STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CAMPUS AUTONOMY IN TRIBHUWAN UNIVERSITY NEPAL: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study investigates stakeholder perspectives on the implementation of campus autonomy at Tribhuvan University. It aims to explore how stakeholders perceive campus autonomy, identify opportunities and challenges associated with it, and examine its benefits and drawbacks.

Methodology: The study is based on a qualitative research method utilizing thematic analysis. It focuses on four main themes: structural challenges, institutional sustainability, governance and accountability, and collaboration and coordination. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and thematic analysis was employed to extract valuable insights from stakeholders.

Results and Discussion: The findings reveal the complexities involved in autonomy implementation. It highlights the significance of strategic planning, capacity development, addressing disparities, upholding academic freedom, maintaining coordination, and striking a balance between autonomy and accountability to foster innovation and enhance educational outcomes.

Conclusion: Implementing campus autonomy in Nepal's higher education system requires careful planning, capacity-building, good governance and accountability, and fostering collaboration and coordination to address challenges and stimulate innovation.

Implication: The research provides valuable insights to stakeholders for improved decision-making, academic quality, governance, innovation, stakeholder engagement, and policy recommendations in developing a high-quality higher education system.

Originality/Value: The research's originality lies in aligning its implementation with stakeholders' expectations for quality development in higher education through campus autonomy. Stakeholder insights and opinions offer valuable understanding of campus autonomy, including its benefits, challenges, and potential implications. These insights inform decision-makers and policymakers, aiding their efforts to enhance campus autonomy and improve educational systems.

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RESUMO
Objetivo: Este estudio investiga las perspectivas de las partes interesadas sobre la implementación de la autonomía del campus de la Universidad Tribhuvan. Su objetivo es explorar cómo perciben las partes interesadas la autonomía del campus, identificar las oportunidades y los desafíos asociados a ella, y examinar sus ventajas e inconvenientes.

Metodología: El estudio se basa en un método de investigación cualitativa que utiliza el análisis temático. Se centra en cuatro temas principales: retos estructurales, sostenibilidad institucional, gobernanza y responsabilidad, y colaboración y coordinación. Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas en profundidad y debates en grupos de discusión, y se empleó el análisis temático para extraer valiosas ideas de las partes interesadas.

Resultados y Debate: Los resultados revelan las complejidades que entraña la implantación de la autonomía. Destacan la importancia de la planificación estratégica, el desarrollo de capacidades, el tratamiento de las disparidades, la defensa de la libertad académica, el mantenimiento de la coordinación y la búsqueda de un equilibrio entre autonomía y responsabilidad para fomentar la innovación y mejorar los resultados educativos.

Conclusiones: La implementación de la autonomía universitaria en el sistema de educación superior de Nepal requiere una planificación cuidadosa, el desarrollo de capacidades, la buena gobernanza y la rendición de cuentas, y el fomento de la colaboración y la coordinación para abordar los desafíos y estimular la innovación.

Implicaciones: La investigación proporciona información valiosa a las partes interesadas para mejorar la toma de decisiones, la calidad académica, la gobernanza, la innovación, la participación de las partes interesadas y las recomendaciones políticas en el desarrollo de un sistema de educación superior de alta calidad.

Originalidad/Valor: La originalidad de la investigación radica en alinear su aplicación con las expectativas de las partes interesadas para el desarrollo de la calidad en la educación superior a través de la autonomía del campus. Los puntos de vista y opiniones de las partes interesadas ofrecen una valiosa comprensión de la autonomía universitaria, incluidos sus beneficios, retos e implicaciones potenciales. Estos puntos de vista informan a los
responsables de la toma de decisiones y a los responsables políticos, ayudándoles en sus esfuerzos por aumentar la autonomía de los campus y mejorar los sistemas educativos.

**Palabras clave:** Autonomía del Campus, Aplicación, Gestión, Perspectivas de las Partes Interesadas, Nepal.

1 INTRODUCTION

University autonomy refers to the ability of an institution to make independent decisions without external interference. It is a crucial prerequisite for creating an environment that fosters enlightenment and knowledge (Joshi, 2019). University autonomy allows individuals to continuously question the world around them and contribute to the creation of new knowledge. It plays a vital role in enhancing our understanding of the complexities of the world. It is important to establish and implement academic freedom and autonomy policies in higher education institutions to enhance student engagement, improve academic quality, and increase transparency (Gallagher, 2019; Watermeyer et al., 2022). Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are considered essential for the development of new knowledge within the academic community (Bergan et al., 2020; Brink, 2018; Council of Europe, 2019). Academic freedom is widely regarded as an inherent principle within higher education institutions, historically associated with the freedom to conduct research and pursue studies without political or external interference (Ceglie & Thompson, 2021; Popov et al., 2021). University autonomy and academic freedom have become increasingly important in higher education governance worldwide, allowing academic institutions to excel and adapt to changing needs (Gallagher, 2019; Toyin et al., 2019; Watermeyer et al., 2022). The autonomy of universities empowers them to make decisions regarding admissions, curriculum, exams, research, finance, and personnel, enabling them to function as independent centers of teaching and learning (Gallagher, 2019; Bergan et al., 2020).

While laws play a crucial role in safeguarding academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Bergan et al., 2020; Council of Europe, 2019), their effective enjoyment requires more than just legal frameworks. Practice, attitudes, and a deep understanding of principles are necessary factors (Bergan et al., 2020). While academic freedom and institutional autonomy are not absolute, higher education institutions should still comply with general laws that ensure safety, financial accountability, and non-discriminatory practices (Bergan et al., 2020; Council of Europe, 2019). Financial support from various sources, without restrictive conditions, can
strengthen academic freedom and institutional autonomy while preserving the societal role of higher education (Council of Europe, 2019; Watermeyer et al., 2022).

