

# THE INFLUENCE OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS IN THE TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

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**Abstract.** *The article examines the concept of university autonomy and its development in developed Western and Asian countries, including the prerequisites for the development of autonomy, as well as the components of autonomy, which include various areas of university activity. The history of the development of universities, historical factors and culture of government administration of public universities in Uzbekistan and the difficulties of transition to a decentralized system of university governance are considered.*

**Keywords:** *university autonomy, academic freedom, university governance.*

## Introduction

Higher education in Uzbekistan is at its historical point of transformation and transition from an elite to a mass model of coverage. This, in turn, sets the task for state universities to move to a higher level of university autonomy.

The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan initiated reforms to provide the state university with greater academic and financial independence in management and development. However, the historical and cultural characteristics of the management of public universities impose difficulties in the process of transformation and the transition to independence. In this regard, it is necessary to understand how the existing culture, formed over decades, will influence the modern processes of change and the formation of a new decentralized system of corporate governance of public universities in Uzbekistan.

The purpose of this article is to study the definition of the concept of university autonomy, its development in developed Western countries and the Asian region and compare the expected results of the transition to a greater level of university autonomy in Uzbekistan, comparing with the influence of historical and cultural factors of centralized state management in higher education.

## Methods

The research involved case study analysis as well as secondary data analysis including overview of past and current of university governance in higher education, specifically in developed Western and Asian countries were reviewed, using reports from different valid and reliable sources. Cases of international and state educational institutions in Uzbekistan, were investigated based on author personal experience, to provide outcomes and conclusions for the present research. Provided conclusions were made based on the matching historical transition of university governance in other countries and current state of transition from centralized government administration to decentralized university governance in Uzbekistan.

## Results

### Definition of university autonomy and its development in various countries

The autonomy of universities refers to the degree of independence of universities in governing themselves, making decisions and managing their affairs without undue interference

from outside organizations or authorities such as the government or the business community [5, 328]. This includes the ability to define university's own academic programs, recruit and promote staff, manage finances, and develop policies and regulations. This is an important characteristic of higher education institutions and a fundamental prerequisite for academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge.

The development of university autonomy in the developed western countries is a complex and multifaceted process that has been going on for several centuries. Considering medieval universities, it can be noted that the concept of university autonomy dates to the formation of the first universities in Europe in the 12th century. These institutions were independent entities created by religious or secular authorities and were given the power to create their own curricula and award degrees [7, 161].

During the Age of Enlightenment, the emergence of modern universities in the late 19th and early 20th century led to a greater emphasis on academic freedom and institutional autonomy. This was facilitated by the enlightenment 's emphasis on rational inquiry, individualism, and humanism. The autonomy of the universities was seen as necessary to protect the pursuit of knowledge and academic freedom from state and ecclesiastical control. Many western countries have laws that protect university autonomy. They may be enshrined in national constitutions, as in the case of Germany and France, or in higher education legislation, as in the United States and the United Kingdom [7, 198].

The professionalization of academia in the mid-20th century led to the creation of professional associations and accreditation bodies that worked to protect and promote academic freedom and university autonomy. In general, the autonomy of universities in the developed western countries has been influenced by historical, cultural and legal factors, as well as ongoing debates and issues related to academic freedom, institutional governance and accountability [2, 158].

Asian countries have different attitudes towards university autonomy, with some strongly supporting it, while others have more restrictions. For example, in Japan, universities are generally considered to have a high level of autonomy. The Japanese government has given them legal autonomy, allowing them to manage their own affairs, pursue their own policies, and make employment decisions. It is believed that this autonomy contributed to the creation of a world-class higher education system in Japan.

In South Korea, universities have less autonomy than in Japan. The government is known to interfere in the affairs of universities and has a significant impact on funding and policy. However, in recent years, efforts have been made to strengthen the autonomy of universities [6, 85].

China has been criticized for limited university autonomy, especially regarding academic freedom. While Chinese universities are given some autonomy to manage their own affairs, they are subject to government control and ideological restrictions, raising concerns about academic freedom and freedom of expression [8, 213].

The autonomy of universities in the Philippines is protected in law and is considered important. However, concerns have been raised about political interference in the affairs of universities, especially during national elections [1, 25].

In general, the autonomy of universities in Asian countries can vary greatly and is determined by cultural and political factors.

### **Development of universities in Uzbekistan**

The history of higher education in Uzbekistan dates to the founding of Bukhara and Samarkand universities in the early 16th century, during the Timurid Empire. These institutions were centers for the study of Islamic sciences and attracted students from all over Central Asia and beyond [4, 53].

During the Soviet era, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR) created a network of technical and vocational schools, as well as institutions of higher learning, many of which focused on agriculture and engineering. The first state university of Uzbekistan, Tashkent State University, was founded in 1920 [3, 225].

Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, the country saw a rapid expansion of its higher education system, with the opening of new universities and the reorganization and modernization of existing institutions. The government has invested heavily in higher education, with a strong focus on science and technology, and has greatly increased student enrollment.

Today, the higher education system of Uzbekistan includes several universities and other institutions with the highest concentration in Tashkent and its neighborhoods. The country also has a number of private higher education institutions, as well as foreign affiliate campuses.

