

論 文

# Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom in the Afghan Public Higher Education Institutes: From 2002 to 2012

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## Abstract

This paper examines the controversial issue of autonomy in Afghan public higher education institutes. It attempts to describe the current status of institutional autonomy in Afghan public higher education institutes and determine ways to improve the situation. The major area of erosion of university autonomy includes admission of students, appointment of chancellors, teachers and other staff, and financial autonomy. This paper also points out important internal and external challenges that prevent the universities from becoming autonomous. Based on the analysis and discussion herein, this paper helps demonstrate that the Ministry of Higher Education will continue to play its dominating role unless higher educational institutes' top management, leadership, and young qualified staff bring positive changes to its governance and management. It is therefore recommended that to be effective and cope with the rising demand of higher education, the universities must be free of politics and contain a relative degree of autonomy in selecting its own students, staff, increasing financial sources and resources, and adopting modern management and governance techniques.

## 1. Overview of Afghan Higher Education:

Modern higher education began in Afghanistan with the establishment of the Faculty of Medicines in 1932, followed by that of the Faculty of Law (1938), the Faculty of Science (1942) and the Faculty of Letters (1944) (S. R. Samady 2007, P.17). The establishment of these faculties laid the foundation for Kabul University in 1946. After launching the first ever economic development plan

in 1956 in Kabul, attention started to be given to the development of higher education, resulting in the enactment of the Constitution of Universities in 1968. During this time, academic and administrative affairs of the university were governed by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The development of higher education in terms of student enrollment was significant in the 1960s and 1970s. The enrollment in higher education totaled 1,700, including 157 female students in 1960; it increased to 12,260 in 1975, which included 1,680 female students; the enrollment at the University of Kabul was 8,680 (S. R Samady 2001, P.62). To standardize, expand, and develop Afghanistan's higher education institutes, the central government established the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 1977.

Afghan public higher education institutes are broadly divided into pedagogical institutions, institutes of higher education, and universities.<sup>1</sup> Pedagogical institutions mainly deal with teacher training. Institutes of higher education can only offer higher education up to the undergraduate course level. According to the administrative rules of Afghan higher education, the term university can only be awarded to an institution that has proper physical resources: at least 10% of its academic staff holds PhDs and 20% Master degrees, there are at least four faculties, and each faculty has two departments and has one active journal for research publications. According to official statistics provided by the MOHE in 2011, the number of higher education institutes have reached 27 and the number of students increased to 84,032 (MOHE statistics 2012). The enrollment rate in tertiary education was among the lowest in the world: in 2001 the total number of students enrolled in all Afghan public higher education institutes was only 7,881.<sup>2</sup>

Political and economic development as well as the peaceful culture of modern society are generally supported by the education of its citizens, particularly through institutions of higher education that strive to meet national needs and international standards (MOHE, Strategic Development Plan March 2005). Achieving political and economic development through education in a nation generally require improved and diversified education policies. However, the belief that education is an engine of growth rests on the quality and quantity of education in any country (Olaniyan.D.A; Okemakinde. T; 2008, P.157). The Afghan government also mentioned the importance of higher education in many policy documents including Afghan National

## Development Strategy (ANDS) and Afghan Millennium Development Goals (AMDGs).

The author considers that there are three important reasons that support the idea that national development is achieved through greater access and improved quality of higher education. First, due to prolonged war, there is a critical shortage of professionals and policy-level decision-makers throughout the country. Afghanistan urgently needs engineers, technicians, administrators, accountants, agronomists, business leaders, and others to meet the needs for reconstruction and development. It is an urgent and immediate need for the country to begin to develop human capital. The ultimate responsibility to develop human resources falls on the MOHE.

Second, higher education constitutes the apex of the educational system and sets quality standards for the rest of the educational sector (the World Bank March 2005, PP.1 and 3). A quality secondary education is partially in the hands of university professors who play key roles in writing textbooks and reading materials as well as teaching students with those textbooks and materials. It is then those very university graduates who teach in senior secondary schools, which in turn produce primary school teachers. It is thus essential to build a good practice for the rest of the education sector.

Third, because institutions take a long time to build, the development process needs to start at the outset, in order to cope with the rising demand for the future. Article 17 of the Constitution of Afghanistan 2004 states as follows:

“The state shall provide measures for promoting education in all levels. The state is obliged to devise and implement effective programs for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan, and to provide compulsory intermediate level education. To attain the effectiveness and balanced expansion of the quality education, the MOHE must establish the mechanism for accreditation and quality assurance”.<sup>3</sup>

On the central government level, the issue of institutional autonomy of higher educational institutes is mentioned in policy documents such as ANDS. Besides the issue of autonomy, the central government also gave priority to the accreditation and quality assurance of higher education. This is the background in which the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) 2010-2014 was prepared by the MOHE. It is widely accepted that the role of

higher education institutes is to develop human resources, promote research, and pursue technological advancement. Nations today depend increasingly on knowledge, ideas, and skills that are produced in universities (Adedokun 2009, P.61). The Afghan government also utilized this general concept as a reform agenda as early as 1968. The Constitution of the Higher Education of Afghanistan, stipulated in 1968, applied the principle of higher education as follows: Chapter 1, Article 1, Paragraph 2,

“The Principal objective of the University is the preservation, dissemination, and advancement of knowledge, strengthening personal and social responsibility in youth; and training youth to realize Islamic, national, legal and political values in order to serve the Afghan society and mankind. National development in Afghanistan is dependent on the success of efforts to transform higher education into an effective high quality system”.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of institutional autonomy appeared for the first time as a policy reform agenda in the Afghan Higher Education Strategic Plan in 2010. A well-managed and self-sustainable higher education system is essential for the growth and development of a nation. Higher education plays a crucial role in the supply of high-level manpower for the sociopolitical and economic development of a nation (H. T. Ekundayo, I. A. Ajayi 2009). Rebuilding and strengthening higher education is a pressing and critical need for Afghanistan (World Bank, 2005, p, 14).

