EXPLORING ACADEMIC AUTONOMY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FACULTY

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I have pleasure of presenting my work with the hope that it adds not only new knowledge to the field of my research, but also opens new horizons of my future work. This study was a very long journey, full of discoveries, raises and falls, though always an inspiring and rewarding experience. With this work I gained expertise, stamina, self-organization. The most valuable acquisition for me is my understanding that I as a researcher have high responsibility for the knowledge I produce. I am happy that this work gave me experience in knowledge production and I hope to apply every piece of knowledge to my future research opportunities.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore academic autonomy as it is perceived by departmental Faculty members in one university in Kazakhstan. This study conducts the research at the departmental level, inviting the Faculty to take the key role in informing research about their vision how academic autonomy is and should be

The study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) method which accesses individual experiences of Faculty members and collect data directly from them. IPA is combined with the Focus Group method to bring this research to a collegial level. The participants in Focus group were 25 participants, including lecturers, professors and teaching assistants. This method allows exploring the phenomenon of academic autonomy at departmental level and observing how the Faculty involvement in academic autonomy matters. The data is analyzed according to the traditions of IPA, based on the protocol designed specifically for the purpose of this study.

The findings of the study shed the light on how Faculty perceives academic autonomy from the departmental perspective, what strategies and actions Faculty define as crucial, to what extent and under what conditions Faculty members are ready to contribute into academic changes at their department.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Academic autonomy has been regarded as a factor stimulating higher education's independence from government control and developing higher quality academic service. The idea behind academic autonomy is to enable the university to enhance its quality of education, offer a wide range of educational programmes, and adjust them to the needs of society and the economy (Noorda, 2013, Matei, 2018, Maassen, 2016; Geodegebuure, 1996; Martin, 2014). Academic autonomy ensures that the university system can gain flexibility and agility to respond to a continuously changing world (Noorda, 2013). It is also important for the universities to seek their individual unique style (Hedmo et al., 2008). Thus academic autonomy has become recognized as a prerequisite and unavoidable requirement of the present universities (Estermann, 2017; Geodegebuure, 1996).

Academic autonomy firmly entered the university organization more than thirty years ago. By now there is a lot of experience and theory is accumulated in numerous research resources, providing guidelines with different levels of specification on how to introduce and manage academic autonomy. This phenomenon turned out to be a complicated task for many universities and was researched from different aspects. Thus it was studied at the macro level with the research focus on understanding how the higher education institutions can gain their freedom in the light of the state control, quality assessment, and accreditation policies. Many concerns are directed to finding the solutions and enabling the universities to follow their individual development path and move from the pressure of the state. Many research studies are devoted to exploring how to bring the university system and state control into open dialogue and agreement. This is about policy making and is less about academic changes the university can suggest.

Academic autonomy is also addressed at the meso level via the faculty discussion about processes happening inside universities. This discussion explores how universities deal with academic autonomy issues, define their unique academic profile, enhance educational service (Maassen, 2008; Estermann, 2011). At this level of research, academic autonomy is studied through the lens of academic culture, organizational culture, introducing innovation into the academic system, and establishing more contacts with internal and external players. Existing research offers guidance to introduce and manage academic autonomy within the university system (Noorda, 2013, Fumasolli et al., 2014, Enders et al., 2013; Maassen, 2017).

The concept of academic autonomy has been explored in the research and applied in practice, though it is still not universally practiced. Many universities worldwide have not achieved a level of academic autonomy. According to Europe-wide project Scorecard, a number

of countries underperform in the area of academic autonomy in several countries and regions to include Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Greece, France, Cyprus, Turkey, Netherlands, Croatia, Slovenia, Georgia, Serbia, Lithuania, Flanders, Portugal, Latvia, Slovakia, Italy, and Spain. The level of academic autonomy is estimated to be between 26-57% (Pruvot et al., 2023). On the contrary, there are excellent examples of universities in Estonia, Finland, England, Ireland, Scotland, North-Reine Westaphia, Austria, Norway with high academic autonomy with the level estimated from 83% to 95%. These are universities with a solid reputation in the world of education. The studies identified that academic autonomy make universities exceptional institutions as they search for the best ways to provide knowledge to the society (Matei & Iwinska, 2018; Marginson, 2016). Thus successful universities tend to use their autonomy and create opportunities for their development (Mai, 2022). This was noted with some successful universities in Germany, France, and China. The contributing factors behind the success of academic autonomy development differ depending on the context. It may be successful professionals who have capacity to influence university system. It may be the research focus, which can university how to improve, as in cases in universities in Germany and France. (Lorenz, 2014; Mai, 2022).

Many attempts to understand how to improve the academic autonomy process are found in the literature and practice. Thrift (2008) states that there are many activities to administer and manage, and less attention is given to teaching and research. In other words, the approach to understanding academic autonomy is located in political aspects, such as regulations, rules, principles, and relationships between the state, university, and internal and external players. This location of interest is misleading away from the area where academic processes occur. Thus, the research in academic autonomy should address the issues connected with academic processes, more closely leading to improvement in teaching and research, enhancement of educational processes, changing academic cultures, and strengthening academic power.

From another perspective, academic autonomy is understood in the context of community. The future of academic autonomy is in hands of the community, who are influencing it. The university is regulated, influenced and handled with the efforts of communities of internal players, that is, academic, management, non-academic staff. Another type of community includes external players, that is, industrial partners, students and their parents. All of them are more or less involved in designing the educational trajectory of the university (Matei, 2018). However, more and more findings assign the leading role to the academicians, academic staff, or Faculty. Thrift (2008) states that it is only with the involvement of academics, and the Faculty, that it is possible to implement the real academic autonomy.

Advancing academic autonomy can be time consuming. There are obstacles retarding its

development. Hence, the findings, principles, experiences, and outstanding cases in successful academic autonomy can hardly be replicated, copied, or exchanged. Every university must find its individual approach to implementing academic autonomy since it is always contextual (Noorda, 2013). It is sensitive to traditions and cultures existing in the university context, to practice routine, the system of beliefs, and the expectation of those directly involved in educational processes. Every university has to write its own story of academic autonomy.

Another factor about academic autonomy is its ever evolving nature. It is a continuous long-term process, influenced by several explicit and implicit factors that are hard to track and follow. Most of the processes happen among the university communities, in interactions among the university members, and their decisions. Therefore, the recommendations and prescriptions that proved effective in one context and underpinned by the contextual factors may not lead to similar results in another context. University communities aiming at academic autonomy have to prepare to go through a long development process.

To continue, academic autonomy is regarded as a complex and complicated phenomenon with so many nuances. There are many signals across cases and research findings stating that academic autonomy is getting more formal and its effectiveness is called into question (Enders et al., 2013; Hedmo et al., 2008). Real autonomy tends to be rare, though the universities invest their efforts to achieve it.

Academic autonomy is a complicated concept, combining and addressing many aspects of university organization, its quality, its capacities, and the community. There are more questions than answers on how to develop it, and every university has to search for its own answers. On the other hand, academic autonomy represents an interesting area for research and practice. Many issues are calling for closer study. These implications informed my interest in this research.

It appears that the focus in the research literature gravitates to descriptive aspects, with the more convincing studies stating the importance of autonomy, the benefits the university and society gains. There is little layer of literature with the practical focus, which would provide background for understanding practicalities. This may be the concerns of how academic autonomy is defined in the university, how it is handled, what changes constitute the essence of academic transformations. The following section gives a brief overview giving the description of what is happening in practice. The overview is linked to the given context of the university, where the research will be conducted. However, this context is typical not only to the given university, but to the most universities in my country.

1.1 Context description

The paths along which the academic autonomy develops are diverse. Every university can design its own path based on its contextual factors, policy and culture. The context of the university in which the current study was conducted follows the Soviet Union's model and still remains a teaching comprehensive university, offering predominantly academic programs in traditional disciplines areas. There are more than 7,000 students on campus and more than 600 teaching staff. The university is rated as a middle-sized university. In the 1990s, the university system in Kazakhstan began the process of departure from the Soviet Union's model following diverse scenarios. In 2005 Kazakhstan higher education adopted several initiatives and changes which was associated with the departure from the need to conform directive, and which followed the inception of the decentralized system, the freedom of university development. Universities assumed new roles, which included serving the local needs, which necessitated changes in programmatic levels. These changes are compatible with the recommendations in the State Programme of Higher Education Development 2011-2020 (Analytical Center of Educational Research, 2011). This programme prescribes that each university defines its individual approach to academic autonomy and develops its unique academic profile.

Having gained the freedom to implement various academic initiatives, universities in Kazakhstan now practice different approaches and strategies when it comes to faculty autonomy development. The present study was conducted at a state university in North Eastern Kazakhstan region with the purpose to describe its autonomy processes development. Though the State program of Higher Education Development 2011-2020 states the necessity to involve Faculty in the process of university development, the manner in which the changes occur are similar to the centralized top-down model, inherited from the Soviet past. It was typical scenario of changes among the universities. Thus, the decisions to introduce changes are in large initiated by the university mangers and delegated to the departments and Faculty.

During the period of 2010-2015 there were some initiatives introduced at university and implemented at a departmental level. One of them required the department to revise and change the content of academic curriculum and update the curriculum by 50% in the Bachelor programme and 70% in the Master's Programme. Another initiative was to introduce elective courses to supplement the main curriculum. This initiative meant to add diversity to educational programmes and introduce inter-disciplinary courses with the aim to instigate knowledge production outside traditional disciplines. The departmental Faculty were given permission to select teaching methodology. In practice this change mean that individual Faculty members could now select their own curriculum and design their own teaching materials and classroom assessments. The above changes were

possible due to individual faculty autonomy. The departments were also required to establish contact with the external partners with the aim of collaborating and improving their curriculum. The role of external partners was to evaluate the curriculum and the quality of educational organization for further improvement. To day it differently, academic autonomy allowed the department and individual faculty members to be involved with curriculum revision, methodology selection, introducing of accountability measures and management of external relations. All these changes originated with top-management and they gave a start to individual autonomy development.

The effectiveness of these initiatives is being periodically examined and should be thoroughly analysed. Thus, the National Analytical Report (Analytical Center of Education Research, 2016) attempted to examine the practices of Kazakhstan'suniversities regarding academic autonomy. The report findings showed that academic innovations are slow due to the low level of participation of academic staff. However, in practice it was noted that the manner in which such initiatives were implemented did not suggest active faculty involvement at this particular university. The old traditions of the centralized Soviet system with the top-down management require Faculty to implement prescribed tasks. As stated earlier, Faculty were not allowed to take an active part in making decision in policy and practice.

This approach to academic autonomy can be observed in the universities across the country as they belong to the same culture and traditions in higher education (Analytical Center of Educational research, 2019). The typical approach to introducing changes into academic area is initiated by the university management, restricting Faculty initiative to implement changes at their level. This practice contradicts with one of the principles of academic autonomy development, which stresses the importance of involving Faculty into implementing academic changes as a university.

1.2 Performing academic autonomy in practice

Based on the preliminary survey, which I conducted as a task in one of the Modules in EdD programme, I can describe the situation that is happening to the academic autonomy inside university system. It must be noted that I am referring to the context of Kazakhstan universities.

The survey was conducted in 8 universities, with about 200 respondents. The aim of the survey was to find out how Faculty is ready to deal with academic autonomy and what they can offer.

The results of the survey revealed that 95% of respondents define academic autonomy as a university's capacity to establish unique academic profile, compose distinctive teaching methodology and educational strategies, design content of study programme, and define the key competences to be developed within the educational processes. In interpretation of the Faculty

academic autonomy is presented as a path to developing educational portfolio of department or university. Faculty expresses their concerns about dealing with the educational processes in a limited perspective, referring to the educational processes, without reference to the political aspects.

Further data revealed that, though Faculty relate academic autonomy to the improvement of educational profile of department or university, they have different attitude to it. About 72% of respondents support recognize the need for academic autonomy and express their readiness to contribute their professionalism. At the same time one-third of participants are either not ready to deal with academic autonomy due to lack of knowledge about it, or are convinced they achieve academic autonomy in their individual practice, which in fact is not related to academic autonomy of department or university.

As statistics illustrates, academic autonomy development cannot rely on the Faculty as a leading power in academic autonomy. Only 22% are ready to take initiative and have their professionalism and experience to offer. The Faculty explained that the traditions and culture of managing academic matters does not envisage high level of active involvement of the Faculty. However, the Faculty proposes another form of their involvement in university changes. 60% confess that they prefer to follow the strategic plan of academic autonomy development and 81% believe that collegiality is the most effective form for the Faculty to consolidate their powers and produce academic changes.

Summing up the discussion above, I see the academic autonomy cannot rely on Faculty as the level of professional and moral reference is not sufficient. However, on the other hand, the Faculty, a smaller part, expressed their willingness to take responsibility for academic autonomy and more than half of the Faculty are ready to start academic changes provided they have support in form collegiality and strategic plan.

Though the Faculty does not demonstrate high level of confidence in their capability to perform academic changes, there are factors calling for active participation of the Faculty and university communities in academic autonomy development. It is stated in the national regulative document titled the State Programme of Higher Education Development 2011-2020, 2017-2022 (Astana, 2011, 2017). According to this document, the universities are given freedom and are expected to develop a model of academic autonomy and the strategy of autonomy development. The document stresses that academic autonomy is ultimately the responsibility of Faculty and university managers. State programme contains a call addressed to Faculty and managers to take active position in developing academic profile and find the best way to offer academic service to the regional and state society, to meet the educational needs of the key stakeholders (Astana, 2011, 2017). This document also includes the requirements that in order to make the academic

changes more authentic and real, the academic autonomy implies involvement of all the university players, including the Faculty, internal and external partners. It must be highlighted that the State Programme assigns a special role to Faculty in academic autonomy. The Faculty are expected to define what academic changes, teaching and learning strategies and other aspects of educational process can improve the quality of education provided by the university (Astana, 2017). Regardless the fact, that the Faculty tend to have a weak position in academic autonomy as it was illustrated by the statistics and observation in practice, of my preliminary research, observed in practice, the Faculty has to take a leading role in this process.

Switching attention to the academic autonomy as a concept, it is necessary to outline its shape in the context of university. The conditions, under which academic autonomy is being developed, tend to restrict its development. Being a member of Faculty and observing the university policy and practice from inside, I did not meet the issue of academic autonomy in agenda of university or departmental management. There is no focus on academic autonomy among the Faculty and managers, though the administration of the universities regularly reports on the progress in academic autonomy development. While university managers present reports and provide evidences of success (National Analytical Report, 2016, 2019), in practice the Faculty members remain unaware of this process. The report fails to chow how the changes such as changes and revision of curriculum is implemented, to what extent the Faculty and managers are involved into this process. It appears that academic autonomy is not well understood, thus left unattended. This fact illustrates that the managers and the Faculty are not on the same page regarding the academic autonomy development in the university. The confusion is apparent that the academic autonomy tends to be formally reported and practically absent.

1.3 My positionality

Being a member of academic staff at the Department of Foreign Languages for twenty years and having experience of working as department head for four years in three universities in Kazakhstan, I observed the changes in the university system. Since signing Bologna Process in 1999, the university system in Kazakhstan has introduced many curriculum changes. The educational trajectory was rearranged and sequenced into three stages Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate. This change instigated the university to design a new curriculum for every level and harbor new goals outlined by state standards. Another innovation was in instruction and learning, based on new ways of delivering knowledge, monitoring students' achievement, and assessing strategies.

Apart from academic changes, the policy of the universities changed dramatically.

Faculty is expected to not only implement teaching but take an active part in enhancing the quality of educational programmes and research. Now Faculty is expected to expand the curriculum by offering innovative courses and adjusting the courses to the needs of the target learners. Faculty should perform at a high level of research and teaching.

In practice, the changing process is slow and loses its significance at the stage of practice; implementation of changes. Referring to description above of what is happening with academic autonomy inside university, I would emphasize not the fact that academic autonomy is being developed in the context of lack of organization and knowledge. I would propose to take another perspective of viewing the situation of confusion around academic autonomy.

My position is that the Faculty does have the professionalism and skills and they can contribute into academic autonomy. As a Faculty member and as a former head of the department, I have many evidences proving that the Faculty members do have professional, intellectual and moral references to ground on their contributions into changing academic matters at the department. This belief is strongly compatible with the opinion that academic staff is the most logical place to start academic changes (Lee, 2013).

Recognizing the need for departmental level research, I believed that my research can be informed by my experience from the perspective of a Faculty member and department chair. My trust that Faculty members have professional expertise and experience to contribute to academic developments underpins my decision to pursue research on the theme. Exploring autonomy from this perspective may shed new perspectives on developing academic autonomy at the departmental level.

1.4 Importance of the present research

The present study aims to explore academic autonomy and contribute knowledge for a better understanding of academic autonomy practice. Thus, this study will provide insight into the internal matters of a university and invites its Faculty to inform about how academic autonomy is shaped within the university organization. This kind of study is not well presented in the literature, though the need for this kind of knowledge is determined. There is a gap in understanding how to manage academic autonomy in such a way to make it more real, make it serve to increase the quality of education.

Another important aspect is the study from the perspective of Faculty. Due to a lack of investigation of this kind little is known about the role and contribution Faculty can make. This study gives the voice to Faculty and structures the concept and practice of academic autonomy,

based on the lived experiences of the Faculty members. Based on my research interest and being informed about the research and practice needs, I formed several questions to guide my research. These questions aim to lead the research to explore the meaning of academic autonomy, its content and the process of formation, and Faculty capacity in the process of academic changes. Below are the research questions that have guided my research process.

1.5 Research questions

Research questions:

1. How do Faculty members define academic autonomy?
2. What aspects of academic autonomy do Faculty consider as important?
3. How can academic autonomy be developed if active faculty engagement is encouraged?

As can be seen from the above research questions, this is exploratory research because it addresses the phenomenon, which is not clearly defined and sufficiently investigated in the practices of people. Academic autonomy at the departmental level is underpinned by assumptions that have different levels of reliability and significance. There is a need to ground knowledge about academic autonomy on the research findings, mined from the Faculty's real context and real experiences. Based on this need, this research intended to explore what the Faculty experience in dealing with academic autonomy. Therefore, this research study was interpretative and phenomenological in nature. The lived experiences of Faculty were addressed to collect information from the real context.

As the present research relied on the lived experience of Faculty members and they were recognized as the owners of practice in academic matters, they were invited to participate in this search. As the lived experiences are better expressed in speaking, the Faculty members were involved in the discussion. The chosen data collection method was a focus group discussion arranged in a setting familiar to the participants. It provided convenient conditions for more informal interaction during the discussion. Providing a more informal setting for discussion groups was important to facilitate productive and authentic data collection. The participants were my colleagues from five departments of one university.

The outcome of my research did not aim to achieve conclusive results or offer solutions. Conducting an exploratory study, I aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon

and explore its essential components. This research was intended to define the areas for further exploration and can be used as a grounded theory.

1.6 Organization of the thesis

The study report starts with an introduction to the theme of instigation. A brief overview of academic autonomy is provided from two perspectives, one is from the research literature and the second is from the practical one. The researcher‘s positionality explains my interest in this study. The introduction provides an argument to support the significance of the investigation.

Chapter 2 represents the review of literature in the field of academic autonomy development, focusing on the influential factors, and the role of the university players, focusing on Faculty and university managers. The literature review highlights the influence of a diversity of factors on the formation of academic autonomy. The leading motive of literature reviews is developed around the assumption that academic autonomy is tensely conditioned by the contextual factors and the university players and it is the result of their communication. The literature review informs the design of the research and data analysis. It shows different paths to shaping and understanding academic autonomy.

The methodology chapter, Chapter 3, sets out the approach taken to seeking to answer the research questions. This is an exploratory study based on interpretative phenomenology analysis of the lived experience of the Faculty members. I provide explanation of my research design and methodology in connection with the nature of the phenomenon under research. Justification is presented to state the need to use the combination of interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA) and focus group, which are deemed to be incompatible to some extent. This is one of the challenges of the present study. The collection of data is conducted through five focus groups with 23 participants through group discussions, based on semi-structured open questions. Data analysis procedures were designed by me as research in accordance with the traditions of IPA. I referred to the other examples of IPA protocols in relevant studies, which is an acceptable practice. The protocol guided the data analysis process. The results were interpreted in two layers, the description, and interpretative layer. The description layer gives an overview of the phenomenon in focus, and the interpretative layer provides an explanation of the phenomenon and puts the discussion into a bigger picture.

My findings are presented in Chapter 4. The organization of this chapter is linked to the research questions. Every finding is presented in two parts, descriptive and interpretative. The description layer is connected with the raw data and the lived experience of research participants. The interpretation layer provides the space for implications to illuminate the horizons of

possibilities of the phenomenon to be further developed.

Finally, I provide concluding thoughts, bridging the major aspects of my research with some recommendations to be applied to the further research and practice of academic autonomy development. Whilst the conclusions and recommendations must be understood to be specific to the given context, within which the study was conducted, their framing may be applied in other contexts and so be of value to other researcher-practitioners.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature on the topic of academic autonomy is vast and some resources can be found to help to answer the questions, for example, of how to manage, how to evaluate, and how to introduce autonomy into practice. There is a vast literature devoted to the evaluation and assessment of academic autonomy in different countries, with the results of success and failure. The practical manual handbooks, prescribing the steps to implement with the purpose to introduce academic autonomy into university organizations mean to support the university managers in dealing with academic autonomy in university. However, I need to limit the literature resources to satisfy the exploratory purpose of the present study. The resources of literature are selected to support the qualitative review of academic autonomy. The studies providing descriptions of the reality of academic autonomy development, discussions around factors, influencing or hindering its development are regarded. This approach restricted the search for literature so as to meet the purpose of the present investigations provide the background concept, upon which further paths of understanding, comparing, and contrasting the results of findings are defined (Creswell, 2009, p. 26-27).

In the first stage of the literature review, I will explore the descriptions of academic autonomy and the multitude of aspects portraying the phenomenon in an attempt to arrive at a characterization of academic autonomy. It is necessary to have a good overview of the factors, dimensions, diversity of aspects academic autonomy may have and observe how it is shaped under the influence of different factors and contexts. Observing how academic autonomy depends on different factors informs that there are different patterns of academic developments. This review will be intertwined into later discussion, in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The second part of the review will focus on understanding the role of Faculty in academic autonomy and how the Faculty can contribute to this field. The resources which reveal the topic from the perspective of Faculty are limited. The keyword search of "academic autonomy development and Faculty" resulted in a much less number of resources than the search for "academic autonomy development". Those rare resources are more valuable for the present study as they illustrate how Faculty address academic autonomy, what practical experiences they acquire. It is through the experience of Faculty the academic autonomy can be described with the aim to define whether the new factors and dimensions of academic autonomy can be identified if it is observed from Faculty's point of view.