Academic freedom grants individuals within the academic community the privilege to engage in independent thinking, research, teaching, and knowledge creation without fear of intimidation from administration or government forces (Bergan et al., 2020; Watermeyer et al., 2022). Institutional autonomy refers to the freedom of an institution to conduct its affairs without interference from external entities (Joshi, 2019; Matei, 2020). It encompasses the institution's power to determine its goals, programs, and the means to achieve them. Restricting university autonomy and denying academic freedom hampers the core purpose of education in nurturing individuals who can think and express themselves freely, truthfully, creatively, and critically (Bergan et al., 2020). Without academic freedom and institutional autonomy, the educational landscape stagnates, hindering innovation, progress, and the cultivation of a society that values diverse perspectives and the pursuit of truth (Joshi, 2019; Bergan et al., 2020).

University autonomy and academic freedom are globally significant issues (Bergan et al., 2020; Ignatieff & Roch, 2018) that are universally valued in higher education (Joshi, 2019; Matei, 2020). However, their implementation requires consideration of contextual factors (Bretag, 2020; Tierney & Lanford, 2014). In East Asia, developmental states have emphasized universities' role in serving national interests and socio-economic development (Dang & Kamibeppu, 2020). The evolving nature of academic work and economic circumstances have presented challenges to academic freedom, with universities expected to prioritize economic interests (Tierney & Lanford, 2014; Watermeyer et al., 2022). The overall framework of university governance, including the relationship between institutions and public authorities, is crucial (Kallio et al., 2021; World Bank, 2012). Autonomy encompasses academic, financial, organizational, and human resources aspects, granting decision-making freedom within these areas (Bergan et al., 2020).

Tribhuvan University (TU), established in 1959 as Nepal's first university, is committed to promoting and disseminating knowledge with a strong emphasis on quality education (Ghimire, 2014; TU, 2019). As a government-funded central university, TU has a widespread presence across the country, comprising 62 constituent campuses, 40 central departments, and employing 8,340 teaching faculty and 7,674 non-teaching staff (TU, 2023). Since its establishment, TU has functioned as an autonomous institution (TU, 2019). The governance and structure of the university have been enhanced through amendments to the Tribhuvan University Act in 1993 and the Tribhuvan University Rules in 1994, providing the university
with a statutory status and a comprehensive autonomous framework. To strengthen the infrastructure required for quality education, TU introduced the Decentralization Rule in 1998 and the Autonomy Rule in 2005. These rules aimed to empower the constituent campuses by granting them increased decision-making authority, fostering a sense of ownership, and promoting accountability among campus stakeholders (TU, 2019). Currently, all constituent campuses of TU adhere to the principles of decentralization, enabling them to exercise specific powers related to campus management at the local level. Moreover, eight campuses operate as autonomous institutions, enjoying a significant degree of decision-making authority and autonomy in managing their respective campuses, as outlined in the TU Autonomy Rule of 2005. This arrangement provides them with a broader range of powers and facilitates efficient campus management.

The transition towards autonomy is driven by the global influence of technology in education and the changing aspirations of society, leading universities worldwide to adapt and transform their goals and structures (Bennetot et al., 2023; Bergan et al., 2020). However, implementing autonomy presents challenges related to infrastructure, quality education, governance, accountability, and academic freedom (UNESCO, 2022; Watermeyer et al., 2022). TU has taken steps to address these challenges and improve teaching, research, and campus management. The decentralization and autonomy regulations were formulated through amendments to the TU Act and TU Rules, marking a significant shift in legal rights from the central authority to constituent campuses (TU, 2019). The Second Higher Education Project (SHEP) was established (2007-2014) with the financial support of the World Bank to facilitate and provide technical as well as financial support for developing these regulations, focusing on infrastructure development for quality education (Asian Development Bank, 2014).

The move towards autonomy aligns with the Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) and the Tribhuvan University Autonomy Rule (2005), which emphasized the decentralization of powers to TU constituent campuses in Nepal (TU, 2019). The fundamental goal of granting autonomy to TU constituent campuses is decentralizing authority from the central level to individual campuses (TU, 2019). This shift aims to foster academic excellence, encourage research-focused approaches, promote financial prudence, optimize resource utilization, and enhance the overall capacity for institutional management (Joshi, 2019) ultimately benefiting both students and the university as a whole. Which, TU is the first university to implement autonomy provisions in Nepal.
Ghimere (2014) highlights that TU and its various campuses have faced significant hurdles on multiple occasions, both before and during the pursuit of autonomy. These obstacles primarily stem from conflicting perspectives among stakeholders and the impact of external factors. University administrations and faculty often appreciate autonomy for its potential to provide academic flexibility, while the government may seek a certain level of control (Gallagher, 2019). Additionally, students may voice concerns about compromised quality and accountability in the absence of sufficient oversight (Kayyali, 2023). Balancing autonomy, quality assurance, competition, and market demands pose a complex task for modern universities (OECD, 2017). The trends of privatization, diversified funding, and internationalization further complicate the autonomous self-governance model (Hunter et al., 2023). Therefore, comprehending the multifaceted nature of autonomy in contemporary universities is pivotal for its effective implementation.