Recent reforms have focused on improving the quality and relevance of higher education in Uzbekistan, with a focus on developing closer ties between universities and industry, promoting research and innovation, and modernizing teaching methods and curricula. However, one of the main goals of the initiated reforms is to expand the accessibility of higher education by increasing admission quotas, opening new public, private universities and branches of foreign universities. In this regard, steps were taken to provide state universities with a greater level of autonomy, to improve the efficiency of universities, to transfer greater financial and academic independence.

In order to achieve the reform goals, public universities are in the transition from a centralized governance system, on the level of state authorities, historically responsible for development and corporate governance, as well as control over the daily activities of universities, to a more autonomous model, when state bodies become patrons and transfer control functions to the corporate governance bodies of each university, require an active change in the existing culture and a greater openness to effective global practices.

### **Culture of Universities Governance in Uzbekistan**

The corporate governance of universities in Uzbekistan is highly centralized and controlled by the state. The government appoints rectors and other high-level administrators who have a relative level of authority over academic activities, financial resources, and planning. The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education supervises the activities of universities and colleges, and establishes rules and regulations for admission, evaluation, and accreditation. Universities conduct their activities based on laws, decrees and resolutions centrally developed by the Presidential Administration, the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education and line ministries for all universities. The practice of independent development of internal policies and procedures in all areas of universities activity, including administrative, economic, personnel, academic and research, is not general practice at state universities.

The culture of universities in Uzbekistan is characterized by formal bureaucratic practices, hierarchical decision-making, and top-down communication. Academic freedom is limited, and all key decisions on the direction of academic programs, as well as the opening of new courses,

are made at the level of the Cabinet of Ministers and ministries. Research activities and academic publications are also regulated in accordance with the requirements resolute at the level of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Students have limited participation in the decision-making process, and university policy is set without their participation.

In recent years, the government of Uzbekistan has initiated reforms aimed at improving the quality of higher education, attracting foreign students, expanding access to educational resources, and improving the governance system. These reforms will have a long-term impact on the culture of university governance, but the transition to a higher level of autonomy is associated with the difficulties of the historical legacy and the established culture of centralized bureaucratic practices, as well as hierarchical decision-making and communication.

### **Discussion**

#### **The Difficulties of Culture Change**

It can be noted that the factors of the historical absence of a culture of independence in making strategic decisions by universities, the development of their own internal and external policies and procedures, the practice of constant monitoring and review of changing conditions in the labor market and collaboration with the industry, in understanding the requirements for university graduates, lead to difficulties in the emergence initial steps of a culture of autonomy and responsibility.

The creation of governance bodies in each state university, designed to replace the centralized state governance, on the one hand, should help to quickly adapt and transition to a new culture of university autonomy. However, the lack of experts who understand and have experience in the work of corporate governance bodies, including an understanding of the specifics of activities in higher educational institutions, leads to the formal execution of the creation of governance bodies, boards of trustees and supervisory boards, without the availability of subsequent support and a sufficient legislative framework that would help established corporate bodies, learn how to function and understand the regulatory framework to achieve their goals.

On the other hand, there are the legacy of the centralized state hierarchical corporate policy of university governance is the closeness of universities, their poor integration with external stakeholders such as the public, students and their parents, international organizations, municipalities, and industry. At the same time, the system of appointment to positions, as well as promotion up the career ladder, is not transparent and in some cases contains corrupt elements. The transparency of the universities performance, the publication of plans and results of periods, their greater integration with society, the inclusion of independent local and international experts in corporate governance bodies, the training of members of the boards of trustees or supervisory boards, as well as senior middle and lower managers of universities, on best management practices, should help in the acceleration and effectiveness of ongoing reforms.

### **Conclusion**

The reforms carried out in Uzbekistan, which affected the expansion of university autonomy, became the stimulus at the beginning of the transition of universities to greater independence and responsibility. On this path, the first step towards the development of university governance is to ensure transparency and accountability. Universities should be open about their governance structures and policies and should regularly report on their activities and results. This will help to build trust and confidence in the university system among external stakeholders and government bodies.

Strengthening corporate boards and university leadership through an open recruitment policy should encourage appointments based on experience and merit. Universities should be run by professionals with strong academic and administrative skills, and not just by political and top appointees. There should be a transparent and merit-based appointment process for university administrators, and they should be regularly evaluated based on their performance.

By encouraging stakeholder participation, should create an environment in which the opinions and feedback of stakeholders such as students, faculty and alumni are taken into account while making university level decisions. Creating forums or committees that allow stakeholders to provide input and feedback will help create a more inclusive and participatory governance structure.

Universities thrive when there is an atmosphere that encourages initiative and academic freedom. Academic freedom is essential to the success of the university. It allows free exchange of ideas and opinions, critical thinking, and innovation. Therefore, universities must protect academic freedom and ensure that it is not compromised by political or other external pressures.

Universities in Uzbekistan, as social institutions, have lots of challenges on the way towards financial and academic independence. Success and development require adequate financial resources, personnel, infrastructure, and equipment to function effectively. Universities must diversify funding sources and learn to capitalize on their strengths, knowledge, talents, and innovations. A culture of investing in science and research at universities should be created in Uzbekistan, and the state, using financial investment instruments, can set the vector for development, thereby providing the resources necessary to provide quality education and conduct research that contributes to the development of the country.

As a result, the necessary resources and incentives will be obtained to change the culture of university management, which in turn will lead the universities of Uzbekistan to a new stage of development.

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