2.1 Defining academic autonomy

Academic autonomy has firmly entered higher education in the period of 1990-ies as a precondition that allows the university to enhance the quality of university education (Geudegebuure, 1994; Estermann & Kupriyanova, 2019). For more than thirty years, there have been many attempts to find the definition of academic autonomy and the strategy to introduce it into the university organization. However, the concept of university autonomy remains a contested one, and it has multiple and evolving understandings (Matei, 2018, p. 364). There is no uniform trend in the definition of academic autonomy (Tarrach, 2017).

In the literature, academic autonomy is defined in diverse ways. Academic autonomy is considered as the ability to independently shape its structures within agreed accountability frameworks to be able to react more effectively to external changes, address social and economic needs and manage resources in a more strategic, efficient, and effective way (Estermann & Kupriyanova, 2019). Academic autonomy can also be seen as the ability of higher education institutions to set and implement their policies and priorities for teaching and research (Bergan, 2016).

Karran et al. (2017) define academic autonomy as a dimension of freedom or power of Faculty and students to teach, research, and contribute to the university's governance (Karran et al., 2017). Blackmore (2009) considers academic autonomy as any provision and process designed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of individuals, activities, and organizations (Blackmore, 2009).

Comparing the above four definitions of academic autonomy illustrates the diversity of directions the autonomy can take. The definition of university autonomy relates to several factors. It may aim at either the external needs, such as social and economic requirements or internal needs to improve the academic processes. It provides freedom to the university communities to define the practice and policy of the university and search for ways to enhance the quality. One similarity these definitions have in common is that academic autonomy creates the opportunity for the university to "deliver" better (education)" (Matei, 2018). In light of the changes that require the universities to be involved in continuous development, academic autonomy has become a necessity and essential prerequisite of a modern university (Estermann, 2017).

In line with this definition, Carlotto et al. (2018) provides a nice metaphor which depicts a colorful illustration of what can happen to university. It states that academic autonomy invites university into a unique dance and then deepens into the diversity of teaching systems and forms of organization. According to this, academic autonomy stimulates the university to define its

individual development path. Though Matei (2018) states that both the definition and the ways of academic autonomy development are hard to pin down, still the fundamental meaning of this phenomenon is defined. Academic autonomy is about improvement, enhancement, uniqueness, and serving internal or external Faculty needs.

2.2 Academic autonomy as response to social needs

A university profile is defined by each university in accordance with its educational needs expressed by society and economy. One of the goals of the academic autonomy is to facilitate the university to offer its educational services to society and contribute to the common good (Chan, 2021).

In order to respond to certain societal needs or needs of various stakeholder groups it requires solid understanding of the latent needs of those groups, whose interests a university is aiming to serve (Casablancas-Segura & Llonch, 2016). To remain aware of such social needs, the university has to establish long term relationships with the target social groups. Ali (2018) found that in order to align university curriculum profile with the needs of the society a university has to search for and establish the model of cooperation, collaboration, communication, meaningful dialogues. That required a connection and information feed from the external partnering groups. It is important to note that it is a continuous process of communication that can allow a university be constantly informed about the educational needs of their target partners or group (Preble, 2005).

A university's response to social needs can be reflected in how quickly and efficiently it is able to process the information received from stakeholders and modify its curricular and educational offerings based on such feedback.

In other words, the response to the social needs shows how responsive the university is and how it can tailor and customize its functions, strategies, and structures; to prioritize societal needs (Campagnicci & Spigarelli, 2020). In order to continue to align societal needs with solid research and best practices universities need to continuously align their curriculum with societal needs and expectations.

The university response to the society may evolve into a more proactive strategy. This strategy is aimed at expanding the channels of communication with society and industries. Though this strategy is more typical for the entrepreneurial university, university organizations developing academic autonomy have to acquire this quality as well. Through using such strategies a university may become more sensitive to and aware of how to excel in one or more specific areas.

2.3 Factors

2.3.1 Factors that influence academic autonomy

Divergent paths of academic autonomy development are evident in the examples of university profiles. Thus, according to the Europe-wide project called Scorecard statistics, the universities in the United Kingdom, Estonia, Finland, and Denmark achieved a high level of academic autonomy. In contrast, autonomy is the lowest in Spain, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, and France. Though it presents how different academic autonomy can be, this statistic fails to define the reasons behind it. Academic autonomy tends to vary across national contexts (Iwinska & Matei, 2018; Pruvot & Estermann, 2017).

The research literature illustrates two traditions on how to approach academic autonomy. The first and the less popular one considers academic autonomy as a phenomenon in itself. It gives an impression that academic autonomy determines the quality of a university, its purposes, and functions (Yokoyamo, 2007). Thus, academic autonomy can be characterized as underdeveloped or well developed, with the note of the weak and strong components of academic autonomy. The Europe-wide project Scorecard (2011, 2017, 2019) provides a good example of this approach to understanding academic autonomy. According to the project research method, academic autonomy was measured in the universities of more than 29 countries. Some countries perform at a high level of academic autonomy, which means they have more independence from the state and more freedom to introduce new study programmes and deal with academic matters. Other countries demonstrate a low level of academic activity with the slow change in educational programmes, with the dominating dependence on the state and quality control.

Based on this approach, academic autonomy is expected to demonstrate a certain range of aspects. These aspects include selecting students and establishing the admissions rules, launching and terminating study programs, choosing the language of instruction, designing curriculums, and even choosing the quality control policy and agency. It is assumed that the model of academic autonomy is universal, morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic powers, and can be followed in any university (Magna Charts Universitatum). Based on the idea that academic authority is universal, the task of the universities is to achieve the proposed model of academic autonomy. In other words, it means that academic autonomy can happen to any university and be implemented accordingly regardless of the social, political, and cultural factors.

The second tradition of dealing with academic autonomy is based on the belief that it is not possible to separate academic autonomy development from the university context within which it is being developed. It says that the university defines the nature of academic autonomy.

University organization, cultural and national context, time, and policy define how academic autonomy can be shaped by a specific university (Iwinska & Matei, 2018; Pruvot & Estermann, 2017). Any form of academic and another kind of development in higher education institutions should be related to historical legacy, including national, cultural, and institutional context (Carvalho & Videira, 2019). Neave (1988) emphasizes that autonomy is always contextual, influenced by the internal structures and culture of a university. Thus, the concept of university autonomy is determined by the context in which it is used and by the changes over time (Salter & Tapper, 1995).

Moreover, Chen and Ke (2014) emphasize that the research on academic autonomy has to appeal to cultural settings and it has to breed context-sensitive studies. It means that academic autonomy cannot be studied as an isolated phenomenon. It should be understood through the prism of contextual features and context-embedded logic (Chen & Ke, 2014).

Since academic autonomy is a contextually dependent phenomenon, it is necessary to ensure that the research on academic autonomy can and must make it possible to explore academic autonomy via understanding the contextual constructs and practice (Beycioglu – Kondakci, 2014). Exploring academic autonomy, the researchers inevitably explore the context and its specific features. Thus, academic autonomy can be defined as notonly the ability of the university to react to the social and economic needs, but also as its ability to facilitate university effectiveness and efficiency. It is the phenomenon shaped within a university and adjusted to a university context. As a result, every academic autonomy model found in a university cannot be evaluated as low, high, or insufficient. It is regarded as a unique individual academic profile of a university, shaped within a university context and serving the needs of a university. It is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of factors.

2.3.2. Factors that shape academic autonomy

There are multiple factors that determine academic autonomy. According to Neave (1988), academic autonomy can be based on "private definition" and "public definition." The factors such as university mission, academic changes designed by the university staff and internal needs for changes shape the "private definition" of university autonomy, whereas "public definition" is determined by the external stakeholders, including state control, labor market, and community.

Whether the academic autonomy of a university will have a public or private orientation depends on whose needs the university chooses to respond to. In private definition, the university aims to satisfy its internal needs and is guided by its vision of how the development should

proceed. In the public format of academic autonomy, the prior concern of the university is to satisfy the social needs and be sensitive to the needs of external stakeholders (Yokoyama, 2007).

Talking about the externally oriented definition of academic autonomy, Florentina et al. (2013) state that it is more efficient in informing the university about the needs in society and giving the guidelines adjust its educational service to social needs. If this is the case and the university designs its academic profile to meet the external requirements, then the specific factors must appear in the university organization. They include the strong channels of communication and relationships with the external actors, a clear vision of the needs and expectations, and vision on how these expectations are translated into academic changes to design academic profiles to meet society needs (Iwinska & Matei, 2018).

On the contrary, Pruvot and Estermann (2017) exclude the external actors and factors as an undue influence. They argue that any external influence is ultimately interpreted and reinterpreted by the university communities. Through this interpretation, the external factors are converted into internal ones. Therefore, the researchers define academic autonomy as the power of an institution to manage its internal affairs, develop institutional profiles, and efficiently deliver its missions (Pruvot & Estermann 2017). Suppose university has internal focus on developing its academic profile. In that case, the factors such as a clear vision of the internal need aim to improve the internal processes according to the internally defined criteria.

It would be misleading to assume that university's academic profile relates to either public or private definition. The reality is more complex as the internal relationships between the units of the university, which are the holders of the private definition of academic autonomy, and the external stakeholders' relationships both shape the meanings of university autonomy (Yokoyama, 2007). The power to handle the academic matters in the university can be in the hands of the individuals of internal university communities such as students, academic Faculty, managers, and administrators, or the internal organization such as departments and management units. What values will be promoted depends on what these stakeholders possess and contribute to university development. For example, a public definition can be found in university management and governance, seeking accountability and communicating with state governments and industry stakeholders. Or the private definition can reside in the hands of internal Faculty communities and individuals with a strong reputation and can promote internal university values. "Private and public definitions" can coexist in one institution.

It is hard to allocate what factors have the leading role in shaping the academic autonomy as both internal and external factors make a dynamic area, conditioned by an ever-changing environment, which is never steady (Noorda, 2013). Maassen et al. (2017) suggest that there is little value in defining the internal or external forces. They state that university changes

do not happen because of internal or external forces. According to the authors, academic changes result from how the university's internal powers handle the expectations and are ready to respond to thenew demands.

This readiness of internal processes, capacities, or university communities described above matters a lot in academic autonomy development. The changes in the academic profile of a university depend on the values and capacities of university community to respond to internal or external factors (Cristopher, 2012). Other factors that shape academic autonomy have also been mentioned in published studies. Some of these factors include internal power balance and internal stakeholders' perspectives (Clark, 1998; Clark, 2018). Clark (2018) considers transformations in the academic matters of university to be a result of the internal balance of the power relationships between stakeholders, who have the right to contribute to the university's development. Academic Faculty, students, industrial partners, or university management can ensure and guide the university transformations and lead to academic autonomy formation, as long as their perspective is accepted as the leading one. Whose perspective and values can win the attention of the university community is a key factor. Clark (2018) additionally suggests that external values and academic values, internal perspectives, and any other perspective can be incorporated into university changes. Thus, the logic of university policy and practice may empower students' interests, students' parents, and those from business sectors, individual constituencies, or collective bodies (Yokoyama, 2007).

At the same time, it is impossible to predict with certainty how academic autonomy can develop in a context of a particular university. This process is largely determined by the relationship between international and external players and the set of values influencing a university autonomy formation process. All such complex factors interact in real time and in ever changing environment, that further compounds this process. Due to the complexity described above, there is no single approach to defining academic autonomy and its influential factors (Maassen, 2019). Maassen (2017, p.243) defines institutional autonomy as a 'room for institutions to manoeuvre their own affairs and reduce their dependency on' the policy. This definition focuses on a university's ability to acquire independence from the factors restricting its freedom. This understanding limits the expectations of the present study, whereas Barnett's vision of what academic autonomy means for the university is more compatible with the present study. Thus, academic autonomy sets a foundation for a university to become sustainable and balanced through the processes of continuous improvement (Barnett, 2010; Stratford, 2015). The concepts of sustainability and balance can be applied towards any aspects of university to include personal, institutional, cultural, global, physical and social. The goal of attaining sustainability is to create a path of well structured and sustainable improvement.

Following along with the idea that academic autonomy also included social engagement, Clark (1998) attempted to define the common pattern of what and how the factors influence the formation of academic autonomy. It was repeatedly observed in the higher education systems and defined that the changes in the university tend to fall into the public rather than private definition. This means that attention is paid to external interests, accountability of the state authorities, and university management (Clark, 1998; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Yokoyama, 2007). However, these studies show that academic autonomy tends to develop along unpredictable scenario with interplay of powers and interests. It is always a unique individual path of academic autonomy development.

2.4 Effectiveness of academic autonomy

Despite the fact that each university should chart its own unique way to the academic authority development, the practice of academic autonomy development is surrounded by contradictory comments concerning the impact it produces in the context of a university. Thus, the researchers state that in many cases, it is difficult to prove whether academic autonomy leads to the improvement of university quality (Musselin, 2013). Many findings declare that academic autonomy failed to introduce changes into university education. These findings are based on the argument that after introducing practices related to academic autonomy, no significant changes in the quality of university education are noted (Musselin, 2013; Maassen et al., 2019; Noorda, 2013). However, some universities have successfully developed their academic profile and found an effective educational format that allowed them to gain a strong position in higher education.

An example of such academic profile development is the developmental trajectory of one of Australian universities, presented at the Scale international conference (Conference, Scale, 2021). The university changes started with internal communication and collaboration between the university managers and academic staff. They aimed to search for ways to improve the university's educational quality and find new opportunities to design innovative curricula. The academic autonomy of this university developed from the beginning with the contextual-sensitive communications, consideration and reconsideration of the internal academic profile. Though the process of academic changes took about two years, the university eventually renovated its educational programs and facilities. It defined a new model of organization and academic decision-making (Wijk, 2008; Kende, 2020). This case illustrates that academic autonomy, well organized and utilized, leads the university to improvement.

Considering the above example, and knowing how academic autonomy is formed can provide many insights into universities. However, little research evidence exists regarding how

the changes in the university are shaped and how the influential factors are being comprehended and interpreted within universities (Fumasoli et al., 2014). The formation of academic autonomy remains invisible and can be compared to a "black box". However, certain results achieved by a university can be defined as the development of formal or real academic autonomy. "Real" autonomy refers to the factual needs of the university. Real autonomy chooses the path of academic autonomy development, enhancing university's performance (Geudegebuure, 1994). Formal autonomy is based on the actions presented to a university in the form of a task. The formal autonomy is attached to the state, governance, or ministries reforms, so autonomy is paired with a control and reporting system, standardizing measures of different kinds (Christensen, 2011).

The context of a university contains much uncertainty where there are many risks of losing track of real autonomy and derail to formal autonomy. A university often finds itself choosing which side to support. It is a continuous dialogue whose interests, internal or external, have more impact and how much flexibility a university has to allow introducing the changes (Enders et al., 2013). Igbakula's (2021) study revealed that real autonomy is harder to implement than formal autonomy. Searching for the ways to achieve real autonomy, universities have to crave the indulgence of government to reposition university's ability to fulfill their academic responsibilities better. According to Igbakula (2021) real autonomy is possible under two conditions. The first is the provision of well-articulated university policies, plans, and machinery to ensure the attainment of university goals and objectives and, second, minimal interference from the state (Igbakula, 2021). Formal autonomy is more feasible to implement. A university does not need to find a way to design its path. Instead, the university adjusts its policy and practice to meet the requirements of state control and standards. Instead of being involved in the creative and professional development of a university (Carlotto et al., 2018), a university has to cut back on management and incentives to match the state's expectations. Meeting these requirements gets even stronger with financial recessions (Chistensen, 2011).

As academic autonomy is a living phenomenon resulting from negotiations and interpretations (Jungblut et al., 2020), it is never purely real or formal. As a university cannot escape state control and accountability connections, neither absolute real autonomy nor formal autonomy is possible. Instead, a great variety of formal and real institutional autonomies across the university system is found (de Boer et al., 2010; Jongbloed et al., 2010; de Boer, 2013). This fact suggests that regulatory autonomy changes from university to university. Every university has a different vision of adjusting the changes and how the powers can be balanced. It is a continuous process of combining conventional management practices with the states accountability requirements (Aithal & Kumar, 2019).

Real autonomy is positioned as a more realistic form of university development; in practice, achieving real autonomy may be even more complicated than formal autonomy development (Enders et al, 2013). While the formal or regulatory autonomy is grounded on the regulations and standards provided by state and government, the real autonomy is dependent on the university policy and structures. So it is university managers and the internal university stakeholders responsible for changing university cultures. An increasing number of management elements hinder academic autonomy development. Moreover, university management staff as well as academics, who have long been working in the context of centralized policy and are more qualified to implement the tasks rather than to define the academic needs, are not well prepared to take a new role in a changing university (Sagintayeva et al, 2014; Christensen, 2011). While academic autonomy development is coupled with the creativity and professionalism of the university communities, who make their contributions, the reality may reveal that the academics and managers may not be prepared to take this role (Sifuna, 2012; Carvalho et al., 2018). What is required from a university community in designing academic autonomy is to have a clear long-term plan of development, structures, and mechanisms of making academic changes, the individualized definition of structures, schemes, and traditions of performing academic functions (Carlotto et al., 2018). However, university communities may not be qualified to make this kind of a contribution. The managers may not be prepared to take responsibility for the leading role in academic changes (Sagintayeva et al., 2014). The academic Faculty have long been remoted from their responsibilities to manage academic quality. This resulted from inherited traditions of a centralized system, which meant Faculty's participation was reduced to the passive role of educational programme implementers (Aberbach et al., 2017). A university can find itself in a situation where there are not enough resources to manage any autonomy. In this case, the autonomy is left derelict, unattended, and unsettled.

Among the four kinds of autonomy, including real, formal, regulatory, and autonomy of uncertainty, all the endeavors of a university gravitate to designing the real one. It is an instrument to enhance the quality of education, meet the real demand, and find realistic solutions. There is no clarity as far as what practices can lead to more real autonomy. The accumulated knowledge about this issue is limited to the advice in the literature. Many researchers concur that old educational paradigms and academic organizational patterns should be questioned (Bergen, 2016). The changing processes call for the definition and redefinition of university structures, schemes, and established traditions (Carlotto et al., 2018). New forms of academic autonomy must be grounded on creativity and professionalism (Sifuna, 2012; Carvalho et al., 2018). A university has to develop its abilities to handle academic matters and offer new educational services (Goedegebuure, 1994).

Thus, just having a conversation about the development of real, formal, or regulatory autonomy is a one sided process. The conversations must be followed up with the practical steps. The beginning of this process starts with the changes inside the university framework. Though literature suggests scaffolding this process, they are still not enough practical examples to draw upon (Berdahl, 2016). Every university should decide how academic autonomy is handled and to what extent it can be real or formal, and what is practical.

2.5 Holistic approach to understanding academic autonomy

The comprehensive list of factors that influence academic autonomy is not directly discussed in research literature. It is more common to find studies that relate academic autonomy to one of the factors. Thus, leadership is well researched as one of the factors that may positively or negatively affect academic autonomy. The researcher's task was to define effective leadership (Sugget, 2015; Kende, 2020; Beyciglu et al., 2014). Some studies explored relationships between academic autonomy and industrial partners, national cultural context, and state control. Conventionally, the research studies have a narrow approach and focus on an isolated factor. These studies do not provide a comprehensive picture. On the contrary, they provide an incomplete framework for understanding the changes happening at a university (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Langley et al., 2013). Instead, there have been calls for studies that can provide a holistic perspective (Jansson, 2013; Langley et al., 2013; Kende, 2020). Maassen (2019) and Fumasoli (2014) emphasize the need to regard academic autonomy not as a collection of different factors, but as an uninterrupted living experience. This fact informs that academic autonomy is better understood not through the prism of criteria and factors, but within its context. It is assumed that research on academic autonomy is only possible from the contextual perspective, within its living experience and living environment (Noorda, 2013).

For the last two decades, especially in the last one, there has been intensive research on academic autonomy. The analysis of experiences accumulated and reported so far and limited research studies identify divergent paths towards academic autonomy (Matei, 2018; Maassen, 2019). All of the studies are presented with varying specificity, clarity, and sequencing levels. Some studies point out to specific lines along which the academic authority develops. These lines of academic authority development deserve more discussion, which is presented in the following section.

2.6 Substantive and procedural lines of academic autonomy

Development of academic autonomy proceeds along two parallel lines, both are unavoidable. These lines are called substantive and procedural. Berdahl (2006) seems to be the first to differ the substantive and procedural lines of institutional autonomy. Substantive autonomy is the 'what' of academe, which means the university determines its own goals and programmes in its corporate form, and procedural autonomy is the 'how' of academia. It is the university's power to determine how its goals will be pursued (Berdahl, 2006).

Both lines are essential for the development of academic autonomy, though more attention is paid to the procedures and strategies for organizing academic autonomy. There are many recommendations on how the university can collaborate with the external stakeholders and develop the internal qualities, structures, and frameworks to improve its systems. The procedural aspects are in demand among the university managers, especially in light of potentially weak university's capacity to make decisions (Enders et al., 2013) and legislative regulations, which tend to vary in their specificity (Birstwistle, 2018).

There is comparatively less attention paid to the substantive line of academic autonomy development. It is quite rare research that aims to disclose the 'what' of academe. There is not enough critical reflection in the development of universities, and there is a lack of research coverage for this particular area (Stech, 2011). The questions that are scarcely researched are how a university regulates its academic profile and the content of educational programmes, how the knowledge production and delivery are facilitated, and what contribution the university makes to education development.

Attention is biased towards procedural matters rather than to the substantive aspects. This uneven balance is misleading as it puts more emphasis on the management of academic autonomy and less focus on the educational content. The present research tends to prioritize the substantive aspects based on the assumption that it is important to define what is academic in the first place. The overview of different approaches to defining the content of academic autonomy is presented below. Though the literature concerning this aspect is limited, except for the information related to Scorecard project, it was possible to collect some information concerning the educational content and the strategies to define it.

2.7 Approaches to defining the content of academic autonomy

Approaches to defining academic the content of academic autonomy represent different perspectives, from which academic autonomy can be considered. Changing the perspective of view, the observer can find the different aspects of academic autonomy. The literature review as it is organized beneath offers the approach to understanding academic autonomy in the project of

Scorecard, from the Faculty and managerial perspective, from the perspective, which discloses real and formal autonomy.

