



Accountability in the Governance of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The paper covers the issues of accountability of higher education institutions (HEIs) in five countries: Brazil, Canada, Italy, Portugal, and Russia. National frameworks and their implementation are examined. The special focus of the review is performance-based evaluation and funding. The reflection on outcomes is followed by the recommendations to policy-makers, researchers and practitioners

Key words: accountability, higher education institution (HEI), new public management (NPM), performance evaluation, performance-based funding, quality assurance.

Introduction

Accountability has been integral to higher education and other public services. The notion of accountability since its inception has evolved with debates on trust, morality and norms. The concept of accountability underwent various stages of transformation in tandem the changing conception of the role of the state. The decade of 1970s witnessed increasing bureaucratization and formulation of heavy administrative procedures. This shift came along with overall decline in public trust and also increased discontent with the service provided by the public sector entities. Similar, changes were affected with regard to governance of universities. Higher educational institutions began to be viewed more as organizations rather than public institutions with wide outreach. Besides, some key changes in environment of universities took place with respect to increase in enrolment, imposition of state authority and increased spillover of knowledge from one discipline to another. Further, imperative of market forces became the key coordinator for knowledge leading to the reinstatement of the role of universities. This meant reconfiguring process of governance. The rise of 'New Public Management' (NPM) emphasized on accountability, efficiency and importance of results in the functioning of public sector. NPM focuses on input and output control, evaluation and performance management based on efficiency and entrepreneurial leadership. Likewise, the conception of accountability transformed from ethics, morality and values laden standards to performance, output and results. This led to the rise of managerial practices towards the functioning of universities that focused more on efficiency and output. This chapter aims to analyze the transformation with regard to academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge that accounts quality, efficiency and effectiveness in the governance of higher education. This shift brought about changes in the understanding of responsibility and accountability of the various actors and most importantly the teachers. Teachers became accountable to the state, to the institution, to the students and other external agencies while they act to accomplish goals. Mnauel Casellls while describing the major functions of universities underlined that universities help in expressing the desirable ideological perspectives to improve the societies at large. Thus, universities do the most important function i.e. generation of knowledge. However, this generation of knowledge has to be accompanied with training towards development of skills as pointed out above, transformation in the role of the state led to alterations in the governance structure and functions of the universities. The change in the role of state from a 'doer' to an 'enabler' (Osborne & Osborne) altered the functioning of public institutions. Studies undertaken by analyzed the changes that have taken place in the universities with respect to processes, organizational culture and decision making. They contend that internal changes within the institution have been affected mainly due to pressure from external forces. As a result, academic work has transformed with greater managerialism, greater instrumentalism, new forms of control and accountability. It is argued here that changes affected should not compromise traditional values essentially upheld as good and at the same time it should cater to the empirical demands of preservation of space for creative and academic freedom. However, space for academic freedom has been gradually eroded due to various internal and external forces. It must be pointed out that the shift led to conceiving accountability not as an idea of normative responsibility but as measurable answerability. Moreover, reconfiguration of internal and external authority has given rise to a new dimension with respect to the functioning of the universities and colleges and the responsibility of teachers. Lastly, relationship between students and teachers which is based on trust has been increasingly monitored via agencies which aim to promote procedural norms against substantive issue of competence. This chapter focuses on teacher's perception of accountability through four important dimensions: regulation, institution, performance and market. The study examines these dimensions through the two case universities. For this questionnaire was constructed. The questionnaire was structured to understand the parameters in relation to each of these dimensions. The various components of each of the parameters have been elaborated. On the basis of interaction with the faculty of the two case universities, members of the executive bodies, head of the institution and members of the various teacher organization the study identified four types of accountability i.e. regulatory accountability, institutional accountability, performance accountability and market accountability.

