Vol. 6 No. 2 March 2018 ISSN: 2320-2653 UGC Approval No: 44213 Impact Factor: 3.008

COLLEGE AUTONOMY ON QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A STUDY BASED ON STUDENTS' SATISFACTION

Article Particulars
Received: 02.03.2018 Accepted: 12.03.2018 Published: 27.03.2018

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Abstract

Quality in higher education has become the prime task of countries worldwide. The role of higher education is vital in the development of a nation. It is largely accepted that autonomy and quality are related directly. The NPE 1986 ensures quality and excellence in Indian higher education by providing grant of autonomy to potential colleges by the universities. These autonomous colleges are empowered with academic freedoms. The UGC has been providing substantial grants to autonomous colleges to increase the quality in education. The role of NAAC in assessing the quality of autonomous colleges using prefixed criteria is no doubt desirable but not acceptable from research point of view. Use of prefixed criteria to judge the quality of goods and services had been denounced here. The trend, all over the globe, has to evaluate quality of goods and services in terms of how far the goods and services satisfy customers' or stakeholders' needs and expectations. Since higher education had come under the service sector, its customers or stakeholders are mainly students, parents, teachers and principals. Therefore, the quality of college autonomy needs to be studied in terms of how far the services provided by autonomous colleges focus on customer's needs & expectations. The present study is unique because, it investigates for the first time the quality in higher education empirically in terms of customers' satisfaction. In this context, the present paper intends to highlight on the practices of college autonomy in Odisha on the basis of empirical findings and it was revealed that college autonomy has positive impact on quality in higher education in terms of students' perception.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Quality, Higher Education, Satisfaction, Perception.*

Introduction

Grant of autonomy to potential colleges by the universities concerned has been the new trend in Indian higher education since the implementation of the National Policy on Education (MHRD, 1986) to ensure quality and excellence. Autonomous colleges are empowered with academic freedom to frame their own curriculum and syllabi, admit students by conducting entrance examinations, innovate and experiment with new methods and strategies for transacting curriculum, conduct examination and publish results, and award degrees to the students. Provisions are being made in national budget every year to provide substantial grants to

autonomous colleges through University Grants Commission (UGC). The UGC has been providing assistance to autonomous colleges to incur expenditure for inviting guests faculties; orienting and retraining teachers; redesigning courses at par with international standard; developing teaching learning materials; procuring equipments, furniture, books and journals; reforming examination systems; extending and constructing buildings, organizing workshops and seminars; holding meeting of governing bodies; and providing fees for accreditation. Besides these, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) have been established at Bangalore to assess the quality of colleges.

The role of NAAC in assessing the quality of autonomous colleges using pre-fixed criteria is no doubt desirable but not acceptable from research point of view. Use of pre-fixed criteria to judge the quality of goods and services has been denounced by the researchers. The trend, all over the globe, has to evaluate quality of goods and services in terms of how far the goods and services satisfy customers' or stakeholders' needs and expectations. Since higher education has come under the service sector, its customers or stakeholders are mainly students, parents, teachers and principals.

Therefore, the quality of college autonomy needs to be studied in terms of how far the services provided by autonomous colleges focus on customers' needs, expectations and satisfaction. Review of literature reveals that no systematic and comprehensive study has been conducted so far either in India or at international level to assess the impact of college autonomy on quality in terms of satisfaction of students in higher education. That is why the present study has been undertaken.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the present study was:

- To study the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education in terms of students' perception relating to their satisfaction with quality of teachers, curriculum, co-curricular activities, methods of teaching, library, infrastructural facilities and examination.

Hypothesis of the Study

Since there has been a little research work available with inconclusive findings in the problem under investigation, the following non-directional hypothesis was formulated.

- There exists significant different between perception of students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with quality of teachers, curriculum, co-curricular activities, methods of teaching, library, infrastructural facilities and examination.