2.7.1 Scorecard approach to academic autonomy

One of the most noted attempts to define the content of academic autonomy is presented in the project Scorecard (Estermann et al., 2011; 2017). According to the project the, academic autonomy includes such indicators as design of academic programs and curriculum, establishment of student enrollment and selection criteria, launching and termination of degree programmes at three levels – Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D., a choice of language of instruction, and a choice of quality assurance (eua.eu).

This list of academic indicators is convenient for the university communities in two ways. First, Scorecard offers an easy way to explain what aspects compose academic autonomy and what actions universities must undertake to achieve a high level of autonomy. The fact that European universities in more than 30 countries accepted this definition of academic autonomy might be an indicator of a political success (Matei, 2018). The definition and guidelines are well defined, comprehensive, and easy to follow. In addition to these advantages, it also outlines the content of academic autonomy as it gives a clear suggestion of 'what' of academe.

Second, Scorecard approach to defining academic autonomy gave a start to a number of research studies. They contributed to a better understanding of what is happening in universities to develop their academe profile. Thus, in Turkey, higher education lacks freedom in design of educational programmes. In Romania, the universities are limited in their freedom to launch educational programs and sequence academic development actions for the reasons of absence of long-term perspective (Turcan et al., 2015).

Scorecard project provided ground for the research trend, which has typical characteristics. The Scorecard-oriented studies are devoted to measuring academic autonomy in the university system and define the hindering factors. On the one hand, Scorecard style of understanding the substance of academic autonomy attracted the attention of the university communities to this phenomenon. On the other hand, it outlined only a narrow content of academic changes, and it limited the vision to a restricted academe-related actions.

However, the critics of Scorecard approach evaluate it as misleading. Though politically successful, Scorecard regarded as too instrumental and mechanical (Matei, 2018; Kupriyanova et al., 2018). Initially, the purpose of Scorecard project is to measure academic autonomy. It does not mean to inform universities about designing and developing their academic profile. Even

though it is mainly positioned as a measuring instrument, the universities admit it as a ready-made plan of academic autonomy development. The essential deficiency of this approach is that Scorecard-based academic autonomy exclusively is limited with eleven aspects. The universities in many countries adjust this model to their research and practice. In other words, the proposed model of academic autonomy is based on theprinciple of "one size fits all." It is adjusted without questioning whether Scorecard model meets the specific context of the university, whether the model has to be introduced incrementally, step by step or if all the aspects of academic autonomy are introduced on short notice. Scorecard approach fails to inform university communities that academicautonomy is shaped through a long-term process and is adjusted to a certain university context. On the contrary, university communities utilize Scorecard-based academic model. It leads the universities towards formal autonomy and prevents them from exploring their academic needs. Regardless of the critique, Scorecard is a good starting point to explore the substantive line of academic autonomy unless it is followed with further analysis and consideration of the dimensions of this concept to personalize the model to the context of individual universities.

2.7.2 Dimensions of academic autonomy

While universities accumulate more experience and knowledge about academic autonomy and how to shape it, the different dimensions of academic autonomy become apparent. Among the dimensions enlisted in different studies, the following dimensions of academic autonomy are most frequently mentioned: curriculum, program design and teaching methods, research and publications, academic standards, student-related issues; staff-related issues, teaching practice, professional development of staff, development of frameworks and processes that support efficient decision-making (Volkwein, 1986; European University Association, 2017; Iwinska and Matei (n.d.); Yermagambetova, 2018; Kupriyanova, 2018).

The number of dimensions is high because academic autonomy is a complex phenomenon (Aghion et al., 2010). Applying these dimensions to practice, it was noted that the researchers selected the parameters to align them to the specificity of the university profile. Thus, the substance of academic autonomy can be outlined by two to eleven more dimensions. The university is free to select its dimensions in accordance with its vision of the academic organization.

The practice and research in academic autonomy, especially in the last decade, flourished in different directions. Though the information referring to substantive academic autonomy is still restricted, it offers various ideas for constructing academic content for university education. In the last three-five years, there formed an approach that places teaching

and research at the center of the academic profile. It is underpinned by the belief that teaching and research are regarded as purely academically-related; through them, academic autonomy is realized (Carlotto, 2018). The need to revise teaching and research profiles in the university is based on the argument that these two dimensions, research and teaching, tend to remain unclear technologies (Musselin, 2006). To achieve clarity and define the academic processes, it is recommended to address the academic issues such as renovating teaching methods, involving the students in active learning processes, to design new strategies for producing and delivering knowledge (Kupriyanova, 2020; Birswick, 2018). From a broader perspective, teaching and research can be improved through searching for new forms in designing curricula and educational programs, exploring new forms of organizing teaching and research processes, diversifying and increasing flexibility of teaching and research methods, and monitoring the quality of academic offerings so that the academic profile can be improved with new forms of organization of teaching and research, flexibility in the selection of methods (Estermann, 2011; 2017; Kupriyanova et al., 2018).

Another way to define the substance of academe is to link the content of educational organization with the social needs. Sifuna (2012) states that academic development must address society's needs as a critical reference. These are also known as social and economic needs, the national and regional needs that a university is entitled to meet and match the educational service (Curry, 2012). The connection between an educational programme and social needs is considered fundamental as the purpose of education organization is to serve society.

However, how this connection between educational profile and social needs is formed is not sufficiently reflected in theory and practice. In the centralized higher education system, the state, government, and ministries of education were responsible for providing educational standards, which ensured this connection. State educational standards provided the documents with a prescription of what academic goals, academic programmes, and content were supposed to be fulfilled in the educational programme. In the last few decades, universities have been entrusted with determining the content, goals, and entire educational program structure. Since the universities have recently acquired this new responsibility, they need to expand their practice in adjusting the educational programmes to the needs of society. In practice, many examples can be found to link the educational profile to the needs of external partners' expectations (Carvalho et al., 2018; Birtwistle et al., 2020). This connection is established through communication with the external partners, who can have the role of partners or part of Faculty. They are involved in such activities as consultations concerning the content and quality of educational programmes, developing dual programmes. To ensure the university fulfills its mission in terms of offering educational service to meet the needs of society requires the university to develop a more

efficient approach.

The efficiency of academic profile can also strongly depend on the standards and expectations proposed by the state. This is known as state accountability and quality control. On the one hand, there are research findings stating that "universities must be autonomous and able to independently shape their governance structures within agreed accountability frameworks to be able to react more effectively to external challenges, address social and economic needs, and manage resources in a more strategic, efficient and effective way" (Estermann & Kupriyanova 2019, p. 9). While accountability and quality control are often mentioned as incompatible aspects as they stifle the university's freedom (Carvalho et al., 2019; De Boer et al., 2007), they are hard to avoid. Moreover, there are findings in the research stating that it is contradictory and still acceptable and even beneficial for the university to incorporate state standards and regulations and make it a part of its academic autonomy (Erkkila & Piironen, 2014). There are already practices allowing for consistency between state and university autonomy (Berdahl, 2006). In other words, it means that there are ways to design an academic profile and follow the state regulations. They state that it is possible to increase universities' autonomy and strengthen accountability. Universities found a way to arrange the practices that combine governmental interests and academic autonomy and are noted to successfully increase their competitive logic (King, 2015; Erkkila et al., 2014). Relying on state standards, accountability, and quality control mechanisms still do not necessarily diminish the freedom of the university to introduce its specific academic aspects. It may be a challenging task for a university to find the strategy to create an academic profile grounded on the state standards and individual university goals at the same time. There is a need for further exploration and practice as the present research is limited to the general overview and fails to equip the university community with practical directions.

One more source for the substantive academic line is found in the human capital, that include professional knowledge, experience, academic strategic plans, and internal vision of Faculty and the entire academic community of the university, who are ready to contribute to the development of an academic profile of the university. In those scarce studies (Suggett, 2015; Rasanen, 2012; Michavilla, 2018; Barman, 2013), it was possible to find some evidence of how Faculty's commitment to providing academic changes and defining the academic strategies was vital to the improvement of university education. For example, Faculty decided to align their teaching practice and establish a unique teaching methodology within their department. It allowed them to increase the teaching effectiveness and introduce collaborative traditions and professional interaction. Faculty discovered many opportunities for cooperation, and as a result, a lot of academic improvements were introduced into the educational programme (Michavilla, 2018). A similar experience is described in the case of Rasanen (2012). The Faculty combined

their professionalism and knowledge and had a tradition of the regular meeting for about eight years. They were able to improve their educational standards and teaching methodology and find a way to deliver better education. There are also examples in the studies of, demonstrating that the Faculty can successfully define the academic strategies and thus shape the academe of the school (Suggett, 2015). Quester Pascal, the vice-president of one of the Australian universities, at the conference of SCALE (2021), presented the strategy of how the academic staff was involved in designing the university's strategic plan. According to the results, the faculties helped define the university's academic weaknesses and strengths and were involved in academic changes (SCALE conference 2021). But, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the studies that examine the role of Faculty in academic autonomy are few and rare. And, therefore there is a need to further investigate this concept and its dimensions.

The present study outlines some ideas on how universities can design the content of the academic profile and define the academe's substance. It should be noted that these ideas are not sufficiently explored, and the practices presented in this section are scattered around different research resources. In general, the problem of how the university can design its academic profile and define the content of the educational programmes needs further investigation.

2.7.3 Considering academic autonomy players

It was noted that most definitions of academic autonomy refer to the words such as institution, university organization, and ability of university, goals, and academic autonomy-related actions. However, it should be emphasized that behind these words, there are real people and role players. Academic autonomy has a human face. So, university has achieved a high level of autonomy means that the university Faculty or managers organized its system to allow them to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of a university's academic profile. People and university communities drive the changes happening in a university.

The communities involved in academic autonomy include external partners, students, Faculty, non-academic staff, and managerial staff; the initial changes start from the collaboration of managers and Faculty (Kupriyanova et al., 2018; Carvalho et al., 2019). Academic autonomy is shaped and spread through communication and interaction between the university communities, (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018). Every community, either internal or external, contributes different aspects. It matters a lot who is involved, whose skills are applied, and whose knowledge is worth in academic autonomy development (Apple, 2004; Kende, 2020). University changes happen to all members of the university. It is also important to know to what extent the community members are professionally ready to be continuously involved in this

process and what they are ready to contribute (Jansson, 2013; Langley et al., 2013; Lok & De Rond, 2013; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). As can be seen from the summary above, a variety of players can contribute to academic autonomy development, and it differs depending on university context.

Research literature most frequently refers to community partners from the industry and labor market, state, educational managers as external players. Every community represents power and influences the academic autonomy in terms of freedom the university may have, the compatibility of the educational programmes and the partners' expectations, the overall perspectives of education, and how universities must support the global trends in knowledge production (Trencher et al., 2014; Miller et al., 2018; Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2016).

There are studies at the meso level focusing on internal university communication among the university communities. The key players are the university managers, academic Faculty, and students at this level. At this level, it is typical to find the discussions about management style, organization of academic processes, and roles and responsibilities of the university members.

The present study's interest is placed at the meso level. Further in this chapter, a brief characteristic of the two critical actors at the meso level, university management and Faculty, is presented with the following arguments why the present research focuses on the Faculty level.

2.7.4 Managerial approach to academic autonomy

There are two approaches to academic autonomy development at meso level in the research literature that can be recognized. They are top-down, or managerial, and bottom-up approaches. The latter is involves academic staff taking an active part in all university affairs. These two approaches are completely different as they approach academic autonomy from different perspectives.

Managerial power tends to tackle the issues at university level and is more likely to provide instructions and advice on how academic autonomy should be formed. The managers are more concerned with developing a strategic profile, positioning university's vis-à-vis partners, and defining a leadership style (Kupriyanova et al., 2020).

The development of academic autonomy in the managerial staff's hands takes the procedural orientation. It is also identified as "entrepreneurial university", "instrumental" or "mechanical" management (Kupriyanova, 2018; Matei, 2018). These names were given since the managers' style of university development was driven by the need to streamline business processes, optimize the use of resources, and efficient implementation of day-to-day operations.

This development path brought the university to the status of a "delivery organization" serving the knowledge society (Matei, 2018).

Though the managerial approach ensures the organization of the processes to achieve academic autonomy, it entails significant deficiencies. It is assumed that academic autonomy constructed by managers tends to be fragmented and inconsistent (Curaj, 2018). According to several educators, the academic changes are incomplete regarding the reality of change in organizations (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Seashore, 2008; Stein & Coburn, 2008). This inconsistent nature of formal autonomy tends to embed certain risks into this autonomy type. Therefore, it is important to identify the definition of academic autonomy that each university or department can relate to.

2.7.5 Faculty approach to academic autonomy

One of the definitions of academic autonomy states that it is the power of Faculty and students to teach, research, and contribute to the university's governance (Karran et al., 2017). This assumption is supported by many arguments, including the one where Faculty is stated to be the most logical impetus for academic reforms to occur (Lee et al., 2007). The members of academia are closely involved in educational processes and can ensure self-governance and quick response to the educational needs of the society and academic practices, including local practices of self-governance (Rasanen, 2012; Suggett, 2015; Moitsios, 2012; Neave, 2009).

In the last five years, the attention to the role of academic staff in academic matters grew significantly. Kupriyanova (2020) and Birstwistle (2020) identify the key role of Faculty in developing the substantive line of academic autonomy. According to these researchers, the top three indicators for an effective Faculty role are the ability of the academics to facilitate the university to be more flexible in designing the content of degree programmes, introducing new modes of knowledge delivery and learning, and introducing and terminating the programmes (Kupriyanova, (2020). Conjoining with this position, Birtwistle (2020) further proposes that Faculty may enhance methods in teaching, research, and design of new teaching strategies.

In addition to indicators presented above, faculty ability to research represents another one of such indicators (Khan, 2021). However, research receives less attention in practice and related literature, despite the stated fact that involvement in research increases faculty productivity. The academics are expected to operate effectively in the fast-changing and challenging social, economic, educational environment. They need to be guided by the clear understanding of the needs in society and economy, not to be in the position when the educational reforms subjugate the autonomy (Niemczyk & Ronay, 2021). The research dimension may facilitate the Faculty

members to search for those opportunities and direction of development which will allow attuning the academic changes more effectively.

With this range of capacities to shape the substantive aspects of academic autonomy, Faculty can and should be trusted to handle academic developments. However, there are factors signaling the weaknesses Faculty may have. However, there is also evidence testifying to the contrary regarding the role of Faculty. The typical routine conditions restrict the role of Faculty in the implementation of academic tasks (Aberbach et al., 2017). It is not uncommon for Faculty to be removed from the decision- making, influencing, and being responsible for academic quality. This resulted from inherited traditions of a centralized system, which meant Faculty's participation was limited to the passive role of educational programme implementers. But academic autonomy cannot happen to passive Faculty (Archer, 1995). Weak, visionless Faculty results in solid management, which is now viewed as insufficient power for university changes.

2.7.6 Empowering Faculty

Whether Faculty or the managers should have the leading role in developing academic autonomy is an open question. Both player groups perform a vital role in a university development. The managers are more capable of taking the lead in procedural lines, whereas Faculty have more experience defining the substance of academic changes (Matei, 2020). It is logical that academic autonomy needs both managers and Faculty as their roles represent two ends of educational continuum. However, the manner in which these two player groups handle academic autonomy in practice illustrates a lack of congruency, with obvious tension between them.

The managerial approach to academic innovations tends to provide procedural regulations and new practices, which leave the Faculty's professional contribution uninvolved. As a result the Faculty tend to remain relatively uninfluenced and unaware of what they are expected to do or how they are expected to act (Clegg, 2008; Aberbach & Christinen, 2017). Consequently, the level of Faculty participation decreases (Aarrevaara, 2010) along with their opportunity to influence academic matters (Matei, 2018). The Faculty approach to academic changes is most closely connected with the substantial processes as they have a better sense of the educational needs of the society and academic practices and have a better grasp of how to provide a quick response to them (Rasanen, 2012; Suggett, 2015; Moitsios, 2012; Neave, 2009). In this sense, the Faculty has the unique capacity to create substantial changes in academic area (Rasanen, 2012).

Considering the capacities that managers and Faculty are ready to offer for academic

development, it should be established that both managers and Faculty are equally important. With involvement of all members of university community and with more responsibilities designed to Faculty, achieving academic autonomy can become more realistic (Sifuna, 2012; Maassen et al., 2019).

Giving more power to the Faculty to influence academic matters may be confronted with several limiting factors. First, Faculty may not be prepared to assume new responsibilities as historically they had a weak position in university organizations. Secondly, loss of professionalism and ability to impact departmental and institutional policies is another limiting factor which is a result of a patriarchal centralized system that was around for several decades during Soviet times. (Aberbach et al., 2017; Carvalho et al., 2018). Third, there are other factors such as administrative and cultural-cognitive traditions suppressing the Faculty active position (Carvalho et al., 2019; Matei et al., 2018). As the previous cultural context suggested that Faculty had the responsibility to implement the task, in the present context Faculty is required to enter policy and practice and play its role in decision making and changing processes. The old traditions impose those patterns of behavior and communication, which are counter productive in the light of the changes these days. These factors, mentioned, should be taken into account in searching for the strategies to empower Faculty.

Despite these confronting traditions, the active role of Faculty should still be a critical prerequisite for the process of academic autonomy development, as such process should require active faculty involvement to be considered inclusive (Henkel, 2012). The search for new academic autonomy frameworks which would involve Faculty in creating intellectual spaces for academic changes is needed (Henkel, 2012; Curaj, 2018; Kupriyanova et al., 2020; Berdahl, 2016). Faculty and the entire university community have to reframe and redefine their new roles and empower Faculty to take an active role (Sifuna, 2012).

2.8 Addressing individual autonomy

Institutional autonomy and individual autonomy have controversial natures and they seem to be incompatible as they define different aspects of academic freedom. Individual autonomy as intellectual freedom refers to freedom of individual academics to their teaching and research, whereas institutional autonomy accounts for the entire higher education institution (Ronay & Niemczyk, 2020). Moreover, as stated by Henkel (2005, 2007), institutional autonomy cannot rely on individual autonomy, instead the collegiality should replace it. However, still practice shows that it is not possible to escape individual autonomy at the university level (Schmidt & Langberg, 2007; Chan, 2021).

Due to the perceived conflict of interest between individuall and institutional autonomies, it

was important to make decision on how to treat individual autonomy in the present study. Based on the research of Graversen et al. (2005), Kalpazidou et al. (2003), and Schmidt and Langberg (2007), individual autonomy is regarded as the fundamental prerequisite, as it tends to determine the process of academic autonomy development. Whatever the model of academic autonomy development is accepted as a university, its success depends on individuals involved in this process. Therefore, the way Faculty members individually define their roles and practices in academic autonomy certainly influences the processes of department and university autonomy development.

Individual Faculty members possess the power and intelligence to support higher education initiatives (Lee, 2004). Their support is expressed in agreement with the given initiative, as well as in their right to interpret set goals and adjust such goals to department and university practices. As it is acknowledged by Bess and Dee (2014), individual autonomy should not only be allowed, but it should be a necessity as it is through the individual autonomy the Faculty members can interpret the goals and generate knowledge through personal initiative and research involvement. Every individual, who has the right to exercise autonomy and freedom to get involved in such initiatives can contribute to the departmental autonomy and fulfill the broader social functions associated with advancing the human condition (Bess & Dee, 2014). Faculty members who express their vision, suggest individual approaches to educational changes will inform and empower department autonomy, and as a result, increase its unique effectiveness.

Taking this argument into consideration, the present study refers to individual autonomy as a necessary resource of information to be included into departmental autonomy. Autonomous Faculty members encouraged to invest their vision and knowledge in to the context and departmental practice.

2.9 Faculty Collegiality

The present research addresses collegiality as a structural unit with a key role in curricular, departmental decision making and the functions and happenings of the institution (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). Collegiality is similar to shared governance, where Faculty members possess a right to invest and own their decisions, maintain their membership, and promote academic process. This suggests that Faculty colleagues cooperate with and respect each other in decision-making processes, negotiate with others whom they may disagree, and collaborate to make the decisions that must be made (Massy, Wilger, & Colbeck, 1994). Collegiality, thus, for the purposes of this research study is considered as entitled to have the

ability and the responsibility to act and influence the university transformations (Easterling, 2011).

Academic matters have always been an individual activity rooted in the professor's discretion and the research activity (Aberbach & Christinen, 2017). Historically Faculty members were placed in the context of individual academic autonomy, pursuing individual freedom and preferences. However, this approach based on individual academic autonomy does not support university autonomy (Henkel, 2007). Making individual academic decisions, Faculty members, working independently, are at risk of being only half-aware of what they are doing and how their work fits the bigger picture of the educational processes offered by the entire department (Rasanen, 2012). The changes based on the efforts of individual Faculty members cannot result in a change at the department or university level (Karlsson, 2020).

Moreover, individual academic perspective of an academician may lose its effectiveness and appropriateness in the light of the academic matters at a departmental level (Musselin, 2006). Every academic member may have to perform their tasks at a high level of professionalism and achieve a high level of autonomy. However, individual autonomy has weak congruence with the overall aims of the department.

Collegiality is another critical factor in academic autonomy development (Henkel, 2007). Due to collegiality, Faculty can establish an academic profile of the department and have avision of how each member can align the individual work with a department's goals. This is the strategy leading Faculty to share a department policy, being aware of what they are doing and how they can coordinate their teaching efforts for the benefit of department (Rasanen, 2012).

The new approach should be found to switch from individual autonomy to departmental autonomy. It is advised to base this approach on collective processes, collaborative instruments with more reliance on the social system, and involvement of the university community from within the content of the university (Curaj et al., 2018; Kupriyanova et al., 2018).

There are some ideas on engaging Faculty at the level of department autonomy development. These are practical aspects derived from the experience of universities in different countries. In the case described by Carvalho (2018), Faculty focused on their professional development via peer review strategies, co-teaching, and designing. Many educators explored teachers' networks and found that collaborative practices improved teaching planning and pedagogy (Kende, 2020). The Faculty of the University of Swinburne, as the presenter reported at the conference Scale (2021) were involved in designing a long-term strategic plan to underpin further academic developments. The University College of London provides the space for their Faculty to collaborate around teaching and research. This activity defined the academic strategies and efficient methods.

These examples prove that there are many ways to achieve academic autonomy at the departmental level. Again, as it is with academic autonomy, the strategies of department autonomy cannot be replicated from university to university. They can be determined from within the context of the department itself. Maassen et al. (2017) state that the changes in university academic matters can be deemed complete if they are implemented at the departmental level and enter Faculty practice. Since every department is conditioned by its contextual factors and specialization profile, the academic profile of the department must be shaped to match the department's context.