After decades of war, there is an urgent need for well-educated and trained leadership for sustainable development in all sectors of economy. Rebuilding higher education is one of the most significant tasks needed to achieve effective restoration and the improvement of Afghan society. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to analyze the current state of autonomy in public higher education institutes in Afghanistan in the light of the need for improving the system for the overall development of Afghanistan.

Traditionally, the higher education system in Afghanistan is centralized and public universities have less autonomy and academic freedom.<sup>5</sup> Article 43 of the constitution of Afghanistan states that “Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan...” and goes on to note that it “...shall be offered up to the BA level in state educational institutes free of charge by the state”. This article prevents the public higher education institutes from collecting revenue

from other sources (e.g. student fees, etc.). The Afghan Public Financial and Expenditure Law state that “the budgetary units can only spend the earned revenue if they receive the prior permission from the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and their proposal is approved in the yearly budget request”.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the public higher education institutes remain financially dependent on the MOHE.

As such, the MOHE oversee the higher education institutes and control their activities and operations. The ministry holds the responsibility to establish national higher education curricula as well as special education programs, and to promote further education for faculty members. On behalf of public universities, the ministry also establishes academic partnerships programs with foreign universities and organizes seminars and conferences. Providing accommodation facilities to teachers and students is the other major responsibility of the MOHE.

## 2. Concept of Autonomy

Many scholars and professionals who work in the field of education define the concept of autonomy according to their specialty and interest. However, all of these definitions and explanations have similarities and close resemblance in their content and meaning. In higher education literature, Akinwumi and Afolayan remarked that “autonomy makes managers of universities answerable to their constituencies and provides freedom to the universities to govern themselves, appoint their key officers, determine the condition of service of their staff, control their students admissions, academic curriculum, and their finance and generally regulate themselves as independent legal entities without undue interference from the government and its agencies” (Akinwumi, 2001, P.117).

In order to explain the term autonomy it is important to clarify the concept of “academic freedom”, which has similarity and is used complementarily with this concept. There can be no academic freedom without institutional autonomy and institutional autonomy has been regarded an essential element for academic freedom (Awe, I.A Ajayi and Bolupe, 2008, P.104). The notion of academic freedom arose and is important because academics are responsible for new discoveries and innovation, and without their research work and findings, knowledge would not have developed and we

would not enjoy today's benefits. Thus, academic freedom allows academics to challenge existing knowledge and create new ideas: they are granted academic freedom to undertake research and discuss new ideas and the problems of their disciplines, and express their conclusions, through both publication and in the teaching of students, without interference from political or ecclesiastical authorities, or from the administrative officials of their institution, unless their methods are found by qualified bodies within their own discipline to be clearly incompetent or contrary to professional ethics (Karran 2009, P.1).

Among other factors, university autonomy is considered important as it determines the success of an organization in achieving its goals and objectives. According to Weber, recently the best-ranking universities are very autonomous (exceptions exist in Japan, Russia and China). The World Bank defined the concept of autonomy in the educational context in a discussion paper as "autonomy applies not only to freedom of expression, but [also to] control over admissions and hiring policies, deployment of resources, decisions on types of activities to engage in" (Ziderman 1998, P.18).

As autonomy reflects the relationship among the university and the government and its agencies, it greatly varies in operational details among different mutual and existing organizations within a country. The other important issue that arises parallel with the term autonomy is accountability. In the opinion of Stevenson, all universities around the world are dealing with the very important issue of how to strike the proper balance between universities and governments, how to strike the proper balance between the autonomy of universities and the reasonable accountability of universities for the public funds that maintain much of their activities (Stevenson 2006, P.1).

In the same way Babalola doubted whether any higher institution of learning can claim to be either fully autonomous or completely lacking autonomy in the world. He added that true autonomy is not an absolute condition but a partial and dynamic concept involving enough freedom of a university to select its students and staff, set its own standards, design its own curriculum, decide its own spending priorities, and decide to whom to award its own degrees, diplomas, and certificates (Babalola 2001, PP.21 and 22). The following section will provide the historical overview of the terms in the context of Afghanistan.

### 3. Overview of Institutional Autonomy in the Afghan Public Higher Education Institutes

The exposure of the Afghan higher education system to different political and ruling regimes since 1979 gave different meaning to the term autonomy in the education sector.<sup>7</sup> At present, the higher educational institutes do not have full institutional autonomy to perform their duties.<sup>8</sup>

There are two aspects to this problem: the legal perspective and current inappropriate practices. From the legal perspective, the issue of institutional autonomy of the public higher education institutes is not clear and several laws exist simultaneously, contradicting one another in their contents. The Public Higher Education Institute's Law has granted some degree of academic autonomy to the higher education institutes (to issue its own academic degrees to its students) without the intervention of the MOHE after prior approval of the High Council (HC).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, article 9 of this law also gives freedom and authorizes the higher education institutes to establish and strengthen academic partnership agreements with national and international entities according to the established Afghan law.

However, the established Afghan Higher Education Institute's Law limits the authority and autonomy of the higher education institutes and specifically authorizes the MOHE "to manage, supervise and develop the activities and operation of the state public higher educational institutes."<sup>10</sup> This law defines academic freedom as "describing of academic ideas, establishing of academic standards and attitudes, and its implementation in the area of the academy and society".<sup>11</sup> However, this freedom is not provided to any particular institutions. According to this law, the main function of higher education institutes is to prepare the national cadre for obtaining bachelor degrees or above, and to provide training in master and doctoral degree courses to the academic cadre. In addition, the role of other ministries and institutions in the HC is limited and the composition of the HC mainly consists of the MOHE and high level officials in public higher education institutes.