Methodology

The present chapter deals with methodology and design of the study. It includes description of research method employed for investigation, sampling used for selection of sample from population, tools developed and adapted for collection of data, procedure of collection of data, organization of data and statistical techniques used along with region of rejection (levels of significance) for testing of null hypothesis.

This chapter was confined to the description of methodology under following heads.

- Method
- Population and sample
- Tools used
- Procedure of data collection
- Organization of data
- Statistical techniques used

Method of Study

The main objective of present study was to investigate the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education. Since college autonomy in India has been a planned programme launched by the Central Government through University Grants Commission to achieve excellence in higher education, and quality in higher education was understood in the present study as satisfaction of students with different educational aspects of higher education; the perception of students of both autonomous college and non-autonomous college with regard to different dimensions of higher education have been compared using causal- comparative method and ex-post facto research. The perceptions of students of both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with quality of teachers, curriculum, co-curricular activities, methods of teaching, library, infrastructural facilities and examination have been compared to study the magnitude of impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education.

Population and Sample

All students of both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges situated in the state of Odisha, India constituted the population of the study. A sample of 120 students representing the population and were selected randomly using the Table of Random Number (Fisher and Yates, 1963). The sample was selected following the multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, all the autonomous college having more than five years of the status of college autonomy were listed out from the website of the Department of Higher Education, Government of Odisha, India. The numbers of such autonomous colleges at the time of selecting sample were 16 in the state of Odisha, India. Out of 16 autonomous colleges nine autonomous colleges were selected randomly using the Table of Random Number (Fisher and Yates, 1963).

In the second stage, all the students studied at least one year in those autonomous colleges were listed out from the Admission Register of the colleges. From the list, 60 students were selected randomly.

Similarly, all government non-autonomous colleges situated in the same town areas where those nine autonomous colleges existed were listed out. Out of the list nine non-autonomous colleges were selected randomly using the Table of Random Number (Fisher and Yates, 1963).

Further, all the students who studied at least one year in those non-autonomous colleges were listed out from the Admission Register of the colleges. From the list of students of non-autonomous colleges, 60 students were selected randomly. Therefore, the total number of sample on which the study was conducted was 120 students.

Tools Used

In order to collect data from the selected sample the investigator used the Satisfaction Scale for Students developed by him.

The Satisfaction Scale for Students

The Satisfaction Scale for Students was developed by the investigator. The scale consisted of 35 items to assess students' perception relating to their satisfaction with seven dimensions of higher education such as quality of teachers, curriculum, co-curricular activities, methods of teaching, library, infrastructural facilities and examination system. For each dimension there were five positive statements which could be checked by students putting tick mark (√) on either strongly agree(SA) or agree(A) or not sure(NS) or disagree(D) or strongly disagree(SD) given against each item.

The initial draft of the scale consisted of 56 statements comprising eight statements on each of the seven dimensions of higher education. The statements were prepared by the investigator reviewing related literature on higher education. Various sources like journals, encyclopaedia, research abstracts, dissertation abstracts, references and texts on pedagogy of higher education were referred by the investigator. The statements arranged under different dimensions were sent to ten experts by mail to judge the validity of the statement. They were requested to give their suggestions so as to modify, retain and delete statements for preparing final draft of the scale. After modifying the statements on the basis of experts' judgment, the scale was administered on a sample of 40 students selected randomly from an autonomous college to make item analysis. Item analysis procedure (Gronlund, 1981) was followed to compute the difficulty and the discriminating power of each statement. The statements with difficulty level ranging from 25% to 75% and discriminating power from ranging from.25 to .75 were selected for final draft of the scale.

Thus, out of 56 statements, 35 statements five on each of the seven dimensions were selected for the final draft of the scale. In the final scale, the item number 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, were on quality of teacher; item number 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 were on curriculum; item number 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31 were on co-curricular activities; item number 4, 11, 18, 25 and 32 were on method of teaching; item number 5, 12, 19, 26 and 33 were on library; item number 6, 13, 20, 27 and 34 were on infrastructural facilities; and item number 7, 14, 21, 28 and 35 were on examination.