At this point of discussion, it is reasonable to introduce a new term of department autonomy. This term means the academic autonomy developed at the department's level, with the department Faculty's active participation and to form academic profile according to the specificity of the department. The present study aims to explore academic autonomy from the perspective of Faculty. Further for the purposes of this study, the term "academic autonomy" is considered synonymous with "departmental autonomy" and "Faculty autonomy".

2.10 Defining departmental autonomy and departmental profile

Departmental academic autonomy is scarcely discussed in research literature, though its relevance to university development cannot be underestimated (Pifer et al., 2015). It is due to the fact that a department as a smaller university unit links to what is happening at a university level and it predicts what changes should occur at an individual level. Therefore, departmental autonomy definitely has its place in the entire story of academic autonomy development within a university organizational structure and must be well studied to become a part of practice (Mitchell et al., 2021; Hai &Ahn, 2022; Dahlander & McFarland, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Pifer & Baker, 2013).

Though departmental autonomy has not received its comprehensive definition in research literature, the current study makes an attempt to define it based on available studies as cited above. According to researcher, departmental autonomy represents as ability of a smaller university to unite Faculty members and to enable them to make decisions regarding academic structure, curriculum, teaching methodology, politics and practices at a departmental level based on the professional vision and university goals for implementing academic changes in collegial manner. Pifer (2011), Pifer et al. (2015), and Mitchell et al. (2021) provided substantial evidence to support this definition.

The need to address academic autonomy at a departmental (micro) level is sufficiently noted by practitioners. (de Graaff & Kolmos 2006; Mitchell et. al., 2021). Presumably all Faculty members are educated and qualified to hold positions in higher education and to determine the

university development (Henkel, 2000; Hai & Anh, 2022). However, having qualified academic staff is only one of the factors contributing to academic autonomy development. Faculty should also be willing to participate and contribute. Chan (2021) reports that if Faculty are not supporting academic transformations and do not participate in autonomy processes, they can potentially paralyze university operations and any hinder innovative endeavours. Therefore, it is important to have the Faculty involved in the university matters (Post, 2015). Departments should provide organizational context for Faculty to create a self-regulating space and to practice academic innovations within it (Post, 2015).

Therefore, the departmental level represents a platform for interaction and integration between the individual micro level and the organizational meso level. As Mitchell et al. (2015) reports in the study that this is the level where the initiation of the educational change occurs. Mitchel (2021) also states that this departmental level can shape the overall direction of innovation and change. Faculty members serve as an impetus for such change and transformative actions.

As department represents a smaller unit of university organization, and its practices and policies are compatible with those of the university. University academic autonomy includes the key aspects, some of which include some of which include independence in curriculum design, selection of teaching and instruction methods, social need to respond to. The department draws upon these aspects and makes it visible how these aspects are being implemented. Mitchell et al. (2021) noted that departmental autonomy is achieved through the collegial revision of curriculum policy and practice. It also stems from the collegial decision decision on methodology and how it should be regarded in the curriculum. Collectively members of the same department highlight areas for innovation and improvement. However, Pifer et al. (2015) and Eddy and Garza (2012) report a more restricted number of actions the departmental Faculty were involved in. This further demonstrates the fact that every university as well as department has its own path of developing academic autonomy.

Well established departmental autonomy can greatly contribute to the formation of departmental academic autonomy and its unique individual academic profile. Collectively, department members can affect many changes in such departmental areas as culture and traditions at the department, communication and collaboration patters (Pifer et al., 2015). In addition, Faculty, being professional in their discipline areas, can link the departmental profile to the social and economy needs. At the micro level, Faculty adjust the departmental profile to the existing local experiences and contexts. This is the contribution that stems from Faculty professionalism and capacities (Pifer et al., 2015).

2.11 Conclusion

From the literature review presented here of the conceptual ground surrounding the process of academic autonomy development, several gaps are presented. The literature review disclosed the fact that academic autonomy is strongly contextually bounded phenomenon, with a lot factors influencing it. The diversity of factors explains why there are so many perspectives of looking at academic autonomy. Raising awareness of connection between the context and academic autonomy development would be of considerable benefit for those, who are involved in this process. To my knowledge, nothing has been written about the way academic autonomy development is adjusted to the specificities of the context of universities in different countries. Though there are some studies, reporting how Faculty are involved in academic autonomy matters, still they are more descriptive. The findings of these studies tend to lose the sight of context and gravitate to establishing the patterns and observe how these patterns are followed in practice. However, the contextual influence cannot be avoided and have to be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is important to have a study how to make the process of academic autonomy development more sensitive to the context. While, it is not the aim of the present research, still some investigations leading to understanding academic autonomy within the context of the given university will be performed. As the present study is conducted in the context of the given university and the researcher provides an internal overview of how academic autonomy is being developed from the perspective of Faculty, it is inevitable that the study will explore the academic autonomy embedded in the context of university.

A noticeable difference is visible in the depth of investigation done at macro level and meso level. While there are many studies on academic autonomy evaluation, on independence of university from the state, search of management model, practical guidance, there are few studies that directly focus on what is happening with the academic autonomy at the level of university. For some reasons the researchers do not put much attention to the internal matters inside the university. Though it is stated that academic autonomy is a product of interaction among the internal powers of university, with the leading role of managers and Faculty, there are few studies exploring academic autonomy from the meso level. At present, the literature available to me provided proof of the fact, that Faculty have the right to take a leading role in academic autonomy, while more often the responsibilities of Faculty are limited to implementation of changes, but not influencing or leading them.

Those studies giving insight into Faculty role in academic autonomy largely focus on the procedural aspects. That is describing how they implemented academic changes, what practices they found efficient and less effective. Lack of information how the Faculty define the

dimensions and aspects of their academic endeavours, what they consider important. No study was found to illustrate the Faculty being involved in improvement of academic profile of the department or university. The Faculty tend to be presented within their smaller paradigm, dealing with the changes at individual level, or individual course. The present study invites the Faculty to take a higher position and define themselves the role they are ready to perform in academic autonomy. It is important to find out how the Faculty perceive and identify the dimensions of the academic autonomy within their specific context.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Research focus centered on several key areas of academic autonomy development, which are defined by the research questions. These are the guiding questions for investigation and are used in the current study to frame the investigation, data collection, analysis and interpretation. Though the research questions are earlier presented in Chapter 1, it is appropriate to mention them as a starting point for research methodology design.

Research questions:

1. How do Faculty members define academic autonomy?
2. What aspects of academic autonomy do the Faculty consider as important?
3. How can academic autonomy be developed if active faculty engagement is encouraged?

3.1 Nature of phenomenon

The phenomenon under study, further referred to as 'departmental autonomy', has characteristics that are important to be taken into consideration in choosing research method. This is the phenomenon that cannot be observed in practice or documents as an event, it is scattered across experiences, practices, traditions, values, communication and collaboration between the university communities, including management staff, academic and non-academic staff, internal and external players. In addition, the meaning of academic autonomy can be constructed by individuals and expressed in the form of reflection and verbal interaction (Jungblut et al., 2020).

Choosing the Faculty members as target participants, and being informed about the particular role of Faculty, I seeked for the research method to ensure the research environment that would meet the conditions. This method must lead to rich qualitative data, based on the lived experiences of participants, their deep insights, and detailed descriptions and give the participants freedom to present their reflections.

Another aspect is that the academic autonomy tends to be the result of collegiality, the internal interaction among the university communities (Kupriyanova et al., 2018). It would be not correct to search for the meaning of departmental autonomy in the experiences of individual Faculty members. On the contrary, departmental autonomy becomes visible as a collective possession, being represented by the entire Faculty of a particular department. It is possible to construct the concept of departmental autonomy only provided the individual experiences are treated as a part of the whole and further interpreted from the collegial perspective. This way of

dealing with the individual experiences and considering them through the prism of collegiality is proved by Smith (2007). He stated that eventually all the experiences, whether they are presented by the individuals or in collegial manner, are aligned into one logical structure (Smith, 2007; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). To keep this collegiality and allow it enter the data collection process, the research method will operate on group account. The collegiality perspective is supported throughout the research report in use of plural pronoun 'they' with the meaning 'Faculty '.

With the respect to the characteristics of phenomenon and the manner in which the data about the phenomenon can be collected, the role of participants in the investigation, I suggest developing my research in the paradigm of interpretative phenomenological analysis approach (IPA) and use focus groups as a method for data collection. The statement of the choice is provided beneath in the following up sections.

3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a theoretical framework for collecting and analyzing data used in the present research. It suits the present study for several reasons. First, IPA is an approach to qualitative research; it aims to offer insights into how a given person in a given context makes sense of a phenomenon (Smith, 2009; Phillips-ula et al., 2011). Thus, IPA study focuses on how the phenomenon of academic autonomy appears in the experiences of the Faculty members. The meanings of academic autonomy are constructed by individuals and expressed in the form of reflection. Sharing their reflections, the Faculty informs the research about their experiences, values, meanings, their intentions and so forth, the aspects that are experienced and reported (Manen, 1990).

As the present study explores the real academic autonomy as it is, ensuring that the department autonomy is explored within the real context becomes a crucial requirement (Reiners, 2012; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2008). The value of IPA satisfies this need as it relies on the participants, who are embedded in their particular cultural, social context of the given university and department (Smith et al., 2009, p.12-13). While IPA provides the research setting, where the participants are expected to present the real data about the phenomenon, still the creditability of this data depends on the capacity of participants to present their experience. In other words, the extent to which the phenomenon, described by the participants, is congruent to the real context depends on the capacity of the participants to present the real data for the research. The research is open to harbor the phenomenon as it is presented to the consciousness

of the participants (Giorgi, 2012), avoiding at the same time the possible concepts and categories introduced by the researcher. Therefore, the researcher ensures that investigation is designed in the way to conduct the research as close to the real context as possible, based on the available data.

Phenomenology, including IPA, is about identifying the complexities of the phenomenon and thus, to illuminate phenomenon and reveal complexities of different experiences (Smith, 2009). The phenomenon of academic autonomy according to the literature review tends to have a number of dimensions, characteristics. Its nature being complex can vary from context to context, adding even more complexity. Exploring the academic autonomy from the perspective of Faculty, I use IPA with the hope that it would provide the research facilities to have access to multi-aspect description.

IPA approach is not only focused on understanding and describing the phenomenon, it is, more than that, is about interpreting the phenomenon. Smith et al. (2009) contend that for IPA, a successful interpretation is based on hermeneutic circle, where interpretation can be engaged with providing insight into the participants' life world, interpretation by the participants, their conflict and desires, social interaction. It is through interpretation that IPA achieves objectification of lived experience and the nature of the phenomenon in its natural setting (Manen, 1990, p. 36). As the final goal of the research is to understand how the academic autonomy concept is structured, what factors are meaningful for academic autonomy development, the interpretative analysis of IPA may provide explanation for it. So, with IPA it is possible to preserve the multiaspected nature of academic autonomy, define its structure, and give explanation to the phenomenon.

IPA in the present study is used with intention to create get access to the real contextual data. Allowing the phenomenon to become visible through the verbal reflections of the participants, IPA results in mining 'thick data'. To ensure that data analysis in IPA paradigm is based on this account, the protocol for data analysis is designed and presented in the section beneath. IPA relies on participants' reflection and their verbal presentation of lived experiences and meanings, therefore the method of focus group will be used. The description of this method follows this section.

3.3 Focus Group Method

Focus group is a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by a researcher (Ruiz, 2017). Focus groups represent a dialogue between researchers and participants within which the participants share their experiences, opinion, and vision

concerning the key issue of their interaction (Gray, 2014; Flick, 2009; Cohen et al., 2011; Chioncel, 2003).

Focus group is identified as one of the methods most compatible with the collegial dimension of the department autonomy. Departmental autonomy is regarded as a result of collegiality, based on Faculty collaboration, on interaction among the Faculty members. The present research refers to a group, not individuals in the group, as a unit of analysis. For this reason, Faculty must be considered as a naturally occurring group (Palmer, 2010). So, a focus group in the context of the present study is the method of collecting data from a unit of colleagues involved in the discussion about the development of departmental autonomy. The possibility of considering Faculty, a group of colleagues, as a fundamental unit of analysis is proven and accepted in the work of Tomkins & Eatough (2010). Therefore, the focus group preserves the sense of group, which is especially important in this study.

Another specific aspect of the focus group method in the present study is to put more attention on group interaction rather than on the interaction between the researcher and participants. At this point, it is more suitable to use a discussion group, a version of a focus group. Both focus and discussion groups emphasize the group dimension; both permit interaction between participants, and a more or less structured moderation (Ruiz, 2017). However, there is one distinction between these two types of groups. The discussion group puts more emphasis on the information and has a more determined way to reach information saturation in a more collective and shared discourse output (Hennink, 2007, p. 145).Thus, it is suggested to use the term 'discussion group' to highlight the importance of the discussion through which the data will be collected. It must be a group discussion which involves thinking together, rather than group interviews (Smithson, 2008). That is the interaction that is regarded as collective group discourse, thinking together (discussion group), rather than a group of individual interviews (focus group) (Ruiz, 2017; Smithson, 2008).

Another reason to use a discussion group for the purposes of the present study is that it encourages the emergence and disclosure of opinions, thoughts, and internally hidden meanings (Smith, 2008; Hollander, 2004). The discussion group facilitates multi- aspect data emergence, which is especially valuable for the study. Departmental autonomy is a complex phenomenon, contextually sensitive and dynamic, as a number of factors influence it. It is important to collect as many nuances as possible about how the department's autonomy is developing. A discussion group offers the setting where the Faculty members can endorse more ideas and share their experiences more than express them individually.

However, care should be taken to verify that the discussion group results in a productive interaction. The present study is looking for multi-aspect data for productive discussion. Group

thinking and group dynamics intentionally foster the productivity of discussion (Ruiz, 2017). For this reason, the researcher must ensure that the discussion group is dynamic, productive, and meets the research expectations.

3.4 Aligning Interpretative Phenomenological Approach and Focus Group Method

The present research was based on the interpretative phenomenology approach and utilizes the focus group method. This combination is considered in the research literature as less usual for the phenomenological approach. Palmer (2010) noted that the focus group is less obviously suitable for IPA because IPA appeals to individual accounts, which is hard to elicit in the focus group context (Phillips et al., 2016). However, the present study used interpretative phenomenological approach and focus group methods (IPA and FG), based on the researcher's belief that these two methods were most appropriate for the current study. This belief was echoed in the studies conducted by IPA and FG based on the experiences of the researchers (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010; Phillips et al., 2016; Githaiga, 2014). The arguments provided by these phenomenologists highlighted some aspects that gave the permission to bring these two into one study. While IPA gravitates to exploring the depth of the phenomenon's nature and looks for the data from the participants' individual lived experiences, a focus group leads the data collection at the group level (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). However, IPA researchers such as Tomkins and Eatough, and Phillips state that eventually the research report is developed on accounts of the individuals and when presenting the findings, the individual contributions are considered as parts of the whole. Phillips et al. (2016) suggest that focus groups tend to collect information about experiences not seen in individual interviews. The focus group method generate richer accounts of individual experiences. Such method of collecting detailed information is compatible with IPA tradition.

The focus group for this study was composed of the Faculty members, who were defined as a naturally occurring group, unit of analysis, or pre-existing homogeneous group interested in the topic (Dunne & Quayle 2001). The most significant characteristic of the focus group, in which the participants belonged to one department, was that they were already used to discussing their experiences as a group (Sternheim et al., 2011; Phillips et al., 2016). Therefore, the focus group was most likely to enhance personal accounts when involved in discussions. The individuals were noted to capitalize on group accounts, especially in a homogeneous sample with shared experiences (Love et al., 2020). In the present study, the focus groups were regarded as

natural groups sharing experiences and were emotionally connected to the topic of exploration and permeated in sociality. While the criticism has centered on the difficulty of exploring individual accounts in combining IPA and focus groups, the present study was looking for the collective voices and is ready to use the group account over the individual account (Palmer et al., 2010, Tomkins et al., 2010; Love et al., 2020). In the present research combining IPA and FG was usedto enhance the depth of data about the lived experiences even more significantly, as the focus group participants tended to represent the power of one department.

Another reason IPA and focus groups could combine in this research area was that both IPA and FG were looking to understand the lived experience and drew the description of departmental autonomy out of it. This intention contradicted the traditional expectations of IPA and FG since they thoroughly considered the importance of accounts, individual or group accounts that the research could refer to (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010).

Based on the following arguments from the phenomenological researchers perspective, there was a way to have another approach to data and avoid concern of the data source issue. Randazzo, Farmer, and Lamb (2015) argued that it is possible to gather "data-rich accounts of experiences, thoughts, and feelings." Tomkins and Eatough (2010) suggested that neither an individual nor a group constitutes a separable unit of analysis. Instead, they claimed that 'analytic efforts must seek to balance that acknowledges the interplay between these two levels of analysis' (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010, p. 249). Equally valuable data could be generated from stand- alone individual contributions and a group dynamic discussion. It was not individual or group accounts that mattered but the degree of importance of information collected by the study had for the participants (Tomkins et al., 2010; Love et al., 2020). Such a data analysis strategy, which was based on the interaction between a group and individual, led to a more complex understanding and a higher degree of data validity.

Furthermore, there was a tendency to lose individual and group accounts in the write-up of the focus group, and the quotes got indistinguishable. The "extracts from focus group data are most commonly presented as if they were one-to-one interview data. Still more rarely does interaction per se constitute the analytic focus" (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010, p. 247).

The intention to combine IPA and FG in the context of the present study was underpinned by these arguments mentioned above. The researcher believed that an IPA's quality should be judged on the analysis itself and not on the data generation method. However, simply focusing on the extraction of personal accounts meant neglecting a rich source of additional insights into participants' experiences. Therefore, focus groups combined with an IPA provided access to groupaccounts, insights, and experiences.

Focus group method added one more benefit to this study concerning the quality of data

provided by the participants. It was anticipated that IPA and FG had different strategies to mine the data, and with FG to be able to get more real data. It is conventionally assumed that IPA operates on more diverse information because it is expressed in the individual interpretations (Reiners, 2012). The participants in IPA have more opportunities to focus on their personal experiences as the researcher is more involved in interaction with the participants and can maneuver for the benefit of more accurate descriptions (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011).

In the present study, the researcher's role in interaction with the participants tended to be diminished to a minimum to allow the focus group to be involved in the discussion in a natural habitual way, as they were used to discussing academic matters in their regular routine. With less interference from the researcher, the focus group might develop interaction and produce the data authentic and real. The phenomenon of departmental autonomy thus could be shaped by the participants more independently than in IPA (Polit & Beck, 2005; Ruiz, 2017). In this respect, the phenomenon emerging in the discussion group might have more connection with the reality than the phenomenon produced in the course of IPA, where the researcher was assumed to have more influence, and the individual was limited to his individual experience only. For the reasons mentioned above, it was possible to bring IPA and focus group into congruence for the present study. This study took place in such a research setting; in terms of having a group of Faculty members as a unit analysis, the homogeneity of the group that it called for flexibility and resilience of the research methods. Since there were other research studies demonstrating how IPA and focus groups could be combined, adjusted, and justified (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010; Phillips et al., 2011; Palmer et al., 2010; Reiners, 2012), the present study adopted this strategy for the purposes of this research.

3.5 Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this study balanced that of the researcher and a colleague to the participants who participated in the research. The researcher, therefore, acted as an insider researcher. This status had a certain impact on this research, both positive and negative, of which the researcher had to be aware. To achieve a higher level of credibility in the research and findings, the researcher needed to be cognizant of these issues and track them throughout the research and prevent the negative effects or, on the contrary, benefit from being an insider.

According to Seraj (2014), there are three main advantages of being an insider researcher. The first one involves knowing firsthand about the research site and participants. Being familiar with the setting and feeling comfortable is also a privilege for researchers and participants. As for the ontological aspect, the researcher has more opportunities to reach the core of the research.

The second advantage is having a greater understanding of culture and knowing how to underscore the truth being sought. From an epistemological aspect, the researcher has an augmented ability to relate the findings to the given context. The third advantage is the researcher's ability to judge how honest and accurate the responses of participants are filtered for "naturally flowing data" and produce analysis and data that is meaningful to participants (Seraj, 2014; Bonner et al., 2002).

On the other hand, insider research presents issues that impair the credibility of the research and thus require awareness of the possible effects. They may include potential bias in data collection, data analysis, and choice of issues for research. The ethical aspects in terms of power relations between the researcher and participants of anonymity for the organization and participants may also diminish the value of research. Ethics-related issues are discussed in detail later in this chapter, in the ethics section.

At the data collection stage, and as an insider, the researcher in this study had to balance the two roles of a researcher and a colleague to the participants. The difficulty was in the conflictof two functions mingling throughout data collection and analysis. The researcher had to be open to accepting what the participants said about their experiences as their "truth" without moral judgment and focused on the meaning as it was given by the participants (Finlay, 2014). On the other hand, as a colleague, the researcher should focus on keeping the flow of discussion in the direction of research goals. It was unavoidable implicitly or explicitly to get involved in participants interactions, where the researcher had to provide explanations where required, take notes and adjust questions to facilitate the discussion. What the researcher choose to pay attention to and emphasize at the data collection stage was subjected to the researcher's influence.

The lack of ability to allow the participants to deliver their meanings and remote from the discussion allowed bias to creep in. Allen-Collinson (2009) noted it is impossible to bracket one's biases completely. It is more realistic for the researcher to be aware of the existing assumptions and "adopt a more self-critical and reflective approach in research" (p. 286). However, not all the assumptions and opinions based on the knowledge of the phenomenon should be suspended fromthe research (Callary et al., 2015). Callary et al. (2015) note that some researcher's assumptions may interfere with the research and thus should be bracketed out; some taken-for-granted assumptions about the topic might inform researchers' approach and thus should be bracketed in. Researcher, being familiar and sympathetic to the situation discussed by the participants, can benefit from making richer data collection (Seraj, 2014). Therefore, bracketing is about the researcher being aware of whether their assumptions can add bias or nourish the data.

Looking for more reliable data collection, I would follow the recommendations from Callary et al. (2015) and Allen-Collinson (2009). They recommend doing a bracketing exercise as an essential tool in different stages of the research, both data collection, and data analysis. This exercise suggests asking reflective questions and keeping the notes to increase awareness of the possible bias:

What are my beliefs about?

Why do I think that?

What is the meaning discussed by the participant?

In what way my belief may differ from the participants' beliefs?