Regulatory Accountability

The conception of regulation in the governance of higher education could be located in the context of policies, guidelines and directives. The directives are circulated by the state to the universities through the agencies for maintenance of standards. The exercise of control is carried out by regulatory agencies or by authorities who are deemed to be the experts. These regulatory bodies act as the 'level players' between the administrators, politicians and the market. The objective of regulation is to set up standards for monitoring and to explore modifications for better enforcement. The purpose of regulation, especially with public services such as higher education is to enforce accountability, enhancement of quality and maintenance of standards. The regulations lay down policies and conventions for the functioning. They are also a way of exercising answerability for the various processes. UGC is the regulatory agency for maintenance of standards across all the universities in India. Regulation is affected through various directives meant to direct the universities towards rationality and to create a standard to procedures to control and manage the system. Regulations are optimistically defined as a set of guidelines for maintenance of standards and also ensure accountability and control. The rationale behind this is to subvert procedural lapses. Likewise, emphasis is given on norms and procedures and a code of conduct for the teachers to achieve these standards. The study argues that it is necessary to understand, how regulations are being structured as a form of accountability. The UGC regulations as examined through the review of literature focused largely towards building standards, monitoring activities and enforcement of accountability. The guidelines of UGC post NPE (1992) focused on building standards for higher education. In 1998 the pay scales were revised and benchmark of minimum qualification for appointment of faculty was underlined. The sixth pay commission 160 further enunciated the revision of pay scales as a way towards ensuring quality of education by motivating the teachers. The UGC regulation (2010) focused on essential qualifications for teachers. The regulation gave guidelines towards strengthening of quality of higher education. The gazette stipulated service conditions for promotion and recruitment of new faculty. The regulation primarily focused on regulating promotion of incumbent teachers as well as the new recruitments. This was based on Academic Performance Indicator (API). It focused on measuring teachers' performance. The UGC regulation (2013) stipulated Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers and other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education. The gazette categorized academic outputs and gave weightage to publications, presentations and research. All in all, these regulations indicate a shift that recognized the importance of measuring outcomes. The interaction with the faculty of DU and AUD through questionnaire brought together their views. In examining the views thus gathered the study took into consideration of Academic Performance Indicator (API), number of teaching hours, and number of hours in college/school, and maintenance of attendance record as the parameters of regulation. API is the indicator which enlists criterion for promotion and appointment of teachers in the universities. This regulation is adhered in both the universities where the focus is to meet the requirements of the enlisted criterion. The API lays the guidelines for promotion and it is taken as a benchmark to proceed towards it. The API parameters are quantitative indices which account the achievements of each faculty with minimal focus on quality of the academic indulgences. The API in both the case universities shows a 100% response. As these are indicators to measure performance, they are numerically deciphered and leave less space for innovation towards academic development. The indicators directed towards consolidation of numerical data do not offer incentives for quality. Therefore, API is a simplistic indicator of academic performance which comprises only quantitative measurement of academic pursuits carried out by teachers and it has no relation with how the teacher relates with the students. Further, with regard to the criteria of the number of teaching hours. It was observed that in Delhi University teachers adhered to the norm of number of teaching hours. They believe that it is mandatory to adhere to the guidelines laid by the UGC and the university authorities. Similarly, the number of hours in college was strictly adhered to by the teachers in accordance to the guidelines enumerated in UGC regulation on hours of teaching. The teachers of DU opined that norms laid by the UGC cannot be altered. The rules are structured to ensure homogenous functioning of the university owing to its large affiliating structure. These regulations are meant to enable smooth functioning of the university and also meant to ensure larger facilities for students. Similarly, the record of attendance was to be maintained in a structured manner with 79% of the teachers perceived it is mandatory to keep and submit the record of attendance. Guidelines for benefit of attendance to students in case of participation in extracurricular activities or consolidation of medical leave are adhered to as per the guidelines of the university. The objective as outlined by the teachers is to help maintain standards and regularity of students. The teachers expressed apprehension with respect to disobedience to rules or non-maintenance of record. Therefore, the regulations which are devised by the UGC as a means of preserving the standards are followed in the traditional manner. The UGC guidelines (2010) define the number of working hours for the associate and assistant professors. A deeper understanding of how this norm is perceived emerged while examining the distribution of workload and its relationship with the number of teaching hours. The number of teaching hours for the associate and assistant professor prescribed as per the regulation of UGC regulation 2010 is 14 and 16 hours respectively. In order to follow the present norm of teaching hours it often leads to split of papers amongst two sometimes even three teachers. This distribution hampers the continuity and comprehension amongst students. The present norm of number of teaching hours has led to a compromise in the quality of education. The amendment to UGC regulation (2013) also laid the guidelines towards interaction with the students beyond the formal teaching learning process. The teachers are to engage with the students beyond classroom teaching with no prescribed hours. The teachers should mentor, counsel and guide students in their endeavors. The UGC made it clear that these efforts would not be a part of API score. There was observed lack of interest amongst DU teachers to indulge in these informal interactions as it would not be a part of their performance matrix. It was observed that adherence to norms is largely controlled by the benefits in terms of measurable outcomes. This has a negative impact on quality of teaching or development of academics endeavors as maintaining active relation with students has no immediate return for the teachers. Adherence to formativeness is reflected with regard to the process of time table formation. As per the UGC guidelines (2010) the teachers are to be in college for minimum of 5 hours. The timetable for the teachers in college is formulated keeping the stipulated norms in mind. This often leads to long gaps in the timetable for students but the norms are somehow followed to great inconvenience for the students. Interaction with the teachers of AUD demonstrated 100% adherence to API. The regulations focusing on the minimum number of college hours and number of teaching hours are followed strictly by the teachers. The teachers expressed that the regulations are to be followed but it should not be allowed to become a hurdle in the academic growth and