Procedure of Data Collection

The investigator after developing tools visited sample colleges to collect data. The principals of the colleges appraised of the purpose of visit by the investigator and were requested to extent their co-operation and assistance for the smooth collection of data. On request of the investigator, a separate room was provided by the principal of each college.

In the first phase, students of the college were invited in a group to sit peaceful and pleasantly in the room. At the beginning the investigator gave a short introduction about the purpose of visit and explained the importance of present study. The atmosphere created in the room was free from fear, anxiety and tension. The students were made clear about the procedure of responding to the scale. To win confidence of respondents and to elicit genuine responses from them, the investigator promised to keep their responses confidentially. The Satisfaction Scale for Students were distributed and administered to the students in a group. Though, the scale was a power test and consisted of 35 items, a minimum of 45 minutes was given to students to respond. After completion, students' responses were collected by the investigator.

Statistical Techniques Used

Since the data collected were on interval scale and size of the sample was appropriate from parametric statistical point of view, the't' test was used to analyze data for testing null hypotheses. For testing null hypotheses 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance were used. The't' values obtained were compared against table values at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance to retain or reject null hypotheses.

Discussion of the Results

The main objective of the present study was to investigate the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education. Since the concept of quality in the present study was defined as meeting, exceeding and delighting customers' needs and expectations with the recognition that these needs and desires would change over time (Downey, 1992), the data collected from customers of higher education such as students, parents, teachers and principals on their perceptions relating to satisfaction with various quality dimensions of higher education by administering the Satisfaction

Scale for Students was presented, analysed and discussed. The perceptions of students of autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with different quality dimensions of higher education have been compared with the perceptions of students of non-autonomous colleges using't' test to assess the impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education. A the summaries of t' value for students has been given in Table 1.1, and analysis. The null hypothesis of the study was tested at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance.

The perceptions of students of autonomous colleges and non autonomous colleges relating to satisfaction with different dimensions of quality in higher education were presented graphically through bar graphs in Figure 1.1, to evaluate the levels of satisfaction. Intra comparisons within different dimensions of quality of higher education in autonomous colleges on average scores of students' perception have been given in Table 1.2 and in Figure 1.3.

Table 1.1 Summary of 't' values for perception of students studying in autonomous and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with different dimensions of quality in higher education (N = 120)

Type of College / Quality Dimension	Autonomous college		Non Autonomous college		't' value	Level of significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Quality of Teachers	17.57	4.10	14.96	4.02	3.52	.01
Curriculum	17.08	4.33	13.84	4.04	4.26	.01
Co-curricular Activities	15.76	4.35	12.36	3.74	4.59	.01
Methods of Teaching	16.14	4.56	12.26	3.54	5.24	.01
Library	16.50	4.56	11.90	3.22	6.47	.01
Infrastructural Facilities	15.72	4.14	12.60	3.63	4.39	.01
Examination	15.72	4.44	12.70	3.60	4.13	.01
Total	114.5	25.5	90.62	18.3	6.17	.01

Students' Perceptions

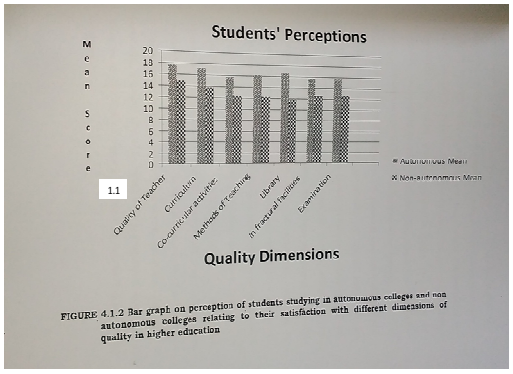

FIGURE 4.1.2 Bar graph on perception of students studying in autonomous colleges and non autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with different dimensions of quality in higher education

College Autonomy and Quality in Higher Education in terms of Students' Satisfaction

As it can be seen in Table 1.1, there found significance of difference between the perception of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges ($t = 3.52$; $df = 118$; $P<0.01$) in favour of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M = 17.57 >$

M = 14.96) relating to their satisfaction with quality of teachers.