The questions played the role of increasing control and preventing the meaning of the researcher and participants from interfering. It was natural for the researcher to have an individual opinion concerning discussion. However, in this particular study, the insider researcher had to find the way to put distance between her own beliefs and the participants' opinions. Being neutral and taking the observer's position helped to remain unbiased.

Phenomenology attempts to combine the meaning articulated by the participants, however, it must be acknowledged that phenomenology cannot escape the moment of 'fusion of horizons', the moment where the meanings articulated by participants and the meanings to which the researcher arrived in the process of analysis and interpretation are blended (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p.730). The data analysis process is associated with creativity; however, it is this researcher's opinion that the latter aspect as more vital at this stage. One of the principles for the researcher is to be open to what the participants say and stay unbiased. Such ability is the foundation on which everything rests; without it, a researcher cannot be said to be truly engaged in phenomenological inquiry (Finlay, 2014). To achieve this position, the researcher must put aside the habitual, taken-for-granted understandings, which tend to be are especially strong with inside researchers (Finlay, 2014, p.123). It is a radical self-meditative process whereby the researcher's assumptions, opinions, and judgments are acknowledged and expressed consciously. Assumptions and implications should be clear and explicit to the researcher before interacting with the participants and interpreting data (Chamberlain, 2013).

In addition to the bracketing exercise above, the following questions were recommended to keep the researcher's attention in data analysis impartial.

What is the person trying to express?

Is there something that is expressed ‘between the lines‘? Does this message interpretation keep to original message?

Does the researcher have a sense of something happening at the moment that maybe the participants are less aware of?

These are examples of ways researchers can explore the interpretative component of participants’ expressions. Smith (2004) and Miller et al. (2018) stressed that such interpretations are always speculative and should be presented in such a manner Thus, it is not creativity but respect and the ability to stay open-minded to the meaning of the participants that provide the basis for credible research.

The researcher also defines what issues to include in the research and what interpretation to ground on. It is acknowledged that the researcher can always be at risk of overlooking the meaning implicitly hidden in the lived experience. The participants inform about the experience, but the researcher explores the essence of this experience and brings schemas and frameworks into being. The phenomenologist must have a research accuracy to structure the lived experience and understand the relationships of the experience within the context, as it was meant by the participants (Enrich, 1996). IPA traditions suggest having a data analysis protocol, a multi-aspected instrument to acquire a complete vision of the phenomenon under study. Following the protocol, It is this researcher’s hope to protect this research from biases connected with the researcher‘s individual perception of the researched issues and allow the natural data to unfold.

3.6 Participants

This section is arranged in two parts, where the first part discusses the parameters according to which the focus group participants were selected, and second part provides an account of the focus groups description.

The in the present study were selected according to the guidance of the chosen research methods. First of all, it was expected that the focus group participants would be actively involved and with a high degree of interaction as the quality of discussion defines the effectiveness of the data for further research (Acocella, 2012). Several sources suggested that homogenous group enhances collaborative performance and support communication processes, especially those which are aimed at discovery and development of subject (Sanchez et al., 2021; Acharya & Sinha, 2018; San-Martinez et al., 2017).

To ensure that study participants represent a homogeneous group and the focus groups also meet

homogeneity requirements. Several specific criteria were used. First, the study sample consisted of participants who work within the same university and department, and therefore shared culture and traditions established by the university environment (Hennik, 2914). Second, homogenous group can ensure that they can provide a more comprehensive description of their practice and share their opinions and experiences with their colleagues (Hennink, 2014; Matthew &Ross, 2010; Miller & Salkind, 2011). Third, participants from the same department would need less time to build group rapport, and they may be more comfortable getting involved in a productive conversational dynamic, thereby increasing the depth of the information gathered (Hennink, 2014; Matthew &Ross, 2010; Miller & Salkind, 2011).

In addition, participants' personal characteristics were considered as part of the focus group formation. Sanchez et al (2021) suggest that considering personal qualities such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness can further ensure that the group is homogeneous. Having an advantage of being the inside research and knowing the participants of the school, it was attainable for the researcher to form the focus smaller groups of 3-5 participants on the basis of these criteria. It was this researcher's belief that homogeneous group will increase the level of collaboration and discussion.

All study participants worked at the School of Humanities. There were a total of 25 participants from three educational programmes. The paprticipants were lecturers, professors, and teaching assistants. The work experience of participants ranges between 5 to 25 years, with the youngest participant being 30 years old and the oldest participant being 55 years old. The descriptive information about the participants, such as work experience, qualifications, discipline of teaching was not regarded as it is not relevant to the purpose of group discussions. Individual opinions of the participants would be considered as a part of group opinion or response, and not as an individual opinion (Phillips et al., 2016).

The participants were invited with the letter of invitation prior to the beginning of planned focus group meetings. They had the right to voluntarily join the focus group discussion. This ensured that the participants who joined were interested in participating in those focus group discussions.

The participants were arranged in five focus groups with 3-5 participants in each group. The group size was defined according to the recommendation congruent with the IPA tradition and following the recommendation from Rubel and Okech (2017), Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014).

3.7 Data analysis

The phenomenological study allows a lot of flexibility, therefore there is a need to structure the data analysis process and adjust it to the individual study. Thus several IPA research studies illustrate different mechanisms and tools for navigating phenomenological data gathering and data analysis (Love et al., 2020; Callary et al., 2018; Palmer et al., 2010). Murray and Gilde (2018) state there are many models of IPA research available, discussing different levels of analysis and presenting IPA findings. The data analysis logistics is called data analysis protocol. It includes steps and directions on how the data should be treated and analysis reported.

Appreciating the flexibility and multidirectional design of the IPA data analysis, I used this advantage of the freedom to design a data-analysis protocol to ensure that the research analysis closely follows the experience and thoughts of the participants. The research design for the present study was inspired by the works of Palmer (2010), Love et al. (2020), Callarry et al. (2018), and Tomkins et al. (2010). The protocol was designed as a series of steps that address a diversity of data analysis aspects. The idea behind this protocol was to design an instrument that would lead both to describing and interpreting the phenomenon under study and preserving authentic lived experience.

The following report in this section presents the protocol, designed for the purposes of the present study. Every step as described provides explanation and the meaning of it for the research. These steps will guide data analysis:

Step 1. Question in IPA traditions

The discussion should be based on the appropriate questions to facilitate communication as a source of IPA data. Following the recommendation for IPA question design, the researcher seeks for a balance between the open-ended questions and follow-up ones. IPA questions should be neither too open, as a lack of specificity may confuse the participants, nor too much leading, making the participants respond to the researcher's expectations (Murray et al., 2020, p.248). The questions must also avoid focusing on areas that mirror the researcher's preconceptions and assumptions. IPA questions are more often concerned with how and what the participants experience.

Moreover, the questions should appeal to reflection on the full experience, including affective, cognitive, bodily, and behavioral components. Following the most frequent advice on IPA question design, the questions should address personal opinions and explain the reasons behind them. The template example gave a practical guideline for designing the questions: "What

is it like for you having X?", "How did you feel when that experience occurred?", "As you think of that experience now, what is it that you consider valuable and meaningful?'', "What did that experience mean to you?"

Apart from designing questions, it was important to be aware of how the discussion can progress. Within the group discussion, the participants might concentrate on validating their colleagues' experiences and advancing their own or group agenda (Palmer et al., 2010). The participants might give a new direction to the talk, which was acceptable. Table 1 below presents research and IPA questions to facilitate focus group discussions. As it is advised, the researcher should be prepared in advance with the key questions and prompt questions to manage semi-structured interview. The manner, in which the questions are asked, was an important step in preparing and managing data collection and analysis (Palmer et al., 2010).

Table 1 Wording questions following IPA traditions

Research question	IPA questions
How do Faculty define academic autonomy?	How does academic autonomy represent itself in your department? **Prompt questions:** What changes have you noticed once you started practicing academic autonomy on individual, departmental, and university levels?
How do Faculty members define department autonomy and content-related aspects of departmental autonomy?	If you are a member of a department with strong academic autonomy, what attributes and activities would you like to see in the first place?

	Prompt questions: what would you like to happen in your department in the first place to help form its academic profile? What instigates and hinders academic changes in your department? What does it mean for you working at the department with strong academic autonomy? What can change or what has already changed with the appearance of departmental autonomy? How did you feel about it?
How is departmental autonomy treated and should be treated by the Faculty?	How would you identify that academic autonomy is developed at a high level? How would you feel, and what would you do if you see that your department does not have an academic profile and does not upgrade its academic profile to the standard?
Whose responsibility is academic autonomy?	How would you comment on the statement: every Faculty member can facilitate departmental autonomy development/ only managers can shape departmental autonomy/ the Faculty and managers are responsible for autonomy development?

Step 2. Positionality of participants

Positionality is typically defined as stance or positioning of the researcher, or participants, in relation to the context within which they perform and get their experiences. It was important to define the positionality, as it informed about the factors which caused the relations between the individual and context. The information about positionality was usually implicit,

hidden in meanings, beliefs, reactions, assumptions of the person. Positionality of participants loomed through their statements, which implicitly explained the function they were performing in practice. The data about this was implicit and hidden in the participants' reactions, comments, and opinions. The questions appealing to how the participants felt and what argument they provided helped reveal the position they assigned for themselves in department autonomy development. This data was mined through a deeper analysis known as interpretative analysis. It relied on understanding the hidden relationships between the person-phenomenon-context relationships and the researcher'ssensitivity to grasp those (Callary et al., 2015).

Definition of position the Faculty acquired in the department context disclosed the phenomenological attitudes to academic autonomy they were dealing with. This was specifically important in the frame of the IPA study (Finlay, 2014, p.122). There was a need to find a method to define this kind of implicit data. Palmer et al. (2010) advises asking questions such as "What is the stance, perspective, the researcher/ participants?" These questions were for interpretative use only; they guided the researcher's analysis but could never be addressed to the participants directly. I assumed the researcher's sensitivity to grasp the meaning and analytical effort should be placed into finding this aspect out (Callary et al., 2015).

Step 3. Claims and Concerns

One of the rare aspects the phenomenologists include in their analysis protocol is claims and concerns expressed by the participant. The work of Palmer et al. (2010) suggests including claims and concerns as an element of analysis, which I find valuable for my study as well. Claims and concerns of participants mirror the power, intentions, and the urgent meanings, which are of specific importance to the participants. This kind of data also informs about the vision and positionality of Faculty. For me, as a researcher, it was challenging to motivate the discussion toward claims and concerns and to track them afterward throughout the textual transcript and analysis (Palmer et al., 2010). The claims and concerns were organized in the table, similar to the example provided beneath. In my research, I suggested it was possible to link the claims and positionality of Faculty. This suggestion was underpinned by the belief that claims and concerns were the products of the attitude the participants had towards the topic of discussion.

It was to understand what matters to the participants, with attention to specific events, relationships, core values, and so forth (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). Researchers recorded exploratory comments, identifying participants' objective comments, emotional expressions, and any notable linguistic patterns (e.g., pauses, metaphors, tone). If researchers were to stop at this point in the analysis phase, the outcome might look similar to a

transcendental phenomenological research product (Miller et al., 2020, p.246).

Step 4. Language and extra-linguistic aspects

Though not well observed by phenomenological studies, language and extra-linguistic aspects were included in my protocol because human experiences are recalled and reflected because we have language. Language is so fundamentally part of our humanness that Heidegger (1971) proposed that language should be a part of the analysis. By the term 'language', I meant not only the use of words, metaphors, and description but also the extra-linguistic elements, like the tempo of speech, pauses, emotions, and the emotive expressions (Miller et al., 2020, Manen, 1990, p.39). The analysis of language was regarded as secondary importance in my research; however, it was deemed to disclose the aspects of the hidden lived experience of the participants (Manen, 1990, p.39). This might include the attention to specific events, relationships, core values, and so forth (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). Analysis of language was based on the study of Palmeret al. (2010), Finlay (2014), Miller et al. (2020) with some amendments to adjust to the present study:

Analysis of language and extra-linguistic aspects involved:

1. Repetition, stand-out words and phrases, turn-taking, prompting;
2. Descriptions of feelings/emotive language;
3. Manner of speaking (e.g., to emphasize/back up a point, to shock, to provoke dis/agreement, to amuse/lighten the tone);
4. Amount of time and attention paid to the issue under discussion, time and contribution invested by the participants;
5. Pausing and speed of discussion development, the stops of confusion or lack of individual experience, interruptions, and taking turns;
6. The commitment of the participants, involvement in discussion, and emphasis;
7. Positive and negative emotions, the emotional coloring of the claims, and individual experiences.

Technically the data concerning language and linguistic aspects were collected through listening to the recorded interview and the transcript. The data about the emotions, reactions, eye expressions, and smile exchange was instant and could be captured in a moment. To keep non-verbal data in the research, I took reflective notes to fix this information for further use. This was a suggestion borrowed from Finlay (2014). Taken during and after the discussion, these notes were also added to this data set. It was important to reflect on the connection between the language useand the meaningful unit it was used for.

Step 5 Identifying themes

The claims and concerns, expressed in the form of narrations, had to be explained and interpreted. The outcome of IPA was the understanding not only the living experience and its constituent parts, but the prior goal was to construct the concept of the phenomenon under study (Fade, 2004). Therefore, the study aimed to determine the explanations for the department autonomy as experienced by the Faculty in the given context. An explanation embraced the themes that are well-developed, systematically repeated, and related to each other. It was the connections and relations between the themes that composed the phenomenon.

Based on this instruction, my concern in the present study was to define the themes and find the explanation for the department's autonomy as it was presented. There was a standard approach to dealing with themes. The search for themes started with a textual transcript; it was read and coded. The researcher identified the themes. Theme definition required sensitive skills and the researcher's responsibility to formulate themes as close to participants' accounts as possible (Pietkeiwicz et al., 2012). After the themes were identified, they were grouped in clusters. It was advised to provide quotes and examples of raw data. At this stage, the themes might be unrestricted in number. The second round of working with themes aimed to identify broad over- arching themes (Fade, 2004; Callary et al., 2015; Smith and Osborn, 2003). The recommended number of broader themes was four or five to give justice to each theme in the writing-up (Smith, 2011).

Getting back to the purpose of the research, it was important to highlight that the entire research was devoted to exploring the complex multi-aspect department autonomy. The participants hade the role of the experienced owners, who reflected on the aspects of department autonomy that had significance for them. The data about the phenomenon could be received from a relatively short period of focus group discussion. Therefore, it was important to pay attention to as many aspects, minor or major, as possible.

Identifying the theme tended to operate more on the themes that bear significance in the context of the whole group experience, the concurrent themes. However, in the discussion between the participants, it was most likely that the colleagues would touch on the themes that might have the status of stand-alone themes and bear significance for one or two participants. My research concern was finding the balance between convergent and divergent themes (Smith, 2011). Weaving both together, it was possible to show how different aspects and meanings could influence department autonomy development. Incorporating convergent and divergent themes into the study was the attribute of more sophisticated findings and higher quality of IPA (Nizza et al., 2021,p. 377).

Organizing the data with concern was important to make convergent and divergent themes visible. So the analysis distinguished the concurrent and divergent themes on an equal basis and used them in the description and interpretation of department autonomy. Different methods were found in the literature on arranging data analysis in terms of illustrating the development of convergent and divergent themes. This research used the following method, with further changes as required.

Step 6 Descriptive and interpretative layers

IPA approach suggests having two layers of analysis development: descriptive and interpretative. The descriptive analysis is the initial phase of IPA. It aims to describe the phenomenon through the eyes of participants. It is based on the explicit data directly defined in the participants' speech, their attention to the aspects that matter, specific events, core values, and relationships (Miller et al., 2018). My task was to collect the phenomenon of department autonomy as a puzzle out of pieces of data provided by participants. The descriptive analysis relies on the participants' answers, collected in the data and further synthesized into clusters of essential meanings (Giorgi 2009; Wertz, 2011; Finlay 2014, p. 129). The following guiding questions helped me focus on data analysis's descriptive layer. The questions were designed as inspired by Finlay (2014), Miller et al. (2018).

What is the experience of participants like?

What does it mean to be/ to have x?

How does this phenomenon appear in the experience of the participants?What matters to the participants?

What specific events, relationships, and core values accompany this phenomenon?

The interpretative layer took the analysis to a wider perspective. The researcher's goal at this stage was to make sense of the participants' experiences. It was in the second round that the phenomenon was interpreted. The first time it was interpreted and presented by the participants in their discussion group, and the second time it was interpreted by the researcher at the interpretative layer. This is called 'double hermeneutic' (Smith et al., 2009). In my case, my task was to explain what contextual factors influenced the participants, what internal meanings were ciphered, and what message was hidden. The following questions were used as guides at the interpretativelayer (Smith and Osborn, 2008; Miller et al., 2020).

What are the participants trying to achieve here?

Is there something leaking out here that wasn't intended?

Do I have a sense of something happening here that maybe the participants are less aware

of?

What are the influential contextual/ cultural/ organizational factors?

The previous plan for data analysis of themes and subthemes was referred to as the level of focus group discussion. The present research included five focus groups. The ultimate data analysis was meant to be implemented at the cross-group level. The themes identified within individual focus groups were now integrated into one data set. The researcher aimed to look for patterns across the theme tables, picking up commonalities and stand-out differences between groups and drawing out super ordinate themes (Palmer et al., 2010; Finlay, 2014). The cross-group analysis allowed forming multiperspective accounts that would probably not have emerged in single-group and individual accounts (Palmer et al., 2010, p.117). The homogeneity among focus groups was expected to confer an advantage in describing and interpreting the phenomenon under study as the participants belonged to homogeneous groups. Their experiences, attitudes, values, and other aspects were easily related and be consolidated into one conception. The resercher's task was to find the similarities and differences and report them.

3.8 Limitations

The present research had limitations regarding context, data collection, and sample issues. The information about limitations was to be regarded concerning the overall understanding of research, designing research methods, and its findings. The limitations informed about the specific conditions of the research without diminishing its value.

The present research was conducted in a society where democratic traditions were less exercised. So, the research participants may have informed about their experiences and behaviors as expected in the given context. The experiences were also linked to the university context, characterized by the strong inheritance from the past centralized system. As the traditions of the centralized system still followed in practice, implicitly or explicitly, they predict the patterns of experience specific to this context.

Another limitation was relevant to the participants, who belonged to mono-discipline Humanities department. There was an assumption that the discipline specialization might impact the manner of behavior and perceived experience.

The limitation was the restricted time for data collection. The research method suggests the maximum duration of discussion of no longer than 60-90 minutes, which may be insufficient for a deep discussion. Consequently, the collection of data could also be restricted. The novelty of the research setting might limit the readiness of participants to talk about their

individual experiences. These limitations were acknowledged.

Authentic group discussion were not part of regular practices among this group of faculty, which in itself presents another limitation as staff were not used to such discussions.

In addition, the theme of academic autonomy is rarely mentioned at the university and departmental meetings. For most of the participants it was the first experience of discussing academic autonomy and drawing on their individual experiences. On the other hand, the university itself has recently introduced academic autonomy into its practices and policy and is now in the process of acquiring its first experience. However, it was noted, that, descending from the Soviet past and centralized system of management, the participants show no fear of repercussion and fear to criticize the bureaucracy of the university. On the contrary, the participants were actively involved and interested in sharing their experiences for the benefit of the research. Considering these limitations, the findings of the present study must be considered as the ones typical for the academics of humanitarian discipline.

3.9 Ethical considerations

My participants had a key role in the research and are recognized as the unique owners of the lived experience in the given context of the university. As a researcher, I had to be respectful to any of their concerns and provide the conditions encouraging their participation. "Competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.78) must be covered throughout the research. In my role as an inside researcher and with my colleagues in the role of research participants, I had ensured the conditions for participants to feel free to join and withdraw from the research, to be fully aware of the research purposes and their role in it. What was more important was to create the research setting in a way to encourage the participants to be truly engaged in discussions with the understanding that their participation is of high value.

The following steps were implemented to increase the confidence and competence of the participants before they entered the research. The informed consent letter was delivered two weeks prior to fully informing the participants of the forthcoming research. The participants were instructed with the purpose to nurture a feeling of their power and significant role in this research and, from a wider perspective, in the area of department autonomy development. The research participants were provided with sufficient, relevant information in a comprehensible format and had the freedom to make an informed decision about their participation (Hennink, 2014, p.46; Henriques, 2014). Being a colleague and inside researcher, I was available for

contact in case the participants needed to learn more. Some of the colleagues expressed their interest and wanted to discuss the event personally. The oral contract between the researcher and participants before the event was found to be more effective in insinuating willingness to participate in research. The less official manner of discussion implied a better relationship based on mutual interest and sympathy. Oral contacts before research were confirmed to be appropriate as the participants may learn more about the research and its benefits (Gray, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011).

3.9.1. Voluntary participation

The participants were informed two weeks prior to the event and were free to express their intention to participate in the research. I ensured the opportunity to not only excuse themselves from the focus groups but also decline to answer questions. Being a part of the Faculty myself, I had no administrative relationships with my colleagues, and no hierarchical power was allowed to influence the decision of participants. As a researcher, I provided the participants with details concerning the research process without impacting their decision (Hennink, 2014, p.46).

The individual willingness of the participants had a great value for the research. It was recognized as a factor increasing the success of the research. The participants volunteering to participate in research were assumed to be more interested in participating in the discussion and sharing their experiences. Every participant received a thank you letter expressing appreciation for the time and expertise they contributed to the research.

3.9.2. Participating in discussion

As with every research, the dominating intention is to mine a full set of data concerning the key research questions (Cohen et al., 2011). The richness of data depends on the willingness of the participants to share their experiences. As the information flows in the discussion process, both researcher and participants may not predict the direction in which the discussion will unfold. Therefore, it is important to have sensitivity to what data is mined, what data is worth, and what should be prevented. The dynamic nature of the group discussion may develop in the direction and topic not scheduled by the researcher (Hanson, 2013). This ethical dilemma is where sensitive issues are raised and should be treated.

The participants might express a critique of the university or management organization; they might refer to negative experiences that damage the university's reputation or the university community. Being aware of this issue, it was made one of the principles for my research to seek

only participants' views and opinions. Any views detrimental to their university work were not allowed.

Another principle allowed the participants to define what data was allowed to be used in the research. If the participant was uncomfortable or felt disadvantaged, the participant had a right to withdraw, not to answer the questions, or ask to delete the recorded information. If the participants were engaged in a discussion about which they could regret, later on, they could ask to damage the recorded information. The researcher only used the information relevant to the research questions. Any unsolicited information was skipped.