TU implemented a campus decentralization policy (1998) to enhance the quality of higher education in Nepal (TU, 2019). However, the policy could not be implemented on all its constituent campuses on the same date due to divergent opinions among the stakeholders (Bista et al., 2019; Gandhari, 2021). Similarly, most of the constituent campuses did not entertain entering into the TU constituent campus autonomy policy (2005) at the beginning stage. Most scholars in Nepal expressed concerns about the limited success of autonomy reforms, as campuses continued to face challenges such as political interference, lack of accountability, limited advancements in quality, and inadequate resources (Ghimere, 2014; Bista et al., 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the impact of campus autonomy and analyze the diverse expectations associated with it. However, the existing literature on these issues in the Nepali context is limited (Bista et al., 2019). Some of the autonomous campuses have been found to have made significant progress in terms of physical infrastructure development, quality education, resource management, program development, and social status after being granted autonomy. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the campus autonomy implementation process, and its impact and analyze the diverse perspectives of stakeholders associated with it.

To address this gap, this study aims to conduct an in-depth case study to assess how autonomy reforms have influenced governance and academia within a specific campus in Nepal. The study seeks to shed light on the significant challenges encountered during the implementation process of campus autonomy at TU. It will examine the perspectives of key stakeholders, including students, teachers, management, and policymakers, to identify the opportunities and obstacles faced. Thus, the study can significantly aid the understanding of stakeholder
perspectives for effective navigation of campus autonomy implementation. In this way, the study aims to provide recommendations for successfully achieving the goals of autonomy.

2 OBJECTIVES

i. To explore the various stakeholder perspectives on the management and implementation of campus autonomy in TU.

ii. To identify the key challenges and opportunities associated with implementing campus autonomy in TU.

iii. To investigate the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders towards the benefits and drawbacks of campus autonomy in TU.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a qualitative case study research design aimed at exploring and analyzing the perspectives of stakeholders involved in the implementation of campus autonomy. A qualitative case study allows for an in-depth examination of a specific issue or problem within its real-life context, as it seeks to understand a contemporary phenomenon with a deep level of insight and exploration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, a purposive sampling approach was employed to select three autonomous campuses out of a total of eight autonomous campuses. The selected campuses represented two categories: multiple campuses and unitary campuses. It is important to note that one of the selected campuses was the first to be granted autonomy, while another campus was the last to receive autonomy from TU. These variations in the timing and type of autonomy granted to the campuses provide unique perspectives and insights into the implementation process.

The study aimed to capture the diverse perceptions and expectations of stakeholders with varying levels of experience in the changing situation of autonomy. The research sought to identify the strengths and weaknesses associated with the implementation of campus autonomy by exploring the overall experiences and expectations of stakeholders.

Data collection involved the use of three primary tools: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. These tools were employed to gather information and insights from the participants and facilitate group discussions to explore different perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with campus chiefs, chairs of the campus
management committee, and two members of the campus management committee nominated by the guardians of students and educationists. Focus group discussions were held separately with teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and members of the Campus Free Student Union, considering their roles, responsibilities, and perceptions regarding campus autonomy.

To validate the findings derived from the interviews and focus group discussions, an extensive search was conducted for official documents related to autonomy rules, regulations, policy provisions, implementation guidelines, and developed policy documents by the campuses. A predefined checklist was utilized to systematically identify and gather relevant documents, including official policy documents on autonomy and accountability. This comprehensive document review aimed to supplement and support the insights gained from the qualitative data collected through interviews and focus group discussions.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique employed to identify common themes, patterns, and insights related to stakeholder perspectives on campus autonomy implementation (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The thematic analysis followed a deductive logic of inquiry, remaining grounded in the chosen theoretical perspective and examining themes and patterns pertinent to the research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis involved a back-and-forth movement between deductive and inductive reasoning, with themes derived directly from the data using an inductive coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach allowed for a thorough exploration of the data and the discovery of meaningful patterns and insights (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

So in this study, the codes were refined and merged using an iterative process to create meaningful categories within each theme. The participants' experiences and perspectives on the challenges of implementing campus autonomy were analyzed by extracting consistent themes from their views. The thematic analysis focused on four key themes that emerged from the experiences, feelings, observations, and opinions of the selected participants, including TU administrators, campus administrators, faculty, administrative staff, students, and key stakeholders of the autonomous campuses. The analysis aimed to explore the multi-perspectives of these individuals and shed light on the challenges based on their observations, perceptions, and practices.

Throughout the analysis process, careful attention was given to maintaining the validity and reliability of the findings. The research team engaged in rigorous discussions and peer debriefing to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the interpretations. The thematic framework, depicted in Figure 1, provides details of the themes and sub-themes derived from the qualitative data.
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented based on each theme concerning the challenges of implementing campus autonomy, derived from a diverse range of participants. The obtained results from different themes, as depicted in Figure 1, are analyzed and discussed in separate headings, relating to the research objectives and existing literature. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the findings and discussion, as each theme encompasses various sub-themes.

4.1 STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

The implementation of campus autonomy can face several structural challenges. These challenges can vary depending on the specific context and circumstances of each institution. In this study, the theme of structural challenges on campus autonomy implementation consists of the sub-themes governance structure, institutional culture and mindset, legal framework, resource allocation, and uneven campus capabilities.

The establishment of an effective governance structure that balances campus autonomy with centralized coordination is a key challenge. According to Zhang et al. (2023), developing
a governance framework that allows decision-making at the institution while ensuring accountability and collaboration requires careful planning and stakeholder participation. It is crucial to define roles, responsibilities, and reporting mechanisms within the autonomy model to ensure effective governance. In this context, participants shared their views:

The establishment of newly introduced autonomous campuses may indeed face several challenges related to the formation of a governance structure and its implementation. During the initial phase, both regulatory and practical issues may arise, presenting obstacles in the formation and execution process.

The newly introduced autonomous campuses need to anticipate and address these challenges proactively. This may involve engaging with relevant authorities, conducting thorough planning and consultation processes, and seeking guidance from experienced professionals in higher education governance. By doing so, the campuses can mitigate potential issues and increase the likelihood of a successful implementation of the autonomy framework.