The MOHE and its institutions do not possess operation manuals or guidelines for performing its activities.<sup>12</sup> The Afghan NHESP, established in November 2009, is an official document based on national needs and realities, and is consistent with contemporary international thinking about educational

change. The MOHE regards this document as a formal template for all of its development programs and activities for the next five years (2010-2014).<sup>13</sup>

Even though the issue of institutional autonomy for public universities is mentioned in both the ANDS and NHESP plans, the central government and the MOHE have been continuously imposing conditions of service and bureaucratic rules on how the universities should be governed.<sup>14</sup> The plans also state that the degree of higher education autonomy existing under present law will be clarified and the MOHE will seek modification where it limits institutional entrepreneurship and creativity. The MOHE hoped that an amendment before Parliament granting higher education a measure of financial autonomy would be quickly ratified, as the law was ratified and sent to parliament for approval and further process.

The following discussion will analyze in what areas higher education institutes have not had their autonomy in Afghanistan.

### **3.1-Academic Autonomy**

As defined above, the term academic autonomy is a very broad concept that covers many academic related issues in the field of education. In this section the author will discuss the current status of student admissions to public universities from the perspective of Afghan legislation as well as current practices of the MOHE followed by discussion of accreditation and the quality assurance of higher education in public higher education institutes.

#### **a. Admission of Students to Afghan Public Universities:**

One of the most vital issues for Afghan higher education is accessibility for those who want to pursue higher education. In this section, the paper attempts to describe the current state of student admissions in public universities: first, the statistical trend of this issue, and second, an analysis of how the MOHE has been involved in this problem.

Access to education for all Afghans is enshrined in the Afghan constitution, which makes it illegal to deny or refuse access to schooling for any reason.<sup>15</sup> Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2002, the Afghan government has been attempting to diversify and expand higher education. However, achievements thus far have not been enormous. Full accessibility would be achieved, as is pointed out by civil society organizations, if every person who wants to study is able to enter and continue further education; i.e.,

there are no obstacles, economical, physical, psychological, cultural, parental, institutional, or other that would prevent one from doing so (Save the Children 1995-2005).

During the establishment of the Afghan interim regime in 2002, the size of the higher education system in terms of the number of educational institutions and teachers was meager, but since then there has been an exponential increase. The number of public universities has also increased from a few in 2002 to 27 in 2012, indicating a 5-fold jump.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the number of teachers also increased from a few hundred in 2002 to 3,040 in 2012.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most important aspects of student admissions to higher education is the level of capacity of the universities. The authority to determine the terms of admission for students to public universities and other related matters belongs to the state and its approved law.<sup>18</sup> In 1990 the number of students in tertiary education was 24,333.<sup>19</sup> “By 1995, the total number of students had fallen to 17,370; by 2001 it had dropped to 7,881”.<sup>20</sup> In 2010, 131,299 secondary school students applied for entrance exams and 28,073 (21.3%) passed including 4,828 (3.6%) females.<sup>21</sup>

Table 1 in Annex 2 shows both the capacity of each public university and the size of student enrollment from 2010 to 2011. From this table, one can observe the distribution pattern of students in different universities across the country. The number of enrolled students in past few years has risen from 7,881 to 84,032 in public universities, averaging 3,361 students per university, which is very low compared to foreign universities, ranging from more than 10,000 students to fewer than 1,000 students.<sup>22</sup> However, the distribution does not follow any particular pattern or norm when considering the capacity of the faculty and infrastructure. Only Kabul University has 10,000 students, thus fulfilling international standards for being recognized as a university. The Badghes, Samangan, Panjsher, and Laghman higher educational institutes have 214, 198, 239 and 342 students respectively, which is abysmally low. Here one can say that the actual number of students admitted is proportionally much lower than the actual capacity of each university, an optimum size for students.<sup>23</sup>

The question then is why has there been such poor performance in student admissions in Afghan public universities. One of the most significant aspects of student admissions is the way the entrance examination is conducted.

However, the management and execution authority of the entrance exam is, in fact, in the hands of the MOHE, not the public universities.

Two aspects of the examination should be clarified regarding how the MOHE has the authority to conduct entrance examination: one is the nature of the entrance examination committee and the other is the criteria for taking the exam. According to Afghanistan's entrance examination bill, the entrance examination committee in the MOHE has full authority to conduct entrance examinations for entering public universities and higher educational institutes.<sup>24</sup>

The entrance examination committee is headed by a director selected by the MOHE, a committee officer as secretary, one representative from the MOE, and seven experienced teachers from universities located in Kabul as members.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the committee that executes and conducts the examination, the planning, and important decisions regarding the development of entrance examination is in the hands of MOHE.<sup>26</sup> The composition of the committee indicates that the role of public (provincial) universities is excluded in conducting entrance examinations. Moreover, this exclusion of the involvement of public universities as an institution means that only a limited number of faculty members can participate in the examination process.

The other aspect of the entrance examination is the rigid criteria for a student's taking of the examination. In the entrance examination, the committee sets passing marks for all faculties and students must select and prioritize the faculties they desire to enter. If a student is unable to achieve the required marks for entering his or her first choice faculty, his or her score will be reduced according to set principles in order to enter the second-choice faculty. Thus, many students suffer here and do not achieve the passing marks required to enter the selected faculties. Hence, such types of examinations do not test knowledge and ability of the students. Rather it is the judgment of students' choices of faculties during the entrance examination. Therefore, many students do not consider the entrance exam as fair as it undermines students' knowledge and abilities.<sup>27</sup>

According to a MOHE official, "the MOHE uses the entrance examination as a tool to determine the number of students to be enrolled in each public university every year, mentioned in the interview by the MOHE official".<sup>28</sup> The other high official stated that "public universities have no authority from the

time of their establishment to conduct entrance examination[s] and select their own student[s] according to their need[s] and capacity”.<sup>29</sup> Thus the entrance exam undermines the real capacity of public universities.

The aforementioned discussion shows that the selection and distribution of students to public universities are implemented by the MOHE, which undermines the existing actual capacity of the public universities. The nature of the entrance exam itself is not to test students’ abilities and knowledge about the subject matter. In fact, this entrance examination pattern dramatically increased the number of failed students to 103,266 out of total 131,299 in 2011.<sup>30</sup>

### **b. Accreditation and Quality Assurance**

The effective rebuilding and development process of Afghanistan is highly dependent on the improvement of higher education and its linkages with the public and private sectors. Afghanistan’s higher education system is now at a critical point at which it needs to focus on quality improvement (M. Osman Babury, Fred. M. Hayward 2009, P.2). In the last few years, the Afghan MOHE has been trying to follow their counterparts in developed countries for establishing a quality assurance system at the university level.