Within the discussion process, as a researcher, I executed the role of monitoring and managing group dynamics. This meant I could control the direction of the discussion and head it more towards the research goals. For example, should the Faculty have discussed the remarks about the quality of university policy and the responsibility and quality of work, it would have been my duty to prevent the development of this issue. I used the strategy of rephrasing their concerns into a positive context and offer to consider the issues from another perspective.

In practice, there were episodes with the development of positive emotions when the participants developed a positive group dynamic, encouraging each other in productive discussion. For example, as a group, they could agree on the strategies for the department's academic profile, how to enhance it and what actions would add quality to the academic profile. They were inspired by the ideas and expressed their desire to appoint the time for further discussion. This episode was worth showing its effectiveness; as a researcher, I was especially grateful for it.

While dealing with different negative and positive discussion developments, I found out how important it was to keep to the research trajectory and control the data being mined within discussion. It was also essential to recognize the moments to use the preventive strategies to stop the negative development and to use supporting strategies to facilitate positive aspects of the discussion. The researcher's control should not be overemphasized as it was impossible to predict all the factors (Hennink, 2014, p.46).

3.9.3 Confidentiality

The research-based interaction should address minimization of harm, maximum anonymity, and confidentiality before, while, and after interaction between the researcher and participants should be ensured. All the information discussed in the focus group and individual interviews should be kept anonymous. Confidentiality can be difficult to maintain because the researcher uses quotations from the research participants when reporting the findings (Hennink,

2014, p. 48). The names of the participants were kept secure, and the participants had to be informed of how their identities were protected.

All data was anonymized and used for research purpose only. The audio recording was done with my mobile, which only I could access. The researcher understood that the participants' data produced in the discussion group was confidential. The researcher took on the obligation to, first, use the information for the research purpose only; second, to store the data on a password-protected folder on an external hard drive disk; third, the participants had the right to ask the researcher to delete the information at any stage of the research, have access to it and do other manipulations with it. Before the data analysis stage, the name of the university or the department, as well as any identifying information were deleted from the recordings. Pseudonyms replaced the participants' names. It was also vital for all the participants to confirm that they kept all the information provided by the researcher and the group participants confidential. Signing the Consent Formand agreement between the researcher and participants before the group discussion assured data privacy.

3.9.4 Awareness of biases

'Reflective responsibility (Williams, 2009, p. 212) is paramount for every researcher in terms of surfacing ontological and epistemological bias not only in the field of inquiry, the research design and choice of participants. Though it is in human nature to have bias both as researcher and participants, care should be taken not to allow biases to influencethe quality of research. The participants had to work under the perceived requirements of the present study. Though the care was taken to provide the convenience of discussion in a familiar setting with the colleagues, the research's needs might still lead consciously and unconsciously to biased answers. It might be caused by participants' desire to be correct, to please the audience, and to fit the expectations. This was unavoidable and predicted but had to be considered throughout the data analysis.

The participants also had to be fully cognizant of the full research cycle and how the data they provided would be used further. They had the right to be informed about the research progress and receive a copy of the final research report. Upon request from the staff or Department of Science or any other university department, the researcher would present the information about the research that was made publicly available at the appropriate time.

All the aspects concerning ethical issues and the Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) of the University of Liverpool granted ethical approval.

Chapter 4

4.1. Findings and discussion

This chapter reports the results of the analysis of the data that was collected for this research study. The findings are based on the complex interpretations following the protocol steps presented in Chapter 3. Every claim in the finding report is supported with the quotes and presented in two layers, the description layer and the interpretation layer. The description layer is most closely related to the data provided by research participants. The interpretation layer presents the analysis of the issues through a wider lens, providing the explanation based on the influential factors, causes, and reasons, and how it is regarded in the broader context of international experience.

The data analysis is based on the findings of different significance levels, including major themes and sub-themes, which were identified based on participants' interviews. According to the principle accepted in this research, every finding, regardless of its significance, is included in the report based on its relevance. The data analysis report aims to fully investigate the phenomenon of academic autonomy development from the Faculty perspective.

The organization of the chapter follows the order of research questions. The first section outlines how the Faculty perceives academic autonomy and defines its function within the department context. The second section is devoted to discussing the content of academic autonomy. It is based on the opinions of the Faculty members. This section provides some ideas about the composition of academic autonomy. The third section gives insight into the internal processes for developing and handling academic profile. The last section presents the discussion concerning whose power and in what form can be applied to facilitate academic changes.

4.2. Faculty Perception of Academic Autonomy

With the aim to give more voice to the Faculty participants in the present study, I created different episodes and was looking for opportunities in focus group discussion where the group participants expressed their vision and meaning concerning definition of academic autonomy. The literature provides different versions of academic autonomy definition. However, this study looked for the definition shaped by the Faculty members in the given context. This principle is underpinned with the assumption that the definition, presented by the Faculty members, would most closely relate to the given context. It should be noted that the notion of 'academic

autonomy' is not a part of regular practice for the Faculty. It is not used in the documents and other regulative documentation. This notion is not an object of discussion among the Faculty and managers. Therefore, the definition of academic autonomy, mined from the focus groups participants, is considered to be connected with the knowledge and experience of the Faculty only.

4.2.1. Faculty Perception of Academic Autonomy: descriptive layer

Most noticeable feature, noted in the discussion of five focus groups, is that the Faculty members avoid using the term 'academic autonomy'. Instead they used the synonymous phrases of 'academic changes', 'steps of improvement', 'changing processes', 'strategies of improvement',and 'increasing quality of education'. While in the literature academic autonomy is often regarded as a way to independence of the university, or adjusting profile to the social and economy needs, the Faculty expresses a diverse understanding of this process. It is more connected with practice of academic transformation, with the leading role of the Faculty.

> "Academic autonym for me sounds as a process of changes. I can introduce improvements, when I see the need to improve my programme of teaching". (Particpant FG4)

> "I think academic autonomy is something that we need and should have had long time ago. It gives freedom to introduce changes into the academic programme, either at the level of the course I teach or at the level of the overall department". (Participant FG2)

> "With academic autonomy we can gain more flexibility and spend less time to introduce improvements into teaching and learning process". (Participant FG 5)

Another typical characteristic of how Faculty perceives academic autonomy is the focus on their individual area of practice. The same quotes include the words typical for narration from the first person: 'I', 'my programme of teaching', 'we need (academic autonomy)', 'at the level of course I teach'. Throughout five focus groups the Faculty members used 'I' and 'we' and they never referred to academic autonomy as an action that is implemented at the departmental or university level. Their understanding of academic autonomy is narrowed to their immediate practice.

In their discussions the Faculty members were noticed to have two reactions. They either showed little interest to the topic or were very excited and ready to share their visions with the colleagues. The moment of disinterest were accompanied with pauses, words of hesitation. Some participants signaled about lack of understanding and knowledge by asking clarification questions. On the contrary, the Faculty who had their vision of academic autonomy were excited to propose their ideas for discussion. At some points the ideas expressed by individuals were developed into group discussion, through which the Faculty reached agreement and expressed readiness cooperate. Thus, the participants in FG 5 discussed the idea of revising curriculum and to investigation the curriculum for weak places. They gave arguments why this step of curriculum revision should be implemented and what they can improve by doing this. The participants in FG2 reached agreement in discussion their claim that they, the Faculty must have more space and room to maneuver in designing academic programmes. In other groups the Faculty were involved in less vigorous debate and their discussions received less development.

4.2.2. Faculty Perception of Academic Autonomy: interpretative layer

As it can be seen from the quality of data, provided in the section above, most of the evidences are detected not in the verbal form, through the words, but through extra linguistic means, including emotions, presence or absence of some features, manner of discussion. It was noted that the Faculty provided restricted definition to academic autonomy. The explanation to this fact can be found in practice. Academic autonomy is not presented in the practice of department or university. No reference to the term ‘academic autonomy’ is made in the regulatory internal documents. It is not the subject of discussion at the level of university board or department meeting.

However, the findings, based on the data, available at the moment of the research, point out that the Faculty showed professional interest to academic autonomy, though some of the Faculty showed difficulty in understanding it. The knowledge about academic autonomy is still random, not well structured in the practice of Faculty. At the same time, the Faculty do have willingness and professional vision of what they are ready to contribute into the academic development.

4.3. Content Related Aspects of Academic Autonomy

This section is devoted to exploring the content-related aspects of department autonomy. As it was observed in literature review, this theme is not sufficiently studied in the research literature. Little information was found concerning what factors those compose academic autonomy. While there is one dominating approach to defining it, as provided by Scorecard, every university and department is assumed to tackle this issue individually.

The findings are derived from data analysis and organized in seven sections: 1) design of academic programmes content, 2) student enrollment, admission, and group size, 3) other substantive aspects of the academic profile, 4) Faculty dealing with academic autonomy, 5) communication, 6) influential powers, 7) collegiality power.

4.3.1. Design of content of academic programmes

4.3.1.1 Design of content: description layer

Design of a course content coupled with introduction of new programmes is considered a fundamental issue by the Faculty in the context of the given university. Twelve participants mentioned this activity as one of the most significant aspects of academic autonomy. By saying "design of the content of academic programmes" they also mean freedom in defining the content of study programmes, academic courses they teach, or the department's curriculum. The designof new programmes is connected with the increase in education quality, which is similar to the conventionally accepted definition (Kupriyanova et al., 2018).

Traditionally, in the context of the given university, the curriculum is predefined by standard, which provides detailed information about the course's content. Inherited from a centralized system, the standards are provided by the state and are referred to as a primary regulatory document. Therefore, design of curriculum, as well as design of study programmes, is framed by the standards. However, with the introduction of Bologna Process principles, changes are noted. To grant freedom and academic autonomy, the universities introduced a new rule, including the given university where the research was conducted. According to it, every department has the right to introduce new study programmes and revise the entire curriculum for specializations by 30% at Bachelor level and 50% at Master's level. This fact is a bright attribute of academic autonomy as it implies the academic changes to be ensued. The participants reported this information, which is also available in the university documents in the State Programme of Higher Education Development 2011-2020. However, when asked, a few participants were

aware of this policy, and they expressed their attitude toward it:

> "I heard something about it…" (Participant in FG 3)
> "I know we have some freedom to introduce new programmes. We introduce the programmes, but we do it randomly. We never aim to introduce 30-50% of new programmes. The teachers do not support this idea." (Participant in FG 5)

> "I see something is happening like this. We are required to introduce new courses. I think it is directly connected with this regulation…" (Participant in FG 1)

Traditionally, the need for new study programmes design is insinuated via managerial instruction, in written form, issued by the university's management. This instruction significantly varies in level of specification. It may provide a general overview of the programme to be designed and some starting elements for designing area of discipline, course duration, and the significance of the course. In some cases, the department is asked to revise the curriculum and introducechanges with the aim to update the study programme.

The Faculty seems to experience different levels of difficulty in defining what content to include into academic programmes. The Faculty's attitude to content design can be conveniently grouped into two approaches: independent approach, when the Faculty rely on their expertise,and random approach when they tackle a new course and have difficulty designing it. The first approach is for the participants to deal with content design in a customary manner, repeating this on a regular basis:

> "Usually, we are informed and trusted to design the programme for the courses we teach. I see no problem defining the content and what should be included in the programme."(Participant in FG 3).

> "When I am designing a study programme, I do not need anyone to consult. I am confident I am able to do it." (Participant in FG3)

> "What I like is that we have relatively much freedom in designing courses and introducing changes into the courses I teach. This is the area where I am free to design and propose the course from my perspective. I have been teaching this course for many years and it is an easy task for me to revise it from year to year." (Participant in FG4)

"However, when the Faculty have to deal with a new task, such as designing a new electivecourse, the process of task implementation can be compared to a "black box". The guidelines from the manager are insufficient to rely on while designing a course. While the course design is meant to improve the academic profile by introducing a new flow of knowledge, the Faculty's attention is focused on the other aspects. How to deal with ambiguity of the goals, for which course is designed, what expectations the managers have and how to deal with ambiguity in designing the programme:

"I am puzzled when there is an instruction to design a new course. I do not understand the title of the course, nor the rationale behind it. I just need some more explanation from those who send the instruction." (Participant in FG1)

"I feel a little lost… sometimes the instruction is so brief, I need to know more about the purpose, overall vision… what they mean by saying, for example 'Innovative pedagogy'." (Participant FG1)

"I was never instructed how to design the course. I copied the experience of the colleagues or referred to the examples from the other universities." (Participant in FG 2)

Analyzing language use performed by the participants, the frequent use of 'I' is noted. Inferred by the participants in the use of 'I' is that programme design is mostly regarded as an individual matter. It is habitual for the Faculty to address their experience and competence in this manner. The use of 'I' is so much incompatible with the academic changes, which are meant to be implemented at the level of department and entire university. However, it is not in the tradition of the Faculty in the given university context to refer to collegiality and use 'we' in implementing programme design.

4.3.1.2 Design of content: interpretation layer

A belief that the guidelines regarding design of educational programme content stifle university freedom is strong and supported by many findings in the literature (Aithal et al., 2020; Noorda, 2013). This data analysis leads to understanding that it is not only the state standards but also the standardized routine that hinders the advancement of academic programmes. Apart from this, the other factors were identified, such as lack of guidance and dominating individual

autonomy.

The manner in which the actions related to the design of academic content are implemented can be characterized as standardized. Fumasoli et al. (2014) referred to standardization in light of university changes. Dealing with changes in academe, the new standards replace the old ones. In this sense, as Fumasoli et al. (2014) proposed that standardization represents an instrument for introducing new traditions in advancing academic changes. However, as revealed in the case of the given department, standards fix and freeze academic programmes, the Faculty's intention to introduce changes. The fact that the Faculty members tend to repeatedly design and redesign academic programmes from year to year with incremental, if any, changes illustrates how standardized and immobile the design of programmes is. Standards are imposed not only on the content of the academic programmes, but also on the manner with which Faculty implement design.

Another factor defined in the analysis shows that the Faculty experience difficulty adhering to the content of designed courses to specific goals. In a broader context, as seen from the experience of universities in different countries, the design may be guided by a framework decree, as it is in Latvia. In this country, universities follow "standard of academic education" and the "standard of professional higher education". In some countries, quality assurance agency determines some content of academic profile. In Poland, the state authorities no longer prescribe the content of academic courses. The universities have absolute freedom to design their own academic profile, thus increasing the diversity of the system.

In case of the given university, we can observe a similar situation when the Faculty are given freedom to design the content for elective course and thus add diversity to academic profile and appreciate 30-50% of academic freedom granted by the university. However, the task seems to be frustrating. The Faculty, being used to standards, experience complications. They have little to anchor their programme on. What is happening is that destiny of academic profile relies on the decisions made by Faculty members. As every Faculty member implements content design as an individual task, there is much risk that the overall academic profile develops as a randomly designed collection of courses. Being given the freedom to design a course, Faculty members accelerate individual autonomy rather than the autonomy at the level of department or university. Thus, the design of academic content, though regarded as key to academic autonomy, loses its effectiveness under this condition.

4.3.2. Student enrollment, admission criteria and group size

4.3.2.1 Student enrollment: descriptive layer

One of the aspects defined as meaningful in terms of developing department autonomy is student enrolment. Though the Faculty members did not thoroughly discuss this aspect, and it was mentioned by two participants in two different focus groups, it is included in the finding section. It is in the requirements of the present study to pay attention to minor and major issues and observe the phenomenon to its full extent. These little issues add to understanding what elements can be included in academic autonomy development.

The Faculty present two key claims. One participant expressed her concerns about controlling the level of education. She claims that students with low academic achievement and motivation affect the quality of the education programme. The Faculty have to adjust the study programme to the students' level by simplifying the course content specification. This negatively affects the quality of offered education. Thus, student enrollment criteria may encourage the students to increase their qualification before entering the university. This will allow the Faculty designing academic programmes at higher level.

> "I see we need to make our selection criteria clear long before the students are enrolled. If the applicants know the admission criteria in advance, they will be informed and have a better vision of what they will do at the university and prepare for study." (Participant in FG 2)

> "I remember long ago, the Faculty has a right to propose the criteria for selection and control of student enrollment. Why are we doing it now? We enroll the incapable studentsand. Their learning skills and capacities do not meet the standards." (Participant in FG 4)

Though this issue of managing the selection of students was not widely discussed and did not take much time in either of focus groups, it was regarded as significant and worth noting it here. It was supported with unanimous agreement of all the participants in discussion groups. Some comments confirmed this issue as urgent and typical in practices of other colleagues. Moreover, the manner of speaking and emotional involvement indicated that this aspect is important for the participants.

The second claim refers to the number of students in the group. Continuing on this theme, some of the participants contributed to the discussion one more aspect, connected with the group size. The Faculty sees it is important to control not only student admission but also the size of cohort and group. It also influences the quality of education and the content of study programme

offered to the students.

> "I wonder who decides the number of students per group? Sometimes, it seems this issue is out of control. When the groups are oversized, like 19 or 24 students, or on the contrary, undersized, 2 or 3 students, I see that my course loses effectiveness. I have to change instruction, students' activities and look for new methods to keep group dynamics." (Participant in FG 2)

> "The best teaching for me is in the group of 10-12 students. Both find it effective, me and students." (Participants in FG 4)

4.3.2.2. Student enrollment: interpretation layer

It was surprising to note that this issue of student enrollment and the number of students in group matters to the Faculty members. Conventionally student enrollment is regarded as the stage of matching the student's motivation and academic characteristics and the characteristics of college and educational programme (Snith, 2018; Boumi et al., 2003; Robinson, 2003). There are studies exploring the factors which allow for predictingstudent enrollment. The common feature of these studies is to consider student enrollment as freedom of university or department.

Scorecard project names student enrollment as one of the developing factors affecting academic autonomy (Pruvot et al., 2017). It was interesting to note that the Faculty mentioned this aspect with the development of autonomy of their department, without reference to Scorecard. As it turns out, student enrollment has a different meaning at the university and department levels.

Additionally, Scorecard project also deems student enrollment to be a sign of university freedom. It measures how independent the university can decide on the overall student number. Most universities follow the model, which can involve negotiations between the university and the state, the ministry of education, and the public authorities. These counterparts decide on the number of state-funded study places and number of fee-paying students. Only a few universities implement a free admission model (Pruvot et al., 2017).

Student enrollment matters a lot at the university level. It is the result of negotiations between the university and its counterparts. Some universities look for student enrollment as an opportunity to control and increase funding from the state and external partners. Some universities control student enrollment by introducing restrictions and qualification requirements to keep the number of students relevant to university educational capacities. In other words, the university has facility limits and cannot serve more students. Some universities have a student

enrollment policy to select students with higher academic qualifications.

The present study explored the meaning of this aspect for the Faculty. Indirectly, it is illuminated that the Faculty considers the content of the educational profile through the prism of congruence. It is important to design an academic profile to match the educational needs of society (Maassen et al., 2019). However, it is not always clear what those educational needs are. It is habitually inferred that university education has to keep up with the advanced requirements of society.

On the contrary, this study revealed that the low academic level of the students may be underqualified and do not match the educational standard of the department. Not being able to perform at the due level of academic standard, the students indirectly influence the quality of the academic programme. The Faculty have to adjust course content, in other words, lower the level of study programme, so as to match students' expectations. Therefore, the Faculty suggests that they can control the enrollment of the students whose academic level is acceptable to study at their department. The students of higher levels will demand a higher-quality study program.

Should the university adjust its academic programme to a lower level of students, or should it offer high quality academic service is the question with the answer 'yes'. Universities are shifting from focusing primarily on teaching and performing research to adding a third mission, meant to make 'a contribution to society' (Compagnucci et al., 2020). The University system and the entire education paradigm represent their social mission and are tailored to serve the society and economy. Behind the claim that the qualification requirements for student admission must be at a higher level, there is a message the Faculty is meant to deliver: they aim to contribute to the community of students and motivate them to have a higher level of academic achievements.

4.3.3. Other substantive aspects of academic profile

4.3.3.1 Other substantive aspects of academic profile: description layer

Apart from the aspects discussed in the sections above, design of academic programmes, student enrollment, admission, and group size, there are other issues the Faculty identify as the content of activities related to the development of academic profile.

The Faculty members in FG5 achieved a unanimous agreement that the departmental curriculum must be updated. This activity for the Faculty means a revision of the sequence of courses, trajectory of student learning, and development of competencies. The Faculty identified this aspect as the content of academic-related actions they see the need to implement. As quotes below indicate, this experience of the Faculty underpins these decisions.

> "It is good we are talking about this issue together. I think you all agree that our curriculum long ago needs revision. I see it as a never-ending process; everything is changing quickly today. We need to revise the curriculum much more often." (Participant in FG 5)

> "I wonder what kind of teachers we educate? The courses related to Methodology are crammed into one academic year. I have serious doubts the students can develop their teaching competence as quickly. We could think of another sequence of courses." (Participant in FG 1)

It was interesting to note that the Faculty did not narrow the discussion to the individual professional goals and specialization areas. Instead, their focus was at the departmental level and looked through the wider prism at academic matters. However, as can be seen from the following quote, some Faculty members confessed they are unaware of what is happening at the departmental level.

> "I was tasked with designing a new course for our programme (Russian Language and Literature). Honestly, I could not identify what relevance this course might have to the entire curriculum. I think it was irrelevant, or … I need to have an overview of the entire department curriculum to find the place for this new course." (Participants in FG 3)

Among other issues, the Faculty proposed those related to their teaching practice and considered them worth proposing for a discussion at the departmental level. These issues include preparing students for regional contests, enhancing student research programmes, and assessing policy. As reflected in the quote below, focus group format did not suggest discussing these issues but only expressing the ideas to make content for academic improvement.

> "From year to year, I am responsible for this event (preparing students for the regional contest). And every year, I have a problem: how to help students prepare for the contest. It would be good to collaborate with colleagues and design a programme." (Participant in FG 2)

It is important to make some notes about the positionality of Faculty regarding content-related issues. The choice of the issues proposed for the discussion was based not on the individual professional interest. The participants did not aim to attract attention to their individual concerns. On the contrary, they positioned themselves as experts taking care of the departmental profile. Though the issues they raised were connected with their unique experience, they were common on a wider scale. Shared experiences and common issues make the discussion effective as the participants can collaborate.

4.3.3.2 Other substantive aspects: interpretation layer

At the departmental level,academic autonomy is viewed from a more practical perspective. It involves considerations of teaching, methodology, interaction with the students, academic programme design, learning strategies, and curriculum revisions. This level is identified as one where the academic autonomy changes are more real (Kupriyanova 2018; Birstwistle 2018; Bosettti & Hefferman, 2021). This belief is confirmed in the research practice of the present study, where the Faculty participants in their discussion about academic autonomy focused on the aspects within their locus of control. These included the design and revision of curriculum, approaches to student assessment, teaching strategies and development of professional skills. Their ideas concerning the improvement of education at their department were directly connected with everyday teaching practice.