Institutional culture refers to the collective identity and character of an institution, shaping how individuals within it perceive, interpret, and respond to various situations and challenges. It influences their perspectives, behaviors, and decision-making processes. Moreover, it fosters a mindset, that acts as a mental framework or lens through which individuals perceive and make sense of the world around them, including the campus environment. Therefore, the successful implementation of campus autonomy requires a transformative shift in the institutional culture and mindset. As noted by Zhang et al. (2023), fostering a culture of empowerment, innovation, and shared governance is essential for a successful organization. Overcoming resistance to change is a significant challenge. It requires sustained efforts to build a mindset that values autonomy and academic freedom among faculty, staff, and administrators (Watermeyer et al., 2022). Effective communication is also needed.

On this point, one of the participants contended:

It's a completely new system, and I must say I was quite curious when I first heard the news. The idea of campus autonomy intrigued me because it presents an opportunity for us to explore different ways of doing things. I believe it opens doors to innovation and allows us to tailor our approach to better suit our institution's unique needs.

Another participant argued in this way:
It allows us to be more responsive to the needs of our students, faculty, and staff, fostering a more dynamic and effective learning environment. I believe it can lead to greater empowerment, collaboration, and overall growth for our institution.

In the same question, a participant claimed it as skepticism:

"I'm not sure if this new system will work. We've always done things a certain way, and it might be challenging to adapt to a different culture and mindset." "I'm concerned about the potential disruptions and uncertainties that may arise from implementing campus autonomy. It's a significant change, and we need to be cautious."

The existing legal framework may pose challenges to campus autonomy implementation (Bennetot et al., 2023; Bergan et al., 2020). According to UNESCO (2022), adapting the legal and regulatory framework to accommodate the autonomy model requires careful examination and revision of relevant laws and regulations. Obtaining necessary approvals and ensuring compliance with statutory requirements can be time-consuming and complex, requiring coordination with government authorities and legal experts (UNESCO, 2022). Allocating resources equitably among autonomous campuses is a significant challenge. Ensuring fair and transparent resource allocation, including funding, infrastructure, and human resources, is crucial for the success of education (OECD, 2017). Regarding the existing legal framework of campus autonomy, the participant viewed:

"Since campus autonomy represents a significant departure from the traditional structure, there may be conflicts or inconsistencies with the current regulations and policies governing higher education institutions." "For instance, there might be specific regulations related to curriculum development, faculty appointments, or financial management that were designed for a centralized system. Implementing campus autonomy could require navigating through these regulations and finding ways to comply while also exercising the desired level of autonomy."

Disparities in capabilities among campuses pose a structural challenge to autonomy implementation. As highlighted by Marginson (2016), not all campuses may have the same level of capacity, infrastructure, or human resources. Addressing these disparities and providing appropriate support, such as training and capacity-building programs, is essential to ensure a level playing field and promote the effective implementation of autonomy across campuses. In this concern, the participant stated:
While granting autonomy is a positive step towards empowering individual campuses, it's essential to acknowledge that not all campuses may have the same level of resources, infrastructure, or administrative capacity. These disparities can create unequal playing fields among campuses, making it difficult for some institutions to effectively exercise their autonomy. Campuses with limited resources and weaker infrastructure may struggle to meet the expectations and requirements that come with autonomy. This can hinder their ability to fully leverage the benefits and potential of the new system. This may involve targeted support and capacity-building initiatives, providing resources, training, and technical assistance…... can help bridge the gaps and enable campuses to effectively implement autonomy.

These structural challenges require careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous evaluation to create an enabling environment for campus autonomy (Zhang et al., 2023). A fair and transparent resource allocation system, targeted capacity-building programs and training opportunities, collaboration and knowledge-sharing among campuses, flexibility within the regulatory framework, and collaboration with external stakeholders for extra support, funding opportunities, and specialized services are crucial for creating a more equitable and supportive environment that enables all institutions to thrive (OECD, 2017).

The implementation of campus autonomy in higher education institutions is accompanied by various structural challenges that need to be addressed, including governance, culture, legal frameworks, resources, and campus capabilities (Ceglie & Thompson, 2021; Sancheti & Pillai, 2020). Developing an effective governance structure that balances autonomy and coordination is crucial (Zhang et al., 2023). Shifting institutional culture and mindset to embrace empowerment, innovation, and shared governance can be difficult but necessary (Virgüez et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Adapting legal frameworks to accommodate autonomy requires careful examination and revision of relevant laws and regulations (UNESCO, 2022). Equitable resource allocation and addressing disparities in campus capabilities are essential (OECD, 2017; Marginson, 2016).

Addressing these structural challenges requires careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous evaluation (OECD, 2017). Strategies such as collaborative resource allocation, capacity building, regulatory flexibility, and external support can foster an enabling environment for autonomy (OECD, 2017).

Developing an effective governance model that balances decision-making powers and accountability is complex (Bergan et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2022; Kallio et al., 2021). Shifting institutional norms and mindsets toward empowerment and shared leadership takes sustained effort (Watermeyer et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Effective communication is crucial for ensuring a smooth transition toward autonomy (Harris et al., 2022).
4.2 INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Institutional sustainability in implementing campus autonomy is a critical aspect that ensures the long-term viability and resilience of an institution as it transitions to a more autonomous model. Bergan et al. (2020) discussed sustainability in higher education as a major challenge in the 21st century.

The framework of strategic planning, resource allocation, governance structures, and stakeholder engagement is essential for achieving sustainable autonomy in higher education institutions (Gupta & Choubey, 2021; Machado & Davim, 2023). The framework highlights the need for institutions to assess their capacity and develop strategies to address challenges to maintain their autonomy successfully. Furthermore, Gupta and Choubey (2021) emphasize the dimensions of financial stability, leadership, faculty engagement, and community support as vital factors in sustaining higher education institution autonomy. In this study, the theme of institutional sustainability regarding implementing campus autonomy is based on the following key factors: financial stability, leadership and governance, institutional identity, limited resources, and monitoring and evaluation.