Quality assurance is the planned and systematic review process of an institution or program to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being met, maintained, and enhanced.<sup>31</sup> Quality assurance is a tool designed to contribute value to higher education by promoting high quality. The growth of quality assurance is a continuous process that needs well-coordinated strategies and concrete actions and efforts if desired outcomes are to be achieved. According to David Lim, the term “quality in higher education” has five possible definitions that the author summarized as follows (Lim 1999, P.2).

First, it may be defined as producing perfection through continuous improvement by adopting Total Quality Management (TQM) to create a philosophy about work, people, and human relationships built around shared values. The second and less formidable definition is to see quality as performance that is exceptional and attainable in only limited circumstances and only when very able students are admitted. The third is to see it as the ability to transform students on an on-going basis and add value to their knowledge and personal development. The fourth definition is to see it as the

ability to provide value for money and to be publicly accountable. The fifth definition sees quality as something that fits the purpose of the product or service, once the purpose has been decided.

The quality of higher education neither follows any international standard nor meets any comprehensive set of definitions in Afghanistan (World Bank 2005). The establishment of accreditation of quality assurance systems in Afghan higher educational institutes appeared recently in the MOHE policy documents, including the NHESP 2010-2014. The Higher Education Institute's Law describes the hierarchy level, function, duties, and responsibilities and the nature of the accreditation board.<sup>32</sup> The MOHE has been realizing the importance of establishing an agency on the national level to oversee and review the accreditation, which is defined as "the process of external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and higher education programs for quality assurance and quality improvement".<sup>33</sup>

Based on aforementioned discussion, in 2011, the MOHE set principles for the establishment of a quality assurance system for public and private higher education institutes, and these principles appear in the MOHE's official gazette. Beside the development of standards for improvising quality in higher education institutes, another important function of this agency would be to ensure all providers including foreigners meet the needs and quality requirements of Afghanistan and its nation, and also ensure that the public is not defrauded by diploma mills or substandard tertiary education providers. The establishment of a formal accreditation institution is mainly dependent on the approval of a revised higher education law. The mutual consultation with the public and private higher education institutes will provide a rigid foundation for this institution. According to the MOHE strategic plan, the self assessment criteria developed by the MOHE in 2009 will be used for the accreditation of higher education institutes. The formal self assessment will focus on improving quality for fostering national development, improving public well being, and ensuring that graduates satisfy national needs as well as become competitive in the international market.

Although the MOHE has set the principles of accreditation quality for public and private higher education institutes, the freedom and authority of formal accreditation will determine the successful implementation of the accreditation and quality assurance process.

### **3.2-Administrative Autonomy**

The administrative structure and procedures of Afghan public higher education are complicated and outdated. Higher education institutes have little autonomy, if any, and are subject to rigid administrative rules and regulations.<sup>34</sup> The notion of planning, management, and performance indicators are both foreign and weak in the higher education system and in each institution. In the Afghan higher education context, the concern of administrative autonomy relates to the authority and freedom of the higher education institutes in recruitment of key staff and the administration and financial affairs of the University for performing the core duties and responsibilities.

#### **a. Appointment of the Chancellors, Teachers and other Staff**

The chancellor is the head of governmental higher education institutes, and has the responsibility of being in charge of and improving academic and administrative affairs.<sup>35</sup> The appointment of the chancellor rests upon the High Council's suggestion in the MOHE and the approval of the president of the state. Since the approval and dismissal of chancellors belongs to the president of the state, it became a political affair.

Vice chancellors are chosen in governmental higher education institutes after an institute's chancellor makes a request, and approval is granted by a minister in the MOHE and the president of the state. The recruitment of teachers or academic staff in universities is a very long and complicated process. If an institute has a vacancy, the department seeking staffing initiates the recruitment request to their related faculty; the academic committee in each department reviews and forwards the request to the chancellor who in turn sends a request to the Director of Academic Affairs (DAA) in the MOHE. After the assessment by the DAA and approval by the Minister of Higher Education, the candidates must pass the required examination to become an official teacher.<sup>36</sup> As the authority of approving the request for recruiting teachers and other civil servants for higher education institutes lies with the MOHE, this is another area where the autonomy has been constrained in Afghan public universities.

#### **b. Financial Autonomy**

Financial Autonomy is an internationally recognized privilege of a university that provides freedom to the institutions to receive income from

the state, private, and other sources; financial autonomy also provides freedom to the institutions to decide how to allocate their income among different categories of expenditures to increase performance, productivity, and cost efficiency. The concept of financial autonomy is used when interests simultaneously concern financial issues and autonomy (Kohtamaki 2009, P.72). Thus, financial autonomy combines financial issues and autonomy. It can then be said that financial issues are related to resources, expenditures, resource allocation, and financial management. Ashby and Anderson developed one new element in the category that focuses on the freedom to decide how to allocate revenue from public and private sources (E. Ashby, M. Anderson 1966, P.72).

Higher education in Afghanistan faces rigid financial constraints from a legal perspective and traditional inappropriate practices by MOHE and financial institutions.<sup>37</sup> The constitution of Afghanistan (2004) states that: “Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan...” and goes on to note that it “...shall be offered up to the BA level in the state educational institutions free of charge by the state”.<sup>38</sup> The interpretation of this article has meant that the expectation of students is that no fees are to be charged for public university education. In addition, the Afghan Public Financial and Expenditure Law state that “the national budgetary units can only spend the earned income if they receive the prior permission from the MOF and their proposal is approved in the yearly budget request”.<sup>39</sup> It is not the case in practice that budgetary units spend their earned income due to rigid rules and regulations. Thus, article 11 in the same chapter further states that “the institutions after receiving the revenue from the public are obliged to deposit it in the prescribed national banks in the national revenue account”. The Afghan legislation and current circumstances inevitably prevent the higher education institutes from seeking outside sources of income, particularly through students’ fees and thus impose restrictions on higher education institutes. Free, or token, tuition is the norm in most developing countries, although during the last decade this trend has begun to change (Douglas Albercht, Adrian Ziderman 1992, P.15). When free higher education is combined with a high demand for university education, the financial consequences can be extremely serious for education institutions.