Teachers of autonomous colleges were highly competent, well, cooperative, helpful and in taking lots of care as compared to teachers of non-autonomous colleges as perceived by students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there exists no significance of difference between the perception of students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to satisfaction with quality of teachers was rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis.

Table 1.1 shows that there found significance of difference between the perception of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges ($t = 4.26$; $df = 118$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=17.08 > M=13.84$) relating to their satisfaction with curriculum.

The curriculum of autonomous colleges was significantly better than the curriculum of non-autonomous colleges because it included new concepts, theories and principles, and was designed according to the present need of the society as perceived by students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there exists no significance of difference between the perception of the students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to satisfaction with curricular was rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis.

Table 1.1 reveals that students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges differed significantly with regard to their perception relating to their satisfaction with co-curricular activities organised by colleges ($t = 4.59$; $df = 118$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=15.76 > M=12.36$).

The quality of co-curricular activities in autonomous colleges were better than non-autonomous colleges as the autonomous colleges organised co-curricular activities more frequently and systematically, and students were encouraged to participate in those activities as perceived by the students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there exists no significance of difference between the perception of students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with co-curricular activities was rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis.

Table 1.1 shows that students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges differed significantly with regard to their perception relating to their satisfaction with methods of teaching ($t = 5.24$; $df = 118$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of students of autonomous colleges ($M=16.14 > M=12.26$).

The quality of methods of teaching in autonomous colleges was better than non-autonomous colleges. Teachers of autonomous colleges used to follow innovative methods in teaching, encourage students to participate in teaching learning process, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their doubts and explain difficult

concepts and principles clearly as compared to teachers of non-autonomous colleges as perceived by students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there exists no significance of difference between the perception of students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to satisfaction with methods of teaching was rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis.

Table 1.1 reveals that students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges differed significantly with regard to their perception relating to satisfaction with library facilities in their colleges ($t = 6.47$; $df = 118$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=16.50 > M=11.90$).

The library facilities in autonomous colleges were better than non-autonomous colleges as the libraries of autonomous colleges were having sufficient number of books, current journals and magazines, and reading room facilities. In autonomous colleges, library staff was more co-operative and students were encouraged to read in the library as compared to non-autonomous colleges as perceived by students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there exists no significance of difference between the perception of students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to satisfaction with library was rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis.

As, it is evident from Table 1.1, there found significance of difference between the perception of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges ($t = 4.39$; $df = 118$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of students studying in autonomous ($M=15.72 > M=12.6$) relating to their satisfaction with quality of infrastructural facilities in their colleges.

The quality of infrastructural facilities in autonomous colleges was better than the non-autonomous colleges as the students in autonomous colleges used to sit comfortably in the classroom, and were satisfied with the urinal, lavatory and drinking water facilities provided in the college. In autonomous colleges, infrastructural facilities like classroom, library, laboratory, playground, garden etc. were available and were maintained properly as compared to non-autonomous college as perceived by students.

Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there exists no significance of difference between the perception of students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to satisfaction with infrastructural facilities was rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis. As, it is evident from Table 1.1, there found significance of difference between the perception of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges ($t = 4.13$; $df = 118$; $P < 0.01$) in favour of students studying in autonomous colleges ($M=15.72 > M=12.70$) relating to their satisfaction with examination system. The quality of examination system in autonomous colleges was better than non-autonomous colleges. The examination system of autonomous

colleges was conducted more smoothly, questions asked in the examination were free from ambiguity, answer scripts of the students were evaluated properly and impartially, and results were published in time as compared to non-autonomous colleges as perceived by students. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there exists no significance of difference between the perception of students of autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges, relating to satisfaction with examination system was rejected in favour of alternative hypothesis.