Campus autonomy requires strong financial stability for institutions to function independently (World Bank, 2017). It is crucial for the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions implementing campus autonomy (World Bank, 2017). Sustainable revenue streams, budgetary autonomy, and strategic investment plans are critical for the long-term self-sufficiency of campuses (Hong, 2023). He further states that "higher education institutions must have autonomy in financial planning and allocating budgets based on strategic priorities. So the fixed source of finance to run the campus should be guaranteed either from the government or from other institutions." Insufficient budget allocations can result in resource constraints, impacting the institution's ability to attract and retain qualified faculty, provide student support, upgrade campus infrastructure, and support research projects (Sutton & Brown, 2016). In this context, the participants viewed the same argument:

For the initial years after autonomy, it is common to receive block grants to run the institution. However, the long-term goal is to gradually develop alternative ways and make the institution more independent. Unfortunately, in the current situation, it appears that the agreements between the campus, the university, and the university grants commission have been deformed and the funding system has become like other non-autonomous campuses. Without the availability of grants, delivering quality higher education becomes a significant challenge for the campus. Quality education requires sufficient resources to support……
Academic leadership and governance is a crucial part of institutional sustainability (Harris et al., 2022). It encompasses the systems and structures in place to manage and oversee academic institutions such as universities, colleges, and schools. Their primary responsibilities include setting the strategic direction, ensuring academic quality, and making decisions that impact the institution as a whole. Academic leadership and governance are essential for an institution's long-term viability to shape culture, values, and educational objectives, ensuring excellence, inclusivity, and financial stability (Bergan et al., 2020). According to Harris et al. (2022) and Akparep et al. (2019), a robust governance structure and stable leadership committed to an autonomous vision are essential. Additionally, clearly defined roles of centralized and campus leadership aid in streamlining decision-making processes and addressing issues of accountability (Hemakumar, 2021). In this concern, the participant expressed: "It requires a significant shift in power dynamics and decision-making processes."

Another participant voiced as:

Leaders need to have a clear vision for the institution and the ability to effectively communicate and negotiate with external governing bodies. They must strike a balance between autonomy and compliance with broader standards. It allows stakeholders to have a sense of ownership and involvement in shaping the direction of the institution. It's a challenge that requires strong leadership, effective governance structures, and a commitment to ethical practices.

Institutional identity refers to the unique characteristics, values, culture, and reputation that define an academic institution. It encompasses the collective sense of purpose, mission, and vision that distinguishes the institution from others (Harris et al., 2022).

Autonomy must be balanced with preserving the core mission and values of the parent institution (Ceglie & Thompson, 2021). Concerning institutional identity, the participant asserted:

Campus autonomy can be the potential for fragmentation of institutional identity. When different units or departments within an institution gain more autonomy, there's a risk of losing a cohesive institutional identity. When institutions gain more independence in decision-making, there's a risk that their unique identity and core values might be diluted or compromised.

Limited resources on campuses can present significant challenges for academic institutions (Asian Development Bank, 2014). These resources can include financial, human, technological, and physical resources. Availability of resources on campuses can vary based on factors such as the size and location of the campus, the programs and departments, and the
overall priorities and strategies of the university. Limited resources like infrastructural, academic, and human resources may be challenging for implementing campus autonomy (Asian Development Bank, 2014). In this context, the participant presented:

Limited resources can be a significant challenge when it comes to implementing campus autonomy. Without sufficient financial support, it's difficult for individual campuses to fully exercise their autonomy and make independent decisions.

In the same context, another participant proclaimed his view:

Campus autonomy requires the ability to allocate resources according to the specific needs and priorities of each campus. However, if resources are scarce, it can hinder the implementation of autonomous decisions and limit the potential benefits.

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial components of institutional sustainability. They involve systematic processes of assessing and measuring the progress, effectiveness, and impact of sustainability initiatives within an institution (Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023). Monitoring refers to the continuous tracking and observation of sustainability indicators, targets, and activities within an institution (Rey et al., 2022; Wilson, 2017). It involves collecting data, analyzing trends, and regularly reviewing the performance of sustainability initiatives. Monitoring helps identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, enabling timely corrective actions (Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023; Rey et al., 2022). It provides real-time information on the implementation of sustainability strategies, allowing institutions to stay on track towards their sustainability goals. Evaluation involves a more comprehensive and systematic assessment of the overall effectiveness and outcomes of sustainability initiatives (Rey et al., 2022). It goes beyond monitoring by examining the broader impact and success of sustainability efforts. Evaluation typically involves conducting in-depth analysis, gathering qualitative and quantitative data, and assessing the alignment of outcomes with initial objectives (Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023; Rey et al., 2022). Evaluation helps institutions understand the strengths and weaknesses of their sustainability programs, identify lessons learned, and make informed decisions regarding future strategies and resource allocation (Rey et al., 2022). Implementing campus autonomy is a challenging aspect. In this context, the participant expressed that:
"It is crucial for institutional sustainability, monitoring, and evaluation can pose significant challenges. It's essential to find effective ways to monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of autonomy while ensuring long-term sustainability."

Another participant disclosed: "It is a challenging task that requires skilled personnel who can navigate through the data and draw valid conclusions and recommendations."