The budget allocation mechanism in Afghanistan is outdated and it’s mostly composed of foreign aid and grants. In general, the allocation of budget

to public institutions in Afghanistan is on an ad hoc basis that does not align with the characteristics and needs of the institutions.<sup>40</sup> The MOF negotiates budgets with the public budgetary units. Within this category of budgeting, decision-making does not depend on specific institutional characteristics, such as the number of students enrolled and teachers in the education sector. In the ad hoc manner of budget allocation, much depends on political relationships between actors (Douglas Albrecht, Adrian Zicerman 1992, P.18). In these negotiated budget practices, the level of funding carries little relationship with the activities that the institutions conduct. This method of funding allows the government to exert a greater degree of power over the budget receivers.

The share of the higher education budget is comparatively low and its allocation to the public higher education institutes is not uniform. The budget flow mechanism among the MOHE, MOF, and Afghan Central Bank is complex and over-centralized as shown in Annex 1, diagram 1. For example, the national budget of Afghanistan in fiscal year 2012 consists of USD 4,782 million (the share of foreign aid and grants is 54.4%).<sup>41</sup> The share for the MOHE in this budget is USD 70.3 million -- that is 1.46% of the national budget. Furthermore, USD 44.2 million of the core budget constitutes operations and the remaining USD 26 million comprises the development budget. The share of the development budget is 37% and the allocation of the development budget to the public higher education institutes is on ad hoc basis. As stated by an MOHE official, the process of receiving the annual operating and development budget from the central government and its fair distribution to higher education institutes is a daunting challenge to the MOHE.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, the operating budget for the higher education institutes is barely sufficient to cover salaries, free dormitory costs, and highly subsidized meals.<sup>43</sup> The allocation of the development budget is mainly controlled by the MOF and donors, the higher education institutes; as well the MOHE has little discretion in the way this fund can be expended.<sup>44</sup>

The development budget execution rate is an indicator to measure the performance of the MOHE in implementing its development plan in a year.<sup>45</sup> The Directorate of Planning in the MOHE mainly deals with management and implementation of the development budget. The data in table 2 shows poor performance by the MOHE in implementing the allocated budget.

**Table 2: The Budget of the MOHE in USD millions**

Years	Operating Budget	Developmental Budget	Operating and Developmental Budget	Budget Execution Rate
2005	13.00	15.25	28.25	-
2006	15.52	19.29	34.81	-
2007	17.93	49.67	67.60	-
2008	25.20	24.00	49.20	-
2009	32.34	34.54	66.88	-
2010	38.68	21.36	60.04	27% (Dec)*
2011	44.25	26.05	70.30	9% (June)
2012	43.71	58.27	101.98	6.8% (Sep)

Source: National Budgets (2005 to 2012), Ministry of Finance, Kabul, Afghanistan.

Compiled by: Author

\* The Afghan fiscal year starts on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

Table 2 also shows that in 2012 there is a 100% increase in the development budget of the MOHE. However, the development budget execution rate is the lowest compared to the rate of the last two years.

#### 4. Challenges Related to Institutional Autonomy in the Afghan Public Higher Educational Institutes

The public higher education institutes face numerous challenges in acquiring autonomy from the MOHE and central government. Generally, these challenges can be divided into two broad categories: external and internal. Some of the key challenges are discussed in the section below.

##### 4.1-External Challenges

These are the challenges that exist on a broader level and beyond the control of an institution. Policy reform in the higher education sector mainly depends on the broader policy's framework where it operates. As discussed in this paper, the constitution of Afghanistan article 43 and the Afghan Public Financial and Expenditure Law, chapter 3, articles 11 and 12 do not allow higher education institutes to keep funds raised through a fee for services that are necessary for institutional development.

Another important issue that raises public concern while dealing with

institutional autonomy is the lack of accountability and transparency between the MOHE and universities. The traditional view that higher education institutes need not justify their activities to government or society at large developed at a time when very limited portions of public budgets were spent on these institutions (Douglas Albrecht, Adrian Ziderman 1992, P.20). As budget demands increase due to government priorities under limited resources, that position is not longer tenable. Therefore, all institutions using public funds have an obligation and responsibility to show how effectively those funds are used. Institutions that receive finances from different means are not only responsible for avoiding corruption, but also they must answer how and under what conditions and costs such institutional goals have been achieved.

In addition to widespread poverty, Afghanistan also suffers from major human capacity limitations throughout the public and private sectors.<sup>46</sup> A poor environment for private sector investment and the growing narcotics industry are other daunting challenges faced all over the country.<sup>47</sup> Deteriorating security and political instability also have been adversely affecting the institutional autonomy of higher education institutes and are considered main external challenges.

#### **4.2-Internal Challenges**

There are many internal challenges that are present in the MOHE and higher education institutes that resist the autonomy process. Some of the prominent internal challenges are discussed in the section below.

##### **a. Governance and Management**

The management structure and norms of the MOHE are outdated and rooted in tradition.<sup>48</sup> Good management and improved transparency in the areas of database management, procurement, budgets, and accounting are especially important in order to achieve improved efficiency in handling financial resources, especially if the case is to be made for an expanded donor base and increased government funding.<sup>49</sup> In the departmental hierarchy level, both the MOHE and higher education institutes lack the division of research and policy development. For example, the planning department in the MOHE mainly consists of units that deal with construction work of the higher education institutes. The staff in the planning and budget sections is comprised of civil servants who receive considerably low salaries and benefits

to perform their jobs. This in turn produces low output.

