-autonomous colleges.
- iv) The quality of physical facilities available in autonomous colleges was better than non-autonomous colleges.
- v) The quality of examination system in autonomous colleges was significantly better than non-autonomous colleges.
- vi) The parents of students studying in autonomous colleges were more satisfied with the quality of co-curricular activities organized in the colleges than the parents of the students studying in non-autonomous colleges.
- vii) Organization of parents' meeting in autonomous colleges was significantly better than parents' meeting organized in non-autonomous colleges and
- viii) In autonomous colleges, student's achievement, curriculum, physical facilities, and examination system were better than the quality of teachers, co-curricular activities and organisation of parents' meeting.

DISCUSSION

Customer's satisfaction as the determining factor of assessing quality of goods and services has been recognized widely all over the globe. Goods and services if meet, exceed and delight customers' needs and expectations are judged having quality as it is evident from the definitions of quality (Deming, 1993; Downey, Frase and Petar, 1994). The positive impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education emerged as parents, the most important stakeholders of education were satisfied with the achievement of their children, curriculum, and quality of teachers, physical facilities, examination system, co-curricular activities and parents' meeting than the parents of students studying in non-autonomous colleges. Parents constitute one of the important stakeholders of education. They pay money for the education of their children with an expectation to get positive return from the education. The educational services provided to the children under college autonomy satisfy the parents which is evident from the present study. Academic progress of the children, timely conduct of examinations, timely publication of results and co-operative attitudes of the members of the staff are the possible factors that determined satisfaction of parents. The autonomous colleges could function according to the expectations of parents for which the resultant effect was parents' satisfaction. This can be attributed to academic freedom enjoyed by autonomous colleges to design curriculum, conduct examination, publish examination results and adopt innovative methods of teaching followed by special grants made available to autonomous colleges under the scheme of college autonomy to incur expenditure relating to physical and academic related facilities.

Educational Implications

The finding revealing superiority of college autonomy in influencing quality in higher education bears remarkable educational implications.

- i) It is recommended that the present scheme of college autonomy which is restricted to a limited number of colleges needs to be extended to a large number of colleges in the country. Both Central Government as well as State Government require to take necessary steps in this regard.
- ii) The present scheme of college autonomy in India has been restricted to academic autonomy only. It is recommended that besides academic autonomy, the scheme of college autonomy should make provision for administrative autonomy as well as financial autonomy.
- iii) College autonomy should be made fully functional in order to enhance quality in higher education.
- iv) Autonomous colleges should be given freedom to formulate their own rules and regulations for college administration, supervision and accountability in order to ensure continuous improvement. The autonomous colleges should also be given freedom to recruit and promote their members of staff within national and constitutional framework.
- v) Every autonomous college should form Q+ team consisting of teachers, parents, administrators, students and classified personnel. The Q+ team should be responsible for planning, implementation and management of the quality process.

- vi) Autonomous colleges should be sufficiently funded by Central Government, UGC and State Government or should be provided opportunity to generate their own financial resources to carry out developmental activities for achieving total quality in higher education.
- vii) On the basis of the finding of the present study, it is recommended that defined criteria used by the NAAC for assessing and accrediting the quality of higher education in the country should be supplemented with the assessment of customers' satisfaction.
- viii) The UGC should establish appropriate mechanism to collect and utilize research findings for improvement of college autonomy.

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