Monitoring and evaluation in campus autonomy implementation face challenges in resource allocation, complexity of initiatives, time-consuming data collection and analysis, stakeholder engagement, and balancing autonomy with accountability (Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023; Rey et al., 2022). Overcoming these challenges requires strategic planning, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Institutional sustainability is vital in the context of autonomy, requiring strategic planning, effective governance, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement (Gupta & Choubey, 2021; Zouheir et al., 2023). Financial stability, leadership, faculty engagement, and community support are key factors for sustainability (Gupta & Choubey, 2021). Achieving financial stability requires sustainable revenue streams, budget autonomy, and strategic investments (World Bank, 2017). Insufficient budgets can hinder recruitment, student support, infrastructure upgrades, and research activities (Sutton & Brown, 2016). Strong academic leadership and governance structures are vital for sustainability (Harris et al., 2022; Akparep et al., 2019). Balancing autonomy with compliance and defining the role of the campus in decision-making processes are additional challenges (Hemakumar, 2021).

Preserving institutional identity while balancing autonomy is complex and requires careful planning (Ceglie & Thompson, 2021). Resource limitations pose significant challenges, particularly for small and remote campuses (Asian Development Bank, 2014). Addressing resource limitations is crucial for the success of autonomous campuses.

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial but challenging in campus autonomy implementation (Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023; Rey et al., 2022). Institutional sustainability is a key consideration, including stable and diversified funding sources (Martinez & Wolverton, 2020). Faculty buy-in and participation in decision-making processes, transparency, and strong leadership are critical for success (Altbach, 2015; Kallio et al., 2021). Succession planning is important for guiding the institution toward sustainability under autonomy.
4.3 GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Governance and accountability play crucial roles in the implementation of campus autonomy. Governance refers to the structures, processes, and mechanisms through which decisions are made and implemented within an institution (Nguyen et al., 2022; World Bank, 2017). Accountability, on the other hand, refers to the responsibility of individuals or entities to provide an account of their actions and decisions (Bergan et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2017). In the context of campus autonomy implementation, governance involves establishing transparent and participatory decision-making processes that empower individual campuses to make decisions regarding their academic, administrative, and financial affairs (Harris et al., 2022; Philip & Jamil, 2011). Accountability in campus autonomy implementation means that autonomous campuses are responsible for their actions and decisions (Bergan et al., 2020; Kallio et al., 2021). They are required to demonstrate transparency, integrity, and responsible use of resources (World Bank, 2017). Accountability mechanisms, such as performance indicators, external audits, and reporting requirements, are put in place to ensure that autonomous campuses are held accountable for their performance and outcomes (Kallio et al., 2021). In this study, the theme of governance and accountability comprises proper leadership management, ethics and integrity, maintaining institutional value, financial regulation, and ensuring policy consistency.

Leadership management in the institution involves guiding and coordinating the efforts of various stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, and administrators, toward a common vision (Wynne, 2016). Leadership management faces challenges: overcoming resistance to change, fostering effective communication and collaboration, building trust, developing leadership capacity, and balancing autonomy with accountability (Harris et al., 2022; Virgüez et al., 2023). These aspects are crucial for the successful implementation of campus autonomy. In this context, the participant expressed that it's crucial to guide and coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders towards a common vision. There are several obstacles that leaders might face. Similarly, another participant contended that:

"With decentralized decision-making, leaders at all levels need to be equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of campus autonomy. …… to increase innovation, responsiveness, and overall success for the institution and its stakeholders."
Ethics refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Integrity involves being consistent in one's actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations, and outcomes (Philip & Jamil, 2011). Ethics and integrity are the necessary conditions for accountable and good governance in any higher education institution. In this context, the participant affirmed that "the establishment of clear ethical guidelines and promoting a culture of integrity is crucial to foster a shared understanding of what is expected in terms of ethical behavior which is more challenging". Another participant revealed that "Fostering a culture of ethics and integrity across all the stakeholders of the institution can be a complex task and achieving this cultural shift may take time and concerted efforts from leadership."

Institutional values are the core principles, beliefs, and reputation established earlier as a foundation of the institution, serving as a benchmark by which people adhere and believe (Bettinson et al., 2023). These values provide guidance and shape the institution's actions, decisions, and interactions with stakeholders, reflecting its identity and purpose. It ensures the values and identity of the institution and reflects in the actions, decisions, and behaviors of each individual. In the context of maintaining institutional value, the participant voiced:

"Maintaining institutional values in a decentralized system requires strong leadership and effective coordination. Leaders must actively engage with each campus, ensuring that they understand and embrace the institution's values, and providing guidance on how to align their actions accordingly. It requires a collective effort from all stakeholders."

Financial regulation is the system in which the set of rules, guidelines, and oversight mechanisms govern the financial activities and operations within an institution (Hong, 2023; Wilson, 2017). These regulations aim to ensure financial stability, transparency, accountability, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations (Sokol et al., 2022). The participant in the context of financial regulation contended that:

"It can pose a significant challenge when implementing campus autonomy. With decentralized decision-making, ensuring compliance with financial regulations becomes more complex, as each campus may have its own unique financial operations and reporting requirements."
Similarly, another participant stated her views: "Financial regulations require adequate oversight and monitoring and also need a strong mechanism to assess and verify that each campus operates within the regulatory framework or not."

Ensuring policy consistency is a mechanism and practice to maintain coherence, fairness, and alignment across policies and procedures within an institution (OECD, 2018). It can be ensured by establishing a clear policy framework, policy ownership, and monitoring and periodic review. Consistency in policies helps to maintain coherence, fairness, and effective governance across all campuses. Ensuring policy consistency can be considered a challenging task in an autonomous campus due to the lack of efficient planning, implementation, and monitoring systems. The participant expressed the view regarding ensuring policy consistency "Ensuring policy consistency can be quite challenging when implementing campus autonomy. With each campus having the authority to develop its own policies and procedures, there is a risk of policy divergence and inconsistencies across the institution." Another participant asserted: "Maintaining policy consistency is crucial to ensure fairness and coherence in decision-making and operations in the transitional phase."