The higher education institutes have little autonomy, if any, and are subject to rigid administrative rules and regulations.<sup>50</sup> The notions of planning, management, and performance indicators are both foreign and weak in the higher education system and within each institution.<sup>51</sup> The communication mechanisms with the universities and other stakeholders are poor and wasteful. The concept of coordination and team work is not considered an essential principle of governance and management. There is no tradition of monitoring and evaluation and appraisal of pending projects. According to an MOHE official, a reward and punishment system is essential for the improvement of systems and service delivery.<sup>52</sup> Based on this discussion, one can say that Afghan public higher education institutes have very few resources and autonomy to improve the governance and management practices for increasing efficiency and productivity.

#### **b. Availability of Facilities**

Infrastructure, facilities, and equipment are all essential tools for carrying out educational activities. In all cases, the infrastructure is insufficient for what is required for universities across the country. Classroom, laboratory, and library facilities are very simple. It is noted that in order to make existing structures including classrooms, laboratories, offices, and libraries functional and environmentally friendly, they must be renovated.<sup>53</sup> Electricity and water supplies are often insufficient and/or not functioning. Basic computer facilities are lacking for both instruction and administration. Ongoing repairs and renovation activities are ad hoc, and facility planning based on strategic plans for universities is nonexistent.

Construction of new buildings and facilities in the universities is top priority and is urgently needed to cope with the increasing demand of higher education. The MOHE has made less progress on infrastructure development (e.g. construction, rehabilitation, renovation and supplies).<sup>54</sup> The MOHE started 21 construction and renovation projects in higher education institutes and due to low implementation capacity they have not yet been completed.<sup>55</sup> For example, the Balkh University construction project started in 2003 with a cost of USD 1,453,400 to be completed in 3 years after the signing of the contract. Similarly, the Kandahar University construction project started in 2005 and its projected cost is USD 1,079,900. However, the projects are not

yet completed and its funding is carrying forward each year. The renovation process in existing universities is also very slow and it reflects the weak planning and implementation of the MOHE.

The space requirement for each higher education institute does not follow any particular pattern or formula (e.g., the number of students or faculties, teaching requirements, including laboratories and practical experiences in science and agriculture fields).<sup>56</sup> There are poor recreational facilities for the students and faculties (e.g. lounges, sports facilities, health centers, etc.). Some universities like Kabul, Nangarhar, Balkh, Herat, and Qandahar have huge campus areas, but there is no reasonable facility planning. Instead the MOHE spends huge amounts of the operating budget on providing free meals to the students in the dormitories.

### **c. Relevancy to and Linkages with the Economy**

On the central government policy level, the ANDS involves strengthening the market-based economy in Afghanistan. The strategy is to improve the quantity and quality of professionals for the emerging demands of the market-based economy in Afghanistan.<sup>57</sup> Higher education institutes in Afghanistan do not have a tradition of linkages with production sectors. Faculties and departments work in isolation from employers. Neither the universities nor the Kabul Polytechnic have a board of trustees with representatives from the private industrial sector and the civil society (the World Bank 2005, P.3).

The MOHE recently began instituting policies and procedures to support relevance and link higher education with the private sector in response to the emerging demand for labor and economic development. A World Bank-funded project hired 12 staff members on a contract basis and assigned them to universities to focus on student services including job placement, academic counseling, sports, new student orientation, conflict management, and dormitory services.<sup>58</sup> The number of such staff per university is negligible and their services are on temporary bases. The MOHE started internship programs recently in some professional courses, including public policy and social work similar to medicine, pharmacy, and veterinary sciences.<sup>59</sup> Such internship programs are important for developing cooperation between the higher education institutes and employers. The ANDS also stressed the issue of autonomy for the higher education institutes by allowing them to cooperate with other domestic and international universities for academic and cultural

exchange programs.<sup>60</sup>

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has attempted to analyze the issue of institutional autonomy in Afghan public higher education institutes and found out that the higher education institutes lack absolute freedom and autonomy in academic and administration issues. This lack of autonomy in Afghan public higher education institutes is mainly due to limitations in legal frameworks and inappropriate practices of education policy-makers in the MOHE and higher education institutes. One aspect of this problem is the absence of the legal status of higher education institutes as legal entities in the constitution of Afghanistan, higher education laws, and other policy documents. The legal restrictions imposed by the Afghan higher education institutes have two high risks: first, these institutes are prevented from seeking greater efficiency since they cannot make use of their existing potential; and second, universities cannot respond to changing external demand.<sup>61</sup>

One important aspect of academic autonomy is the ability and freedom of universities to select their own students. As discussed in section 3.1a, the admission of students to public higher education institutes is the sole authority of the entrance examination committee located in the MOHE, which has members from universities located in Kabul. Thus, provincial public higher education institutes are limited in their role in selecting their own students.

As discussed in section 2 of this paper, academic autonomy is important in promoting new discoveries, innovation, and establishing a knowledge-based society. The quality assurance and accreditation system has recently evolved for improving the quality of higher education. The standard of quality assurance of the higher education system in Afghanistan needs to be improved significantly in order to achieve the country's goals of competitiveness with the international standard and regional norms, and to lead to the foundation of a knowledge-based economy.

The discussion in 3.2b also indicates that higher education institutes have little administrative autonomy and their administrative affairs are subject to rigid rules and strict regulations by the MOHE. To measure the performance

capacity of the MOHE in developing higher education institutes, the development budget execution rate is used in this paper. As shown in Table 2, the development budget execution rate declined to 9% in 2011 compared to 27% in 2010. However, while in 2012 there was a 100% increase in the development budget, the execution rate was as low as 6.8%.

Furthermore, due to legal constraints in financial issues, higher education institutes depend on the central government for their entire budget. The MOF uses a negotiated type of funding in Afghanistan that has not been an effective mechanism to allocate financial resources to institutions. This type of budget ignores incentives for efficiency and increases uncertainties regarding future funding, especially in relation to enrollment and improving quality.