In sum, the quality of education as perceived by students studying in autonomous colleges differed significantly from the quality of education in non-autonomous colleges ($t = 6.17$; $df = 118$; $P < 0.01$). From the Table 1.1, it is evident that quality of higher education in autonomous colleges was significantly better than the quality of education in non-autonomous colleges ($M=114.5 > M=90.62$). Figure 1.1 showing bar graph drawn on perception of students studying in autonomous colleges and non-autonomous colleges relating to their satisfaction with different dimensions of higher education reveals that autonomous colleges were having significant edges over non-autonomous colleges on quality of teachers, curriculum, co-curricular activities, methods of teaching, library, infrastructural facilities and examination system.

Table 1.2 Average perception scores of students on different quality dimensions of higher education in autonomous college as compared to combined average score (i.e. 16. 35) (N = 60)

Quality Dimensions	Scores < 16.35	Scores > 16.35
Quality of Teaching		17.57
Curriculum		17.08
Co-curricular Activities	15.76	
Method of Teaching	16.14	
Library		16.50
Infrastructure	15.72	
Examination System	15.72	

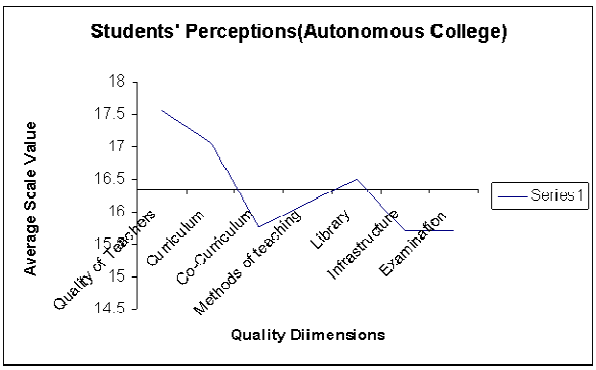

Figure 1.2 Average perception scores of students on different quality dimensions of higher education in autonomous colleges as compared to combined average score

Table 1.2 and Figure 1.2 showing the intra comparison within different dimensions of quality of higher education in autonomous colleges, such as quality of teachers, curriculum, co-curricular activities, methods of teaching, library, infrastructural facilities and examination system on average perception score with combined average perception score of students relating to satisfaction reveals that quality of teacher (M=17.57 > M=16.35), curriculum (M=17.08 > M=16.35), and library facilities (M=16.50 > M=16.35) were better than co-curricular activities (M=15.76 < M=16.35), methods of teaching(M=16.14 < M=16.35), infrastructural facilities (M=15.72 < M=16.35) and examination system(M=15.72 < M=16.35). Though, the students of autonomous colleges were satisfied with co-curricular activities, methods of teaching, infrastructural facilities and examination system, they were more satisfied with quality of teachers, curriculum and library facilities.

From the above analyses, the findings emerged could be summarised as (i) the teachers of autonomous colleges were more competent, well co-operative, helpful and in taking lots of care as compared to the teachers of non-autonomous colleges; (ii) the curriculum of autonomous colleges were significantly better than the curriculum of non-autonomous colleges because it included new concepts, theories and principles, and was designed according to the present need of the society; (iii) the quality of co-curricular activities in autonomous colleges were better than the non-autonomous colleges as the autonomous colleges organised co-curricular activities more frequently and systematically; (iv) the quality of methods of teaching in autonomous colleges were better than the non-autonomous colleges as teachers of autonomous colleges used to follow innovative methods in teaching, encourage students to participate in teaching learning process, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their doubts and explain difficult concepts and principles clearly; (v) the quality of library facilities in autonomous colleges was better than non-autonomous colleges as the libraries of autonomous colleges were having sufficient number of books, current journals and magazines, and reading room facilities; (vi) the quality of infrastructural facilities in autonomous colleges was better than the non-autonomous colleges as the students in autonomous colleges used to sit comfortable in the classroom, be satisfied with the urinal, lavatory and drinking water facilities provided in the college; (vii) the quality of examination system in autonomous colleges was better than non-autonomous colleges as the examinations of autonomous colleges were conducted more smoothly, questions asked in the examination were free from ambiguity, answer scripts of the students were evaluated properly and impartially, and results were published in time; and (viii) the quality of education in terms of students satisfaction with different dimensions of education in auto-colleges was better than non-autonomous colleges.