Implementing campus autonomy in higher education requires addressing challenges in governance and accountability across various sub-themes (Zouheir et al., 2023). Proper leadership management, ethics and integrity, institutional values, financial oversight, and policy consistency are crucial aspects.

Competent leaders, transparent decision-making, and defined roles are necessary for effective governance (Zouheir et al., 2023). Upholding ethics and integrity requires codes of conduct and accountability enforcement (Zouheir et al., 2023). Aligning governance practices with institutional values, such as academic excellence and diversity, is complex (Zouheir et al., 2023). Financial oversight encompasses robust policies, budgeting processes, internal controls, and audits (Zouheir et al., 2023). Ensuring policy consistency demands centralized development, stakeholder engagement, regular reviews, and clear communication (Zouheir et al., 2023).

Governance and accountability are crucial in implementing campus autonomy reforms (Bergan, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2022; Joshi, 2019). Boards of trustees/governors with diverse representation ensure democratic governance (Bergan, 2020). External accountability is achieved through quality assurance frameworks, program accreditation, and reporting requirements (Eaton, 2021; Kayyali, 2023). Stakeholder feedback and public disclosure of information strengthen downward accountability (Eaton, 2021). Linking funding to strategic plan targets incentivizes results-based accountability (Eaton, 2021).

Balancing autonomy and accountability requires inclusive internal governance models and robust external quality assurance mechanisms (Eaton, 2021; Kayyali, 2023). This addresses risks associated with insufficient oversight and promotes effective implementation of autonomy reforms (Eaton, 2021; Kayyali, 2023).

4.4 COLLABORATION & COORDINATION

Collaboration and coordination play a crucial role in implementing campus autonomy as they facilitate effective decision-making, resource allocation, and policy alignment across autonomous campuses. According to Moyo and McKenna (2021), collaboration is essential in managing the tensions between institutional control and campus autonomy. It requires establishing effective communication channels and fostering collaborative relationships among different stakeholders, including campus administrators, faculty, and staff that help to develop the sustainability of the institution (Kallio et al., 2021; Nkonki-Mandleni, 2023). This collaboration helps in achieving a shared understanding of goals and values, ensuring consistent policies and practices across the institution (Joshi, 2019). These mechanisms ensure that policies and decisions align with the institutional vision and maintain consistency across campuses. Collaborative decision-making processes that involve diverse stakeholders can help ensure that the needs and perspectives of marginalized groups are considered, fostering a more equitable and inclusive environment across all campuses (World Bank, 2017). In this study, the theme of collaboration and coordination are defined based on sub-themes such as collaborative decision-making, coordinated networking, faculty and staff mobility, change management, and managing stakeholder expectations.

Collaborative decision-making involves stakeholders working together to analyze problems, generate solutions, and make decisions collectively (Conti et al., 2019). It is a challenging task in campus autonomy implementation. This approach recognizes the diverse
perspectives, expertise, and interests of stakeholders, and aims to create a sense of ownership and commitment to the decisions made. Collaborative decision-making in implementing campus autonomy requires seeking input, engaging in dialogue, and reaching formal consensus through a collaborative approach, which can involve time-consuming negotiations (Hawkins & Wang, 2012). In this context, the participant argued that

"Implementing collaborative decision-making in the context of campus autonomy can be challenging due to various factors. First, there may be a need to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, staff, and students, each with their perspectives and interests. Coordinating and aligning these diverse viewpoints can be complex and time-consuming."

Similarly, another participant expressed his view:

It can be potential for conflicts of interest or power dynamics among stakeholders. … different groups may have varying levels of influence or resources, which can affect the decision-making process. Balancing these power dynamics and ensuring fair representation and participation can be demanding.

Coordinated networking in implementing campus autonomy refers to the intentional and strategic collaboration and coordination within the different domains of the institution and among other institutions. Coordination is defined as the deliberate and orderly alignment or adjustment of the actions to achieve jointly determined goals (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020). It involves establishing networks and mechanisms for sharing information and resources among the institution to promote efficiency, synergy, and the achievement of common goals (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020).

The concept of coordinated networking aligns with the broader understanding of collaboration and coordination in the context of campus autonomy, where institutions strive to balance independence with the need for coherence and cooperation among autonomous campuses. In this context, the participant is viewed as:

"Ensuring equitable participation and engagement of campus stakeholders in the current context of Nepal can be challenging. Power dynamics and varying interests among stakeholders can create imbalances in networking opportunities. However, it is crucial to address these disparities and promote fair and inclusive participation to prevent the marginalization of specific campuses or stakeholders."

Faculty and staff mobility can indeed pose a significant challenge in implementing campus autonomy in Nepal. Several factors contribute to this challenge. Firstly, faculty and
staff mobility can be limited due to geographical constraints. In Nepal, TU constituent campuses are located in different regions of urban and remote areas. It can be difficult for faculty and staff to relocate or commute between campuses. This geographical barrier can impede the exchange of knowledge, collaboration, and the sharing of best practices among autonomous campuses.

Secondly, resource constraints can affect faculty and staff mobility. Limited financial resources may hinder the ability to provide incentives or support for faculty and staff to move between campuses. Inadequate funding for travel, housing, and other necessary arrangements can discourage faculty and staff from participating in mobility initiatives. Similarly, the uneven distribution of human resources also hinders the quality of higher education (Mary et al., 2023; Moyo & McKenna, 2021). So the autonomous campus located especially in rural areas is facing more challenges regarding the factor faculty and staff mobility. In this topic, the participant argued that

"Faculty and staff mobility can indeed be a significant challenge in the context of implementing campus autonomy in Nepal. One major challenge is the geographical constraints. Nepal's diverse topography and scattered campus locations make it difficult for faculty and staff to physically move between campuses. This can limit the exchange of knowledge, collaboration, and the sharing of best practices among the autonomous campuses."