This part of the current research illustrates that the department function of more than a context of academic work. It also represents specific culture, which is revealed in everyday interations (Pifer et al., 2015). Within the department the relationships between Faculty members becomes the source of Faculty support, knowledge generation and dissemination, and collaboration (Dahlander & McFarland, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Pifer & Baker, 2013). However, it should be thoroughly considered whose agenda stimulate the changes in academic organization. Academic transformation may come as a result of the interests of internal university community, or external stakeholders such as market, industry and employers, of the society and state (Hashim et al., 202). Considering the case of the present study, we can observe how the internal interests of the Faculty members give the direction to academic transformations. It is the vision of the Faculty members that is used as the foundation of the decision making by the academics. So, in the present case the departmental autonomy links individual preferences of the Faculty members and the interests of department.

To what extent the departmental autonomy can be guided by the vision of the Faculty

members is an intangible issue. In the light of the statement of Baker et al. (2015) that there is a potential disconnect between Faculty goals and the goals of institutional leaders and Faculty members themselves, the risk of confusing the academic transformations increases. The vision of the Faculty as it was presented in the current study is well argued and supported with the lived experiences of the Faculty members, their professional vision. However, it may not be congruent with the strategy of the department, school and entire university policy.

Searching for the efficient path for departmental academic autonomy, the right balance between the leading powers should be established. Pifer et al. (2015) emphasized a need for research that explores Faculty members' lived experiences and perspective in relation to the development of department academic autonomy. On the other side Pifer et al. (2015) also suggest researching the role of a department within an institution. The current study presents the case that there is a need to find the balance between the Faculty and department, and to define whether it is Faculty that influences the department academic profile, or it is the department policy and academic framework which informs Faculty about the changes to be implemented.

One more substantive aspect, that is "what" of the change, the content, is dealing with uncertainty. This aspect was based on the experiences of Faculty participants, which can be summarized as difficulty in implementation of tasks with the low level of guidance and clarity. It was noted that the manager's tasks appear to be ambiguous and uncertain when interpreted at the level of the Faculty. Partially, this ambiguity can be explained with the fact that the vision of the academic changes can differ at the level of university and Faculty due to the potential disconnect between the goals of Faculty and those of institutional leaders (Baker et al., 2015). This explains the conflict between the task, delegated to the Faculty, as it is issued by the managers and the interpretation of it by the Faculty, as it was observed in the given case.

Uncertainty and lack of clarity about the changes and processes involved are traditionally perceived with stress, misunderstandings, and negative reactions from Faculty members (Mitchell et al., 2016; Barrmen, 2013). The similar model of behavior was observed in case of the present study. According to Hashim et al. (2021), this behavior is typical to the schools with low level of autonomy as the Faculty cannot contribute to substantive changes in policies and management, and have to accept directive from departmental administration. Instead, the Faculty tend to distance themselves from the process of improving of internal processes in university organization.

Though Faculty expresses their dissatisfaction with the uncertainty in the university management tasks, it should be admitted that uncertainty and ambiguity are inevitable (Hashim et al., 2021). Any university change is a complex process with many stakeholders involved. In addition, the changing processes are connected with innovative practices, which are new to the university community.

High level of autonomy is well evident in practice and in the manner of dealing with uncertainty by the Faculty members. In their focus group discussions the participants in two groups demonstrated some element of independence in making decisions concerning the departmental changes in their practice. This behavior belongs to autonomy paradigm and is congruent with the Bess and Dee's (2014) conclusion that autonomy is visible when Faculty deal with uncertainty as an opportunity to deviate beyond the established set of organizational goals and priorities. Faculty can interpret the university mission and policy at the departmental level and translate the task to their collegial language (Bess & Dee, 2014). This is where the academic autonomy allows the Faculty to keep to higher level of their task fulfillment and increasing the effectiveness of educational programme.

Converting this theory into practice, we can provide one example from practice, outlining how Faculty can manage the uncertainty. This quote depicts this practice: "If the district adopts a new curriculum, teachers can do what makes sense [our principal], every year, has asked 'What do you want to use? What do you think is best for our kids here?' [and] she makes it happen." (Hashim et al., 2021). Following this example, the Faculty can find their interpretation of the changes, proposed at the university level, and adjust them to their departmental level.

Another strategy to deal with uncertainty is acquiring a panoramic vision, which menas considering a situation or a set of circumstances from a wide range of perspectives. Accepting this strategy may serve as a ground for understanding of a bigger picture of university mission. In the present study the Faculty participants identified the necessity to have such a panoramic vision to have a broader understanding of the university processes and define how their decisions match these processes. This experience is in agreement with the advice proposed by different researchers (Carlotto, 2018; Hashim et al., 2021) who stated that Faculty need to be aware of university processes and policy to be able to define their place in it. Hashim et al. (2021) continues with the advice to structure the uncertain tasks. It is advised to have the following abilities such as flexibility of Faculty in decision-making, adaptation to varied circumstances, high level of internal control and assistance. These are the recommendations for future research.

Summarising the practices of dealing with departmental autonomy and uncertainty, we ca n conclude that Faculty face certain obstacles in transiting from the traditional practices to the new ones in the context of departmental autonomy. Departmental autonomy processes require more expertise and new professionalism, flexibility in decision-making, and creativity (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Torres & Weiner, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2018). Higher level of Faculty professionalism is one of the prerequisites of departmental and university autonomy. As the present study revealed, Faculty needs to develop their skills and expertise in dealing with academic autonomy tasks and uncertainty

4.4. Faculty dealing with Academic Autonomy

The meaning of communication in the given context is defined as a channel of interaction between university players to negotiate their concerns on academic autonomy development. There are two levels of communication distinguished; one is at the departmental level and another at the university level. Although university players' interaction is developed around academic autonomy, there is a significant difference between the two levels. This section includes two parts and provides insights into how Faculty and university management handle academic autonomy.

4.4.1 Faculty dealing with academic autonomy:description layer

Faculty have restricted options for meeting and communicating in the context of department academic organization. One option is department meetings, which occur as often as once a month. A typical department meeting is devoted to discussing organizational issues concerning the organization of exam session, student attendance, and achievement, preparing the departmental events, and involving the students in department activities. If there are instructions from university management, they are presented as a list to do. The meeting agenda is usually filled with several issues, and there is little room for communication among Faculty members.

Faculty may also randomly organize themselves into affinity groups for a specific purpose. It may be the collaboration between two colleagues to design or revise a course to discuss the plan for preparing the students for regional contests. There are affinity groups where colleagues discuss only the problems connected with research and supervision of student research, or they discuss the internship organizational matters and the exam sessions. The communication in these kinds of groups usually occurs online, with restricted development, and is usually used as a channel of information. It is a convenient way to ensure that every Faculty member has access to information.

The Faculty approaches the departmental academic profile from diverse aspects. The Faculty are informed how academic matters are tackled during the focus group discussions. It is typical to have random episodes of quick discussion among colleagues. Usually, they discuss the academic issues, which are problematized on a rather small scale and require a prompt decision. It is habitually done in informal communication, on irregular basis. Thus the academic profile is handled with random episodic care, without a systematic approach, and in small steps. As shown below, such pattern of dealing with academic issues was defined through the analysis of the experience presented by Faculty members:

> "I remember we had some disputable questions concerning the student research requirements, …. about publishing articles … My colleagues gave me a couple of ideas, it was helpful to quickly get an instant answer… though we still do not have regulatory documentation concerning this issue." (Participant in FG 2)

> "As I am the one who is responsible for preparing students for the regional contests in our discipline area, I am very concerned every year about how to do it better. Honestly, I still do not know whether I am doing it right … every year, I have to ask for colleagues… A group of colleagues and design a programme for this purpose would be nice." (Participant in FG 2)

Other patterns of dealing with academic profiles were noted in the group of colleagues. In their discussion, FG1 and FG 5 focus groups implicitly demonstrated the effect the groups can make on the development of the academic profile of the department. The first focus group was involved in the discussion of the ways to enhance the academic profile in their department through the negative lens:

> "As I see, our department's curriculum does not match today's requirements. It is out of date. Why do we teach this course "History of Teaching Methods"? I do not understand why not replace it." (Participant in FG 1)

> "We are not in a position to introduce changes. I can do it in my course; I see how I can change my course as I am a specialist in my area. But I do not think I have anything to offer to the other areas." (Participant in FG 1)

> "If we compare what is expected from the students to know and what we teach them in university, we will find a big gap… something should be done with it…. why doesn't the Department of Curriculum take care of this issue?" (Participant in FG 1)

FG1 developed the discussion in this direction, moving from one problem to another. It was noted that the group discussion gained dynamic in discussing the problems. These quotes reveal the positionality of the Faculty tends towards academic profile: the Faculty can identify the weak side of the academic profile but are not ready to take responsibility for it. Their capacity is limited to their area of specialization they lack ambition to contribute into the improvement of the overall curriculum of the department.

Faculty perspective of departmental authority development was defined in the style of interaction in FG2. As well as FG1, included staff members with seniority and a high level of expertise, and some lecturers in both groups belong to the so-called 'academic elite'. Though being similar groups in composition, the difference between them is considerable. The group dynamic in FG 2 developed along with positive interaction. Positive emotions and excitement accompanied their discussion. The participants were genuinely involved in the discussion, interrupting each other with excitement and exchanging ideas. The effect of the discussion showed that the Faculty are motivated to make changes. At some point, the colleagues were so involved in the discussion that gradually, the focus group converted into a group meeting to discuss new strategies.

> Participant 1: "I have some vision of how we can improve our curriculum… I have long been thinking of changing the course in Research methodology to minor serious courses".
>
> Participant 2: "…. Yea, right, I also thought of it. I think it would be good to include the courses like these….."
>
> Participant 3: "…. Dear colleague, it is so nice we discuss it together. I think we can gather some of these days and design a plan for the following year…. "
>
> Participant 4: "Why not meet in a group of 3-5 and revise our curriculum together. It is a great idea. It will be a good practice. We can do more together rather than doing it on our own."

Positive communication developed in the way of exchanging intentions and ideas on how the academic profile for the research thread can be enhanced. The Faculty addressed issues such as the content and duration of study programs, goals and their validity, the program's organization, and the key teaching strategies, emphasizing critical thinking and group debates. As a result, the Faculty agreed to schedule a meeting to continue this discussion. In this case, the Faculty positioned themselves as active participants and showed how academic profile can be tailored at the Faculty level.

4.4.2 Faculty dealing with academic autonomy: interpretative layer

It is important to analyze the model of professional integration into the organizational set (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018, p. 26). According to Carvalho & Videira (2019), integration of the Faculty into the educational processes may need reconfiguration of power, transformation of profession itself, redefinition of organization structures and practices, sustaining these changes.

The present study revealed specific approaches to academic changes as it was observed in Faculty behavior. The first approach can be labeled as a 'random approach', which means that academic decisions are results of random preferences of Faculty or an individual Faculty members, who aim to improve their practice. Though the ideas routinely proposed by the Faculty are regarded to be important, these ideas do not translate into practice. One of the reasons is based on the fact that the relevance of the Faculty proposals to university or departmental matters is decreasing (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018). This means that there is a gap between the Faculty vision and department management vision, as a result of which the effectiveness of Faculty ideas is lost. It has become evident through this study that there is a lack of the structures and practices that promote cooperation between the Faculty and managers practice.

There is another interpretation of the random approach, described in the study of Mitchell et al. (2021). His study illustrated how the random ideas, offered by the Faculty members, were developed at the departmental level. First, the changes were implemented on a small scale, often in a single class, without short or long-term planning. Additionally, the changes were incremental, done as trials and local experience and it was important not to speed up the changes, but give Faculty time to engage with ideas and experiences. According to Mitchell et al (2021) this strategy of slow changes gave Faculty confidence that the changing processes are well balanced and accepted at the local context.

Applying this random approach to academic change in the case of the present study, the researcher can conclude that this approach can be considered as the initial stage of academic changes, the opportunity for the Faculty to have first practice in academic autonomy development. Random approach, as it was performed by the Faculty, may be considered as a starting point of the departmental changes. Though the Faculty regard their random ideas as incomplete and inefficient, this experience can be managed for the purposes of departmental autonomy provided it is supported with the proper structures and practices.

The second approach to academic autonomy identified by this study can be called 'an active approach'. It is based on the positive involvement of the Faculty members into academic transformations. It is congruent with Henkel's (2013) findings that academicautonomy can happen to active Faculty. Though this approach is not thoroughly explored in research literature, some studies confirm that the positive and active position of the Faculty towards departmental changes is meaningful. Thus, in case of Rasanen (2012) the Faculty were voluntarily involved in a long-term

collaboration with the aim to improve the quality of educational programmes at the department. Their academic autonomy depended on positive involvement, mutual interests, creativity, and professional collaboration (Rasanen, 2012). Positive aspect was the critical prerequisite to escape the formal attitude of Faculty towards the proposed changes and achieve high level of effectiveness. Whereas the negative attitude to changes causes stress, increased workload, ambiguity and stagnation of change (Barman, 2013, Michell, 2012). If Faculty decides not to actively engage in departmental initiatives, then the innovation is stuck (Chan. 2021).

The findings in this section lead to a conclusion that any perspective that Faculty have, either random approach, active approach, or positive or negative attitude, may be considered as a foundation of the departmental autonomy development provided it is interpreted and managed efficiently. As the experiences provided by the current researchers proved, the Faculty random approach and positive approach to departmental changes represent a resource for autonomy. This finding leads to further research need to explore the models for reconfiguration of power, redefinition of the structures, and cultural normative framework needed to sustain these changes (Carvalho & Vidiera, 2019).

4.5. Communication at the level of university

4.5.1. Communication at the level of university: description layer

Matei et al. (2018) and Kupriyanova et al. (2018) claimed that real autonomy is only possible with the inclusion of all players, both internal and external. It is opposed to the opinion of the Faculty. They pointed to a restricted circle of university players who are closely involved in decision-making in academic matters. These communities may include the department of curriculum and strategic planning, student office, department of research, and dean's office. There are different aspects the Faculty would propose to collaborate on, though communication between university players seems difficult to arrange. It is in the tradition of the given university organization to have a one-way, top-down communication style, inherited long ago from the university's centralized past. Now, in the era of decentralization, with the freedom of development and searching for new solutions, communication among the university players has become particularly important. Still, communication is handled in the old tradition, and the following quotes indicate that:

> "The departments do not cooperate. It is useless to search for communication with them." (Participant in FG 1)

> "I do not know whether it is possible for us, the academic staff, to see someone from, say, the Curriculum department and discuss the things that matter… I can enter their office to hand in my syllabus only…." (Participant in FG5)

Communication between the Faculty and university departments grows complicated because they communicate for different purposes and these purposes are, in most cases, not aligned. Department of curriculum, the dean's office, and the other departments are more concerned with so-called administrative and office needs. They collaborate with the Faculty to implement such activities as monitoring students' achievement, collecting data about students, and controlling fee-paying students. There are tasks connected with the entrepreneurial thread of the university expansion of business-oriented campaigns. Mostly these are issues related to aspects different from academic matters.

On the other hand, the Faculty seeks contact with university players for purposes closely related to academic aspects. They would seek contacts with university and curriculum managers for the issues related to the design of the content of academic programmes, and the possibility to introduce changes into the course. In the focus group discussion, the Faculty members expressed their intention to discuss with the curriculum department, for example, changes in the exam format and syllabus design. Among the other issues, the Faculty find it essential to address practical issues connected with the organization of the learning process and schedule, and student research. The university players perform a similar one-way communication model regardless of the Faculty concerns. It is demonstrated by the following quote:

> "There is not enough instruction concerning the design of the new course. I cannot understand what is the goal of the new course should be, or what it should be about… and I do not know who to ask." (Participants in FG1)

> "I see a need to increase the study hours for my course in Methodology of Teaching. The head of our department is supportive of this change but we cannot discuss it with the Department of Curriculum design…. They ignore my request…" (Participant in FG 5)

The interviewed Faculty members provide argument with which they state that top-down style of communication loses effectiveness. They emphasize the importance of having two-way communication. With the right to have mutual communication, it is more feasible to accelerate the process of academic changes and improvements. Thus, the Faculty identified it is important

todiscuss with the Department of Curriculum the possibility of tailoring the curriculum to change the sequence of courses, as it may increase the effectiveness of the academic programme. As quotes below indicate, one Faculty member sees it is urgent to report to the Department of Curriculum and Planning about the group size problem as it impairs effective teaching.

> "The university managers have the right to control Faculty, and the students have the right to manage their learning trajectory to their convenience and obtain permission. Why can't the Faculty staff report back to the managers and ask for changes that would enhance the quality of education?" (Participant in FG 2)

> "We wish we could have an open dialogue with the Department of Curriculum and Planning. When designing the course syllabus, which we teach from year to year, I am more concerned not with the quality of my course but with how to organize the paper andhave it signed by people who never read my syllabus." (Participant in FG 1)

These examples illustrate the role of communication in managing academic issues. Whereas the university players use communicative channels to delegate the instructions, Faculty use communication channels to facilitate the improvement of academic profile. It is through communication that the academic changes are handled. Communication with the university players becomes even more urgent when Faculty needs to gain approval from managers. Academic changes, though proposed by the Faculty and underpinned by their trustworthy expertise, cannot be implemented unless they are confirmed and accepted by the university managers. This is the way the academic profile of the department is managed, and the following participant quotes support that:

> "We can meet and design a new academic programme, but first, we need to know whether it will be possible to implement it." (Participant in FG 5)

> "It is for the third year we are trying to convince the university managers at the Department of Curriculum to add course hours to my course in Methodology. They do not approve of this change, and I still have to teach the course at an extremely high speed to inconvenience the learners." (Participant in FG 2)

4.5.2. Communication at the level of university: interpretation layer

Communication at two levels, departmental Faculty and university management, leads to two different attainments. Belonging to different paradigms, the Faculty and the managers pursue different goals and discourses. Their communications lack common interpretations, giving the space for ambiguity, uncertainty, and tension. While interactions at the departmental level solve internal academic issues such as the content of programme, curriculum design, and educational profile modifications, the interaction at the university level is more political in nature as it involved values at other university levels. This pattern is a common communication pathway between Faculty and administration (Bess & Dee, 2014; Osburn & Gocial, 2020; Nordin & Sundberg, 2018; Bosetti& Hefferman, 2021). The conflict is inevitable, however, the improvement of communication efficiency s possible and there are different approaches to improve communication (Bess & Dee, 2014; Pifer et al., 2019; Uslu & Arslan, 2018). The first step in improvement is to achieve a deeper understanding by all participants of communication philosophies, goals, and processes before Faculty and administrators can interact effectively.

The present study identified the communication style that can be recommended and employed between Faculty and administration. In the current context the communication process is accompanied with negative traits and ambiguity, but positive traits and willingness of the Faculty to participate in departmental changes is needed. Pifer et al. (2019), Nordin and Sundberg (2018) discovered that the communication is accompanied with positive and negative attitudes towards the processes of academic changes, with the unavoidable uncertainty and ambiguity. Such negative communication can definitely lead to a lack of effectiveness.

In the academic autonomy process, the ability to communicate is ranked as the highest in the list of necessary skills in education community (Prentice & Guillaume, 2021). This belief is well supported in the present study with the opinion of the Faculty that they needed to have more contacts and discussions with managers concerning the changes they propose. Thus communication is deemed fundamental to organizational success, to advancing the knowledge-generating capacity of institutions (Bess & Deem, 2014; Marketing Weekly News, 2021). It should be emphasized that Faculty and the managers can benefit from the communication if it is well structured, based on sense of openness and trust, and creates the new space for interactions (Kezar, 2004).

In the present study the Faculty participants identified the model of communication to match their goals. According to the Faculty opinion, the communication must lead to discussing the changes at the initial stage, to finding an approval and agreement between the two parties. Though the Faculty reached a common understanding on how communication at the departmental level should be

developed, still this step is regarded as insufficient for making the decision concerning the communication model in the given university.

The manner in which the university parties can develop productive communication depends not only on the vision presented by the Faculty, as it is in case of the given study. It strongly depends on diversity of factors. Some of such factors include the university cultural traditions, hierarchical connections, and subordination structure, values and expectations. Other factors include readiness of both managers and Faculty redesign their role and responsibilities, the vision and expertise (Bosetti & Hefferman, 2021; Christopher, 2012; Edgar et al., 2016). Search for best ways to improve communication in the given context should acknowledge paradigm differences between Faculty and administrators (Bess & Dee, 2014). It is advised to take the contextual particularities into account (Pifer et al., 2019).

This leads to understanding that effective communication for particular university context is designed within the, and cannot be replicated or reproduced from other contexts. Though the literatures provide practices and recommendations of how communication can be designed, still the communication should be adjusted to the specific features of the culture inside a university and a department. It is recommended that future research studies focus on efficient communication strategies that can be broadly generalized to universities across the board. Other issue is that can be further examined include the communication, whether the university players ready to be co-creators of educational changes, how the boundaries between Faculty and managers should be changed, these are the questions to be further researched before the communication model can be defined (Uslu & Arslan, 2018; Nordin & Sundberg, 2018; Esterberg & Wooding, 2012).

4.6. Influential powers in academic autonomy development

There is a good deal of research about the role of managers in shaping the academic style of the university. Comparatively, little is known about the power the Faculty can invest in academic development. Managers and Faculty players are inseparably involved in academic processes with different outcomes. The data analysis in the present study looks at the management as it is suggested by the Faculty, based on their vision and interpretation.

The Faculty offered limited information about the management style practiced in their university context. The managers see the university administration as having a locus of power, and their expectations are directed to have the university administration's regulations implemented at the Faculty level. For example, the university administration delegates the task to the Faculty to design academic standards for internship programmes. The managers assign the

responsible Faculty members to implement this task without specific instruction or supervision. The design of any educational standard or programme is related to the instruments for constructing an academic profile. As the quote below demonstrates, implementing this task, the Faculty experienced when the managers failed to provide supervision or resources to rely on.

> "I remember reporting my problem in implementing the task to the departmental managers …. They either ignored me, or I had to wait for the answer for some time." (Participant in FG1)

This autocratic style of management has become a tradition. The intended aim of managerial practice seems to be limited to ensuring implementation of the tasks delegated to the Faculty by the top management. The Faculty have low expectations from the management. Having the initiative to improve some academic aspects, the Faculty expect that the managers will not be able to provide support to them. The communication between Faculty and managers is restricted, providing limited room for the Faculty to maneuver.