development of knowledge. The teachers at AUD followed the regulation with respect to the number of teaching hours but at the same time were flexible to increase the number of teaching hours, if that would contribute towards academic development and better interaction with the students. The teachers exhibit openness towards number of teaching hours and do not limit themselves to the defined number of hours. Mentoring and counseling of students is mandatory for teachers and it is perceived as a way to form relationship with the students for discussions and deliberations. Taking the example of curriculum reform, examined in detail in the previous chapter the study found out that the level of participation of the teachers in DU is more procedural than substantial. The participation of teachers in curriculum reform was observed to be limited to inputs structured around the guidelines of UGC. The reformed curriculum gives guidelines with respect to readings and number of lectures assigned for each topic. This limits the academic space of the teachers and their autonomy to decide on the teaching methodology and makes teaching an estranged exercise. Therefore, the teachers perceive the regulations and guidelines as norms to be followed regardless of its down side. The process of curriculum reform in AUD is largely initiated by the teachers. The teacher has the responsibility to structure the curriculum towards knowledge. The teachers do follow the norms laid in the curriculum but do not limit themselves to the defined timeframe of interaction and other modalities. This exhibits flexibility and the desire towards innovation in academic endeavors. Maintenance of attendance record is a way to ensure accountability of teachers with respect to regularity of conduct of classes. AUD teachers perceive attendance as a means to keep a record of the regularity of students in class and also to help identify the students with absenteeism. It is indeed described as a way to not only ensure accountability of teachers in terms of regularity and conduct of classes but also enables teachers to identify absenteeism of students. It is well acknowledged that regulations are a way to ensure proper conduct of processes and functions. Moreover, regulations are deemed to be a way forward to comprehend policies and their implementation. It is also a well taken point that formal structure of authority with top down flow of communication enables academic governance. However, the understanding towards regulatory accountability with respect to API, number of teaching hours, number of hours in college and maintenance of attendance record has brought forth some similarities and differences. DU and AUD exhibit existence of formalism with authority. API is adhered in both the universities as it defines the guidelines to promotion. The regulation of number of teaching hours, number of hours in college and attendance record exhibits a different perspective as was understood through the questionnaire. In DU the number of teaching hours, number of hours in college and attendance record are focused and executed in a normative manner. In DU the data indicates observation a top down flow of communication and exercise of authority in a prescriptive manner. AUD exhibits an amalgamation of formalism with flexibility. The conduct of attendance record, ensuring number of teaching hours or number of hours in college are carried out as directed by the rules but the teachers alter the methods of functioning to enable quality and knowledge development. The alteration in processes is guided by positivism and flexibility.

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