Major Findings of the Study

- The students studying in autonomous colleges were more satisfied with their teachers as compared to the students of non-autonomous colleges. Qualities of

teachers in autonomous colleges were better. They were competent, well co-operative, and helpful and student concerned.

- The curriculums of autonomous colleges were significantly better than the curriculum of non-autonomous colleges as perceived by students. The curriculum of autonomous colleges was designed with new concepts, theories and principles, and was according to the present need of the society.
- The students studying in autonomous colleges were satisfied with co-curricular activities organized in the colleges than their counterparts studying in non-autonomous colleges. The curricular activities in autonomous colleges were frequently and systematically organized.
- The quality of teaching methods in autonomous colleges were better than non-autonomous colleges as teachers of autonomous colleges used to follow innovative methods in teaching, encourage students to participate in teaching learning process, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their doubts and explain difficult concept and principles clearly.
- The students of autonomous colleges were more satisfied with the quality of library facilities in autonomous colleges than the students of non-autonomous colleges. The library of autonomous colleges were having sufficient number of books, journals and magazine and reading room facilities.
- The quality of infrastructural facilities in autonomous colleges was better than non-autonomous colleges as perceived by the students. In autonomous colleges students used to sit comfortably in the class room. The urinal, lavatory and drinking water facilities provided in autonomous colleges were better than non-autonomous colleges.
- The students of autonomous colleges were satisfied with the examination system than the students of non-autonomous colleges. The examination systems in autonomous colleges were conduced smoothly, questions asked in the examinations were free from ambiguity, answer scripts of the students were evaluated properly and impartially, and results were published in time.

Educational Implications of the Study

The finding revealing superiority of college autonomy in influencing quality in higher education bears remarkable educational implications. It is recommended that the present scheme of college autonomy which is restricted to a limited number of colleges needs to be extended to a large number of colleges in the country. Both Central Government as well as State Government require to take necessary steps in this regard. The present scheme of college autonomy in India has been restricted to academic autonomy only. Besides academic autonomy, the scheme of college autonomy should make provision for administrative autonomy as well as financial autonomy. College autonomy should be made fully functional in order to enhance

quality in higher education. Autonomous colleges should be given freedom to formulate their own rules and regulations for college administration, supervision and accountability in order to ensure continuous improvement. The autonomous colleges should also be given freedom to recruit and promote their members of staff within national and constitutional framework.

Further, it is recommended that autonomous colleges should be sufficiently funded by Central Government, UGC and State Government or should be provided opportunity to generate their own financial resources to carry out developmental activities for achieving total quality in higher education.

Research and development should go in a linear direction. Research findings should be utilized for continuous improvement of quality in higher education. Therefore, it is recommended that the UGC should establish appropriate mechanism to collect and utilize research findings for improvement of college autonomy.

Conclusion

The present study is a unique of its kind in the field of higher education in India and abroad. The study ventured to investigate for the first time the quality in higher education empirically in terms of customers' satisfaction. The impact of college autonomy on quality in higher education was also explored for the first time using the causal comparative method taking non autonomous colleges as control group. The study concludes with the establishment of an empirically verified proposition i.e. college autonomy has positive impact on quality in higher education. The study comes to a close with following generalizations that college autonomy impacts positively on quality of teacher, curriculum, co-curricular activities, method of teaching, library, infrastructural facilities and examination system.

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