Beside the aforementioned issues, higher education institutes face numerous external and internal challenges that resist the process of autonomy and growth of higher education in Afghanistan. Political decisions on appointments of executive staff negatively affect the governance and management of mid- and lower-level staff as top management quality varies.<sup>62</sup>

The issues of corruption and low capacity in other public institutions, nationwide security, and political instability are daunting challenges for higher educational institutes, however, and require further study.

#### Notes

- 1 The term Afghan public higher education institutes has used in MOHE's legal and policy documents and will refer to all aforementioned educational organization in this paper unless specified.
- 2 NHESP 2010-2014, MOHE, Kabul, Afghanistan, page 1.
- 3 Constitution of Afghanistan, Article 17, 2004.
- 4 Constitution of the Higher Education of Afghanistan, Afghanistan, 1968.
- 5 Based on interview with Strategic Advisor for the HE, MOHE, Kabul, Afghanistan, July 10, 2012.
- 6 Article 12 chapter 3, Afghan Public Financial and Expenditure Law, page 15, Registration No 6854, July 18, 2005.
- 7 In 1979 Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan that continues for several years; followed by civil war and other religious movement that ended in 2001.
- 8 Based on an interview with the Chancellor of Kabul University, Kabul, July 24, 2012.
- 9 Official Gazette, Higher Education Law for the Public Universities in Afghanistan, No 777, 18 Aug, 1989, Chapter 1, Article 7, item 2, Page 8. According to this law, the members of HC include the first deputy of the Afghan cabinet as president, the Minister of Higher Education as deputy, the president of science academy as a member, the ministers of finance, education,

- health, and planning as members, the chancellors of the universities as members, one representative from the academic council of universities as a member, the president of the staff training institute as a member, and the first deputy minister of higher education as secretary.
- 10 Afghan Higher Education Institute's Law, chapter 1, article 3, MOHE's duties and responsibilities.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Based on an interview with the Strategic Planning Adviser, SHEP, World Bank funded project, July 11, 2012.
- 13 H.E. Minister of Higher Education, preface of NHESP, 2010-2014, page ii.
- 14 Based on an interview with the acting chancellor of Kabul University, Kabul, Afghanistan, July 24, 2012.
- 15 ANDS, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008-2013, page 113.
- 16 NHESP 2010-2014, MOHE, 2009, page 3.
- 17 MOHE statistics 2012, <http://www.mohe.gov.af/?lang=da&p=ehsaya>.
- 18 The constitution of Afghanistan, article 46, 2004.
- 19 Samady, Saif R. Education and Afghan Society in the Twentieth Century, UNESCO, Paris, 2001, p 59.
- 20 NHESP, 2010-2014, Afghanistan, 2009, page 1.
- 21 Joint Sector Review, MOHE and USAID, 2012, Afghanistan, page 11.
- 22 NHESP, 2010-2014, Afghanistan, 2009, page 17.
- 23 Optimum size refers to average number of students in foreign universities.
- 24 Afghanistan's Entrance Examination Bill, chapter 1, article 1, 2011.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Based on interviews with first year students of the Faculties of Engineering and Social Sciences in Kabul and Balkh Universities, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- 28 Based on an interview with an Entrance Examination Data Controller, Entrance Examination Committee, MOHE, Afghanistan, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- 29 Based on an interview with a strategic adviser for the HE, MOHE, Kabul, Afghanistan, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- 30 Joint Sector Review by the MOHE and USAID, Kabul Afghanistan, 2012, page 11.
- 31 Quality Assurance Manual for Higher Education in Pakistan, Zia Batool, Riaz Hussain Qureshi, Higher Education Commission, Islamabad, Pakistan.
- 32 Afghan Higher Education Institute's Law, Chapter 5; article 45-50.
- 33 NHESP 2010-2014, MOHE, Afghanistan, 2009, page 23.
- 34 Ibid, page 23.
- 35 MOHE, Higher Education Institute's Law, 2011, chapter 3, article 18, item 1, page 8.
- 36 Based on interview with Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs at Balkh University, Balkh, Afghanistan, June 20, 2012.
- 37 Financial institutions refer here to the Ministry of Finance, Da Afghanistan Bank, and their corresponding organizations.
- 38 The constitution of Afghanistan, 2004, article 43.
- 39 Afghan Finance and Expenditure Law, 2005, chapter 3 article 12.
- 40 Based on interview with the Budget Officer, Directorate General Budget, MOF, Kabul, Afghanistan, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- 41 Fiscal Budget 2011, MOF, Kabul, Afghanistan.