Another participant claimed that "Limited resources available for facilitating faculty and staff mobility is the major challenge."

Change management presents a significant challenge in implementing campus autonomy in Nepal's higher education system (Joshi, 2019). The transition from a centralized model to autonomous campuses introduces specific change management challenges. One of the main obstacles is the cultural and institutional resistance to change, as Nepal has a tradition of centralized decision-making and hierarchical structures (Zhang et al., 2023). Shifting mindsets to embrace greater decision-making authority at the campus level is necessary. Overcoming resistance and fostering a culture that values autonomy and collaboration is crucial. Coordinating and aligning stakeholders' expectations and interests are also vital challenges, as balancing diverse viewpoints and establishing a common vision can be complex (Zhang et al., 2023). Resource allocation and financial management can further complicate the implementation of campus autonomy (Hong, 2023). These challenges must be addressed to ensure successful implementation.
"Change management is indeed a crucial aspect of implementing campus autonomy in Nepal. One of the main challenges is the cultural and institutional resistance to change. TU has a long-standing tradition of centralized decision-making and hierarchical structures in its education system. Overcoming this resistance and fostering a culture that values autonomy and collaboration can be a significant challenge."

Similarly, another participant disclosed that "coordinating and aligning the expectations and interests of various stakeholders, balancing the diverse viewpoints, and aligning them towards a common vision can be complex and require careful negotiation and consensus-building."

In the context of campus autonomy implementation in Nepal, managing stakeholder expectations includes students, faculty, staff, administrators, governing bodies, and the wider community. Effective management of stakeholder expectations requires clear and transparent communication throughout the implementation process (Butt et al., 2016; Kallio et al., 2021; Virgüez et al., 2023). Engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue, providing accurate information, and addressing concerns and queries are essential steps for building trust and ensuring their support (Joshi, 2019). In this concern, the participant insisted on the view that Managing various stakeholders' expectations can be quite challenging due to their own unique individual expectations and concerns when implementing campus autonomy."

"Managing stakeholder expectations can be quite challenging and some stakeholders may have unrealistic and high expectations or misconceptions about campus autonomy that are impossible to achieve. Therefore, it is important to set realistic expectations from the beginning and provide a clear understanding of the limitations and constraints that may exist."

Collaboration and coordination are crucial for successful campus autonomy implementation in Nepal, as they facilitate decision-making, resource allocation, and policy alignment (Moyo & McKenna, 2021). Collaborative decision-making, involving diverse stakeholder perspectives, helps address power dynamics and mitigate marginalization (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Conti et al., 2019; Hawkins & Wang, 2012). Coordinated networking promotes synergistic goals (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020).

Faculty and staff mobility support knowledge-sharing and collaboration, despite geographical and resource constraints (Moyo & McKenna, 2021). Managing change and aligning stakeholder expectations is crucial for a smooth transition (Joshi, 2019; Leymann & Lundan, 2023). Managing stakeholder expectations through clear communication is important (Butt et al., 2016)."
Inter-institutional collaboration, industry and community engagement, and internationalization strategies are key for autonomous universities (Razak, 2021; Noorda & Lock, 2021). Collaboration on issues like credit transfer and joint programs prevents isolation and capitalizes on collective strengths (Enders et al., 2013). Engagement with external stakeholders enhances program relevance, student employability, and research commercialization (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020).

Coordinated internationalization efforts, such as exchange programs and joint research initiatives, help universities globalize (Hunter et al., 2023). Collaboration in areas like learning outcomes formulation and accreditation procedures ensures consistency (Giller, 2023). Strategic cross-institutional coordination, facilitated through networks and partnerships, is essential for achieving access, excellence, and relevance (Zhang et al., 2023). Addressing the challenges of collaboration and coordination enhances autonomy implementation by fostering a culture of partnership and shared vision. Effective collaboration and coordination maximize autonomy's benefits and help universities achieve desired outcomes.

5 CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges of implementing campus autonomy in Nepal's higher education system, identifying key themes such as structural challenges, institutional sustainability, governance and accountability, and collaboration and coordination. The findings highlight the importance of careful planning, capacity-building, and addressing disparities in campus capabilities. Long-term financial stability, academic leadership, and resource management are critical for sustaining institutions (Virgüez et al., 2023). Exemplary leadership and adherence to regulations are essential for governance and accountability. Collaboration and coordination are vital for participatory decision-making and meeting stakeholder expectations. To transition to campus autonomy, a strategic vision, robust frameworks, flexibility, capacity development, and stakeholder engagement are emphasized. Continual evaluation and alignment with national priorities are necessary. Protecting autonomy and academic freedom within Tribhuvan University (TU) is crucial. Enabling structures, resources, and responsible shifts are vital for success. Gradually delegating decision-making authority, transparent funding allocation, and collaboration with stakeholders can support the transition.

Campus autonomy at TU holds the potential for stimulating innovation, benefiting local communities, and enhancing student outcomes in Nepal. Meaningful academic freedom and
adherence to funding policies are crucial for faculty and institutional growth. Implementing campus autonomy necessitates a comprehensive approach considering Nepal's unique context and challenges in higher education. Effective collaboration and coordination can maximize the benefits of autonomy reforms in higher education, advancing Tribhuvan University and its constituent campuses.

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were approved by the Ethical Review Board of Tribhuvan University (approval number: ERBTU-080-003).

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