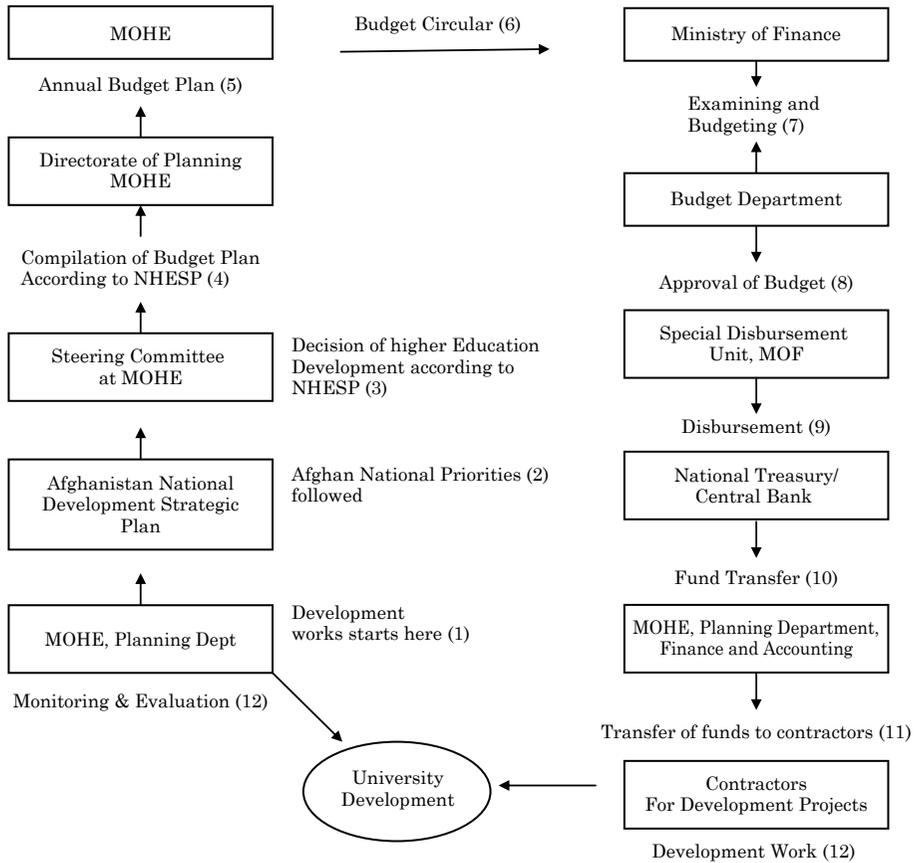
- 42 Based on interview with the Planning Officer, Directorate of Planning, MOHE, July 13, 2012.
- 43 Based on interview with the Operational Budget Manager, MOHE, Kabul, Afghanistan, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- 44 NHESP 2010-2014, MOHE, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2009, page 13.
- 45 Joint sector review: MOHE and USAID, Kabul, April 2012, page 47.
- 46 ANDS 2008-2013, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, p 3-4.
- 47 Ibid, pages 3 and 4.
- 48 Technical Annex, SHEP, World Bank, Kabul, Afghanistan, March 2005, page 3
- 49 Joint sector review: MOHE and USAID, Kabul, Afghanistan, June, 2012, page 4.
- 50 Based on interview with the Vice Chancellor of Balkh University, Balkh, Afghanistan, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- 51 Technical Annex, SHEP, World Bank, Kabul, Afghanistan, March 2005, page 3.
- 52 Based on interview with the Strategic Advisor for the HE, MOHE, Kabul, Afghanistan, June 21, 2012.
- 53 NHESP 2010-2014, Kabul, Afghanistan, Nov 2009, page 13.
- 54 Based on interview with budget officer in Directorate General Budget, MOF, Kabul, Afghanistan, June 19, 2012.
- 55 Fiscal Budget 2011, Ministry of Finance, Kabul, Afghanistan, pages 55-56.
- 56 Based on interview with the Vice Chancellor of Administrative Affairs, Balkh University, Balkh, Afghanistan, Aug 7, 2012.
- 57 ANDS 2008-2013, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, page 121.
- 58 Joint Sector Review, MOHE and USAID, Kabul, Afghanistan, April 12, 2012. Page 31
- 59 Ibid
- 60 ANDS 2008-2013, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, page 121.
- 61 External demand includes greater accessibility, improved quality and facilities; and other services to students.
- 62 Based on interview with Physics Professor from Kabul University, Kabul, July 30, 2012.

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Annex 1. Diagram 1: MOHE's Annual Budget Flow Mechanism



Source: Author's field work research during June 2012 in Afghanistan.

## Annex 2:

**Table 1: Statistics of the Afghan Students in the Public Universities**

University	Enrolled in 2011			Existing Students			Total Students in 2011			Graduated in 2010		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Kabul University	2971	970	3941	5704	2295	7999	8675	3265	11940	1394	595	1989
KU Eve Session	0	0	0	2722	422	3144	2722	422	3144	350	30	380
Kab Med Univ	251	191	442	749	545	1294	1000	736	1736	239	86	325
K Polytechnique University	701	46	747	1810	80	1890	2511	126	2637	325	18	343
Kabul Education	784	487	1271	2359	1914	4273	3143	2401	5544	513	327	840
Takhar University	520	102	622	1446	316	1762	1966	418	2384	330	49	379
Bamyan University	1014	131	1145	889	218	1107	1903	349	2252	153	16	169
Khost University	1658	54	1712	2273	15	2288	3931	69	4000	418	0	418
Alberoni University	932	136	1068	1933	180	2113	2865	316	3181	287	14	301
Balkh University	1209	499	1708	3826	1333	5159	5035	1832	6867	759	212	971
Nangarhar Uni	2653	147	2800	5008	208	5216	7661	355	8016	1073	28	1101
Heart University	2363	852	3215	3879	1792	5671	6242	2644	8886	666	269	935
Kandahar Uni	1167	99	1266	2442	112	2554	3609	211	3820	184	2	186
Paktya University	1185	29	1214	964	0	964	2149	29	2178	94	0	94
Jawzjan University	774	171	945	1278	321	1599	2052	492	2544	286	102	388
Ghazni University	495	87	582	193	51	244	688	138	826	0	0	0
Kunar University	343	29	372	117	5	122	460	34	494	293	54	347
Kunduz University	839	85	924	811	203	1014	1650	288	1938	95	52	147
Baghlan HEI	532	106	638	1619	231	1850	2151	337	2488	61	41	102
Faryab HEI	985	247	1232	1326	177	1503	2311	424	2735	186	47	233
Badakhshan HEI	802	174	976	170	81	251	972	255	1227	216	4	220
Parwan HEI	687	114	801	1723	239	1962	2410	353	2763	0	0	0
Helmand HEI	983	127	1110	87	0	87	1070	127	1197	0	0	0
Badghes HEI	214	20	234	81	20	101	295	40	335	0	0	0
Samangan HEI	198	70	268	32	0	32	230	70	300	0	0	0
Panjsher HEI	239	4	243	0	0	0	239	4	243	0	0	0
Laghman HEI	342	15	357	0	0	0	342	15	357	0	0	0
Total	24841	4992	29833	43441	10758	54199	68282	15750	84032	7922	1946	9868

Source: Afghanistan's MOHE Official Website, Sep 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012,

<http://www.mohe.gov.af/?lang=da&p=ehsaya>