> "I contacted the dean's office and shared my vision on improving the course, as it was more logical to have two separate courses instead of one. However, I did not insist, as themanager seemed to have no authority to manage this issue." (Participant in FG 1)

> "There is no point in asking the managers to consider some significant curriculum changes, for example, or sequencing the courses more logically. I prefer not to ask questions which may be a bit out of the responsibilities and power of the dean. I honestly do not know who to ask or contact." (Participant in FG 4)

> "When contacting the managers, I try to pick up an easy issue for discussion, not to embarrass them with hard questions." (Participant in FG 2)

The Faculty have expectations, proved by the experience from practice, about the role the managers play in departmental matters. Their role is limited to controlling the academic, teaching, and research processes and implementing university policy in practice. Managers represent the interests of the university's top committee and the internal and external players. If there are changes in the academic organization, some innovations in the curriculum, and other aspects of academia, they are initiated by the university's top management. An example is a rule, introduced by the university management, empowering the Faculty to change the curriculum by

30-50%. This is one of the regulations to instigate departmental autonomy by designing new courses. Managerial power in this case, is directed to provide the direction for academic autonomy developments. However, managerial power is limited to procedural matters, directives, and controlling the process of implementation. If the Faculty need to clarify ambiguities in the given task, connected with practicalities, optimization, or more specific instruction, the management fails to provide further supervision.

Discussing the role of managers in supporting academic improvement, the Faculty recalled the example which exemplified the management style promoted by one of the university presidents in the past. His style of management illustrated a supportive relationship between managerial practice and Faculty performance. The aim was to empower the Faculty through the following strategies: regular meetings with academic staff, asking for Faculty s opinion, checking the level of satisfaction, and getting information about the Faculty s concerns and vision. The quotes below attest to this dynamic.

> "Once, we had a president whose management style differed greatly from what we have now. He introduced a tradition of regular meetings with the Faculty and was primarily concerned with the Faculty's opinion about the work, their satisfaction, and their concernsand vision on how to improve the work." (Participant in FG 2)

> "This rector exercised a high level of trust. He gave freedom to the departments to define their mission, request needed resources, and independently define development strategies. The Faculty were given much freedom and support. It added power. I liked to work duringthe time of his administration." (Participant in FG 2)

The Faculty members highlighted the effectiveness of this kind of managerial style. They described a vivid difference between this style and the style practiced in today's university context. The Faculty had more room and autonomy to actively participate in innovative processes. The Faculty initiated a development plan to advance the Faculty's professional development, enlarge library resources and revise teaching methodology and instruction. The management style of that time facilitated the Faculty to invest in the quality of the departmental academic profile.

Two managerial styles are identified to impact academic changing processes differently. The managers can either isolate themselves from contacting Faculty and block the power of Faculty or empower the Faculty to advance the academic profile to higher quality. It should be noted that in either case, managerial power is restricted to procedural matters. In other words,

managers can provide a setting for academic developments, while the substantive matter, content of academic development, belongs to the Faculty paradigm.

4.7. Collegiality power

4.7.1 Collegiality power: description layer

One of the goals of the present research was to explore collegiality as a predictor of effective departmental autonomy. The peculiar feature of this research goal is in fact that due to the traditions in the organization the Faculty may not have experience in collegiality in terms of power to be used for academic improvement. Therefore, asking direct questions about the lived experience in developing collegiality seemed inefficient. Instead, it was suggested that focus group participants might perform some features of collegiality through their discussion.

In the data collection process, there were noted two episodes of developing collegiality in the sense of developing academic autonomy. The participant of focus groups 1 and 5 were involved in developing the topic into a substantive discussion at a high level of engagement and with the group dynamic. It is worth noting that with the appearance of the group dynamic, the participants started using the pronoun ‘we’ instead of ‘I’. The use of plural pronouns mirrors the intention of participants to consolidate their efforts into collegial power.

At his point of discussion, the participants shared their future experiences, which may be implemented with different degrees of probability. This contradicts the phenomenological principle referring to the lived experience as an area to be researched. The Faculty members were involved in the discussion about their experience-to-be as they have not yet acquired the one in the present time. Therefore, the research aims to explore not the lived experience, but the probable experience.

It must be acknowledged as a limitation of the study and as a factor diminishing the credibility of the findings. However, in terms of the exploratory research, it was accepted as it can provide a starting point for further research on collegiality and academic autonomy. So the findings of research should be considered preliminary and informative.

The findings respecting collegiality, which emerged in the colleague relationship, provide evidence that it can be regarded as a power influencing development of individual academic styles at the departmental level. In the case of collegial discussion, observed concerning the present research, the participants were engaged in formation of collegial power. This kind of collegial interaction was the design of collegial strategy to tackle academic changes.

The discussion developed around the issue of harmonization of the curriculum. The colleagues detected the curriculum malfunctioning as its structure and sequence of courses

lacked logic. As the quotes below demonstrate, they intended to tackle this problem with a group of colleagues as they shared vision, intention, and purposes.

> Participant 1: "I believe the student's teaching practice must be more closely related to the research work they intend to do. So, it would be more convenient for the students to have a course in Research Methodology long before the practice period."

> Participant 2: "I see what you mean. In connection with this, I would suggest that the students not only have Research Methodology long before practice but also have done some preliminary research work. It may be a short course of …"

The entire discussion between the colleagues developed into an exchange of ideas, enhancing freedom of each other and, on the other hand, bringing their vision to a common purpose. By doing this, the colleagues gradually shaped a complete vision of what they could implement as a group. They outlined the curriculum changes, and the strategies to increase the effectiveness of the programme. As illustrated by the quotes below, mostly they focused on the substantive aspects, fixing the actions they will do together.

> Participant 3: "I am teaching the course in Academic reading and writing. Now, I see that it should be tailored to prepare the students for research work. I think we can revise and adjust it to this goal."

> Participant 5: "We can select the reading resources or at least define the criteria for selecting reading materials for this course. I am convinced it matters a lot what kind of reading the students do to develop an overall understanding of research."

In this kind of collegial interaction, a short extract, it became visible how the Faculty was involved in shaping the academic profile and designing the content of the changes to be implemented. This process, regarded from different aspects, also included the elements such as learning from each other, adjusting individual interests to match the collegial vision.

Apart from substantive aspects, it was also important for the colleagues to discuss procedural ones. It is hard to separate the substantive matters and procedural ones, 'what' and 'how', as they are two components of one process. The colleagues performed as a self-organized group, arranging the time and location for the follow-up meeting and setting goals and tasks to get ready with.

Analysis from language and extra-linguistic perspective helped identify the elements associated with collegiality and a high level of trust among participants. Interruptions and turn-taking, emotive expressions and many adjectives with positive meaning, expressions of excitement, eye contact, and exchange of smiles and laughs distinguished this part of the discussion from the manner of the overall discussion. The colleagues were actively exchanging experiences, sharing ideas, inspiring each other, and attentive to the ideas of each other. They expressed their willingness to collaborate. The idea that they could collaborate and produce a product was accepted with excitement. These elements prove that collegiality is recognized through group dynamics, accompanied by the dynamic content of the discussion, use of language, and mutual understanding among the peers.

4.7.2 Collegiality power: interpretation layer

One of the purposes of the present study was to explore how collegiality is connected to academic autonomy and how it is formed at the level of Faculty. The findings of the present study were twofold: three Faculty focus groups performed low level of collegiality, while two groups performed high level of collegial involvement and readiness to collaborate. The following step in this section is to find interpretation of why collegiality leads to higher level of Faculty involvement. This understanding helps to explore the nature of collegiality and find the approach to develop it.

A dichotomy, where collegiality either represents a strong power or no effectiveness in university transformations, is found in practice of universities in different countries. Some studies have indicated that collegiality is on the decline, others have shown that it has endured in academia despite sweeping changes to university practices (Kligyte & Barrie, 2014; Chan, 2021). Kalpazidou and Lanberg (2014) believe that collegiality has little significance in academic autonomy development. The state that the pressures on the academic staff are unprecedented and significant changes will inevitably occur. In other words, it is an inevitable fact that Faculty have to change their position in the university organization and get involved in departmental autonomy transformation.

It is essential to understand how collegiality can be formed and how it can become a part of departmental autonomy. The findings of the researchers in this field define a diversity of factors that advance collegiality. These factors include supportive working conditions for Faculty to ‘work harder and smarter’, strong culture based on professionalism, and commitment-oriented practice. Other factors are represented by organization of research environment, in-house academic culture, and personality and

style of leaders (Graversen et al. 2005; Kalpazidou, 1996; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al. 2003; Edgar et al., 2016). One more factor is defined as freedom of Faculty, which allows the Faculty to deviate beyond the established set of organizational goals (Bess & Dee, 2014). Edgar et al. (2016) regard freedom as innovative and spontaneous activity of Faculty. This deviation enables Faculty to have more flexibility in designing different paths for improving the education quality (Bess & Dee, 2014).

The main inconsistency in this situation is that regardless the numerous factors, which complicate the advancement of collegiality, still the practice shows slow progress. Factors impeding collegiality include accountability, hierarchy, work pressures and loads, which distract attention of Faculty (Pifer et al., 2019; Kalpazidou & Langberg, 2007). The present study identified another factor that interferes with advancement of collegiality, and that is the fact that Faculty members do not view themselves as subordinates to university administrators. Thus, the factors, which are entitled to have a positive influence on collegiality development, may not match the interests of the Faculty. “If a Faculty doesn’t want to do something, then one is stuck”, this quote illustrates the distance of the Faculty towards the university strategies (Chan, 2021). The Faculty may remain uninfluenced and expect to continue ‘business as usual’ (Kalpazidou & Langberg, 2007). Faculty can choose to accept the change or to ignore it. Being willing or unwilling to participate, Faculty can potentially slow down university operations or, on the contrary, reinforce them (Chan, 2021).

The present study revealed this connection between the attitude of the Faculty towards the change and the level of their involvement. Thus, the low level of collegiality was visible through disengaged interests expressed by the Faculty members. Lack of common interest did not allow the Faculty to consider closely the issues in their discussions. Another behavior trait was the focus on negative aspects of practice. This behavior evolved into unproductive exchange of negative experiences, which limited the productive interaction among the participants. In the contrast, high level of collegiality was evident through participant engagement in discussions, expressing interest in each other’s opinion. Their discussion unfolded into large-scale plan to change the departmental curriculum. The foundation of their collegiality rooted in willingness to contribute ideas and efforts to engage the departmental improvement. The participants were negotiating what part they can play and what contribution they can make. They showed their professional interest in producing the change.

Analyzing these two models of behavior, the researcher defined that the level of engagement of Faculty depended on their wish to participate and how they see their position in community of colleagues. This is a suggestion which requires further

investigation, though there are some supporting arguments found in the research literature. Chan (2021) in his study defines collegiality as a powerful, autonomous, and intelligent stakeholder group whose support for most higher education initiatives is essential. According to this definition and the findings in the present study, several conditions are important to develop collegiality. First, Faculty need to express their willingness to support change and take active position in contributing to change. They also should be willing to achieve goals in collegial manner. It must be emphasized that Faculty did and will be willing to achieve goals in collegial manner. It must be emphasized thay Faculty did not mention specific factors that encouraged or discouraged their involvement. Specific factors that encouraged or discouraged their involvement. The collegiality was founded on the mutual interest and desire of the participants. The readiness of the Faculty to collaborate defines the moment when the new vision of how the department changes can be implemented. That process is then shaped and spread to a departmental level. Regarding this, it can be concluded that collegiality is a necessary prerequisite of departmental academic autonomy as it encourages Faculty to collaborate at a departmental level.

This finding is valuable and well congruent with the call of Mindich et al. (n.d.), stating that we know much less about how collegiality starts, develops, and what requirements for its development and markers of its maturity are. Along with this opinion, the present study explored some aspects of collegiality formation. That is the importance of having desire to enter collegial collaboration with the Faculty members and willingness to contribute. Further research is needed to explore factors that influence Faculty to take active position. This may be connected with another call for research, presented by Tight (2003). Researchers have called for studies that improve our understanding of academics' relationships within their departments (Tight, 2003), suggesting that such relationships are sources of Faculty support, knowledge generation and dissemination, and collaboration (Dahlander & McFarland, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Pifer & Baker, 2013, Pifer et al., 2015).

Chapter 5

5.1. Conclusions

In the literature review in Chapter 2, many aspects of academic autonomy development from the perspective of Faculty were revealed. It was impossible to predict in advance what would emerge from the reflections of the participants and what new aspects concerning academic autonomy will be surfaced. The study was carried out to explore and find out those constituents, which are more connected with the context and the real process. In this chapter, I will further elaborate on the findings by connecting them to the literature and the contextual factors. While Chapter 4 Findings is more focused on describing and interpreting the results stemming from the data analysis, the discussion in this chapter will summarize the main findings, directly and indirectly, related to the research questions, introduce recommendations

5.2. Research question 1

How do Faculty members define academic autonomy?

Academic autonomy is defined by the Faculty as a slow incremental process of changes inacademic matters and the organization of the educational process. It is a slow and incremental process because the Faculty proposed to focus on a limited number of indicators. Of the 12 indicators stated in the definition of academic autonomy in Scorecard project, the Faculty in this study chooses only two indicators. These include design of the content of study programme and student admission policy. The Faculty identify these aspects as most relevant to the real context at the present moment, with unanimous agreement among the colleagues.

The number of changes the Faculty can handle gives an idea of the tempo of academic improvements. It is hard to explain whether the two indicators of academic changes as defined by the Faculty can produce significant changes at the departmental level. It is also not clear whether a load of academic changes should be regulated by the Faculty and their professional capacity or whether it is important to introduce more changes and increase the speed of autonomy development. The findings of the present study revealed that the Faculty tends to offer a restricted number of changes. No literature provides guidelines concerning the parameters of academic autonomy development such as the duration of the changing process, the load of changes, and sequencing of the changes. These are technical specifications of the transformations which may organize the development of academe. Relying on the Faculty

decision, academic autonomy development may develop at the speed and productivity as defined by the Faculty. In this case, the Faculty decides these organizational issues, though academic autonomy is a process of the entire university. Turcan et al. (2015) found out that the success of academic autonomy directly depends on the long-strategic plan of the university, which gives an outline of the entire process. Without it, academic autonomy becomes a short-term, episodic and unstable process with low effectiveness in practice.

Further research on how to organize, and define the speed and nature of academic autonomy processes is needed. This calls for management and organizational strategies, based on the changing patterns of practice in terms of making decisions about the changes to be implemented, sequencing the order of changes, the procedures to realize them, and monitoring and controlling the processes. These are managerial practicalities that can be further explored.

Another feature of academic autonomy was strongly highlighted by the participating Faculty. While the political concerns are more connected with academic autonomy as an instrument of independence and the capacity of the university to define its profile, the Faculty associate academic autonomy with the continuous changing process with the aim to improve the quality of education. Thus they mentioned the improvements needed in different levels of their practice ranging from teaching practicalities to the organization of the process at the level of the university. The most evident concerns are related to revision and changing methods in teaching, instruments of student knowledge control and assessment, revision, and evolving curriculum introducing a new style of collaboration and other aspects.

5.3 Research question 2

What aspects of academic autonomy do the Faculty consider as important?

As it was reviewed from the literature in Chapter 2, there are two lines of academic autonomy developments identified. Namely, they are the substantive and the procedural lines. The substantive line is connected with the ‘what’ issues, the aspects of content. The substantive aspects are related to the questions of what to change, what elements of the educational organization to modify, and what aspect of teaching, learning, and so forth to improve. The procedural line is linked to the organizational issues, and procedures, and related to the questions of how to organize the change, and who is involved. The focus of the present study gravitated to exploring the substantive line of academic changes. This perspective was based on the assumption that the Faculty is more related to the ‘what’ rather than ‘how’ of academe, to the

content of academic autonomy changes. The substantive line does not receive due attention in the research literature, therefore, my study focused on exploring its nature and components.

Among several substantive aspects, chosen by the Faculty, the four dominating issueswere identified: design of content of study programmes, revision of curriculum on regular basis, student admission policy and size of student groups. However, along with the substantive issues, the Faculty also demonstrated their concern for procedural aspects. As these two lines are related to academic autonomy from different sides, similarly it is not possible to separate the substantiveissues from procedural ones in the practice of the Faculty. However, in the conclusion report, I separate these issues to some extent and devote this section to a description of substantive aspects, and the following section to the procedural aspects.

In the process of interviews, the Faculty identified four autonomy indicators, which are similar to the indicators conventionally accepted and borrowed from Scorecard definition of academic autonomy. The value of the findings is that the Faculty added their explanation and rationale to these indicators, which gives a deeper insight into the significance of these indicators for academic autonomy development. These four indicators can be grouped into two groups or pairs. The first pair of indicators is the design of content of study programmes and the revision of curriculum. The second pair or indicators are student admission and group size.

The first indicator is design of content of study programmes. Within this indicator, the Faculty also mention the need to revise academic programmes on regular basis. The Faculty recognize that the educational paradigm is now subjected to continuous changes; new knowledge appears with high speed and must be introduced into the university study programmes. Noorda (2013) points out that the universities are rather slow to adjust to new knowledge. The value of this point is that the Faculty considers academic autonomy as a continuous process. For the university to maintain the rate of educational accomplishments and introduce them into an educational programme, the design of the new programmes is a must. Though the university does demonstrate the curriculum changes, if we compare the present curriculum with the ten-year-old version, the changes tend to lose effectiveness due to the low level of guidelines, provided by university management. To increase the quality of design of academic programmes, the Faculty suggest and are ready to assume this responsibility. In parallel with the design of study programmes, the Faculty defined the need to implement curriculum revision on a regular basis. It is important to note that curriculum revision has to occur prior to design of new programmes. The logic behind these indicators shows that the Faculty considers the revision of curriculum as an opportunity to define the weaknesses in study programmes as a starting point for follow-up improvement. This rationale informs the practice and sequences the two events into one logic chain. Thus, to introduce innovation into the academic profile it is necessary, first,

to revise the curriculum and, second, to use the results of the revision, to design a new programme.

Though this section is devoted to a substantial line of academic autonomy, it is not possible to totally separate academic autonomy from its procedural aspects, which are based on the vision of the Faculty. The Faculty was concerned with the process of revision and their vision can be used as a ground for practical implementation. The Faculty suggested four specific recommendations related to substantive line of academic autonomy, presented in this section below. First, the curriculum revision is implemented by Faculty members, specifically the group of academics with professional qualifications related to curriculum discipline areas. Second, the Faculty members implement revision in a collegial manner through communication, leading to group decisions on what changes should be implemented. This may be the change in student hours, the content of the study programme, the knowledge assessment instruments, methodology, and similar aspects. Third, the Faculty, though expressing their readiness to take responsibility for curriculum revision, still highlight the necessity to collaborate with the managers of the university. They expect to obtain consent from the managers or to have an opportunity to negotiate decisions. This addition is meaningful in terms of advancing real academic autonomy. The proposed changes in curriculum, concerning the design of study programme content and revision of curriculum, are formed by the Faculty who are embedded in the context.

These recommendations are congruent with the statement that the Faculty is closely connected with practice and thus can deal more effectively with the substantive aspect, while the managers are more involved in organizational matters. Moreover, with more power in substantive aspects of academic changes the Faculty can play a new role in the system of the university and get a stronger position. This will allow the Faculty to contribute to the effectiveness of university changes.

Another indicator of academic autonomy, promoted by the Faculty is the student admission policy. It is also one of the indicators from the definition in the Scorecard project. The Faculty in the given university defines the meaning of this indicator, which explains in what way students' admission policy is related to academic autonomy development. From the research findings in the studies of Clark (2005) and Hindricks et al. (2010), student enrollment of the students tends to increase as well the student performance improves in those schools and universities, where the academic programme is developed in academic autonomy paradigm and thus has more opportunities to offer education at a higher level. However, the present research identified the fact that underpins a completely different logic. The finding is that the Faculty considers the student enrollment policy as an instrument to indirectly influence the effectiveness of the academic programme. In other words, the academic changes are meaningful if the

education consumer, that is students, is ready to follow higher educational standards. In other words, it is not the academic autonomy that causes educational improvement and student higher performance, but on the contrary, the students are positioned as drivers of the academic changes.

This finding revealed a serious gap between the meaning of academic autonomy for university improvement and the role the Faculty can play in it. This is the question of why the Faculty does not recognize their role in terms of the key players who 'deliver better' education (Matei, 2018), and provide the educational programme as an instrument to develop better students. By staying in the background and choosing not to take the leading role in academic change development, the Faculty decreased the efficiency of the process. This position of the Faculty seems to be underpinned by the values of Faculty which are incompatible with the purpose of academic autonomy. Further research on the values of Faculty may shed the light on how to improve the role of Faculty in academic autonomy development.

5.4. Research question 3

How can academic autonomy be developed if active engagement is encouraged?

This section is centered on the procedural issues of how to implement the changes. However, this section does not provide the scenario of actions but shares some ideas about the implementation of academic autonomy. These ideas are grounded on the vision of Faculty, their positionality, and my as a researcher's interpretation of the data.

Academic autonomy development is balanced by two powers, that is the power of the Faculty in defining the substance of changes, and the power of managers, to give the organizational consideration of the changes and approval to the Faculty's intentions. This finding is compatible with another research, which I conducted before the present one. According to the survey among faculties of 8 universities, 51% of respondents are ready to contribute their professional skills to academic autonomy, provided they have clear guidance and collaboration with the managers of the university. A similar opinion is supported by the findings of the present study.

Following the established strong traditions in university organization, with the strong hierarchy and long-term practices, the Faculty have no experience of having power in making academic decisions. This is explained with the fact of the dependence of Faculty on the approval of managers. Further exploratory research on how to empower the Faculty and facilitate

them to acquire more independence, creativity, and professionalism in dealing with academic changes may advance the practice of academic autonomy development.

The findings connected with collegiality as a form of deciding for the Faculty members lead to understanding the importance of the transition from individual academic autonomy to the departmental autonomy. Inheriting the traditions from the centralized system, the Faculty members practiced individual academic autonomy and were guided by their individual academic goals. In the era of a decentralized system, the Faculty faces the requirement to assist the university to define the academic profile. Individual autonomy never supports university autonomy. There is a need for the Faculty to acquire a new form of decision making.

Though the Faculty demonstrated their readiness and willingness to practice collegiality in designing the academic profile of their department, still there is a risk to lose focus at the departmental level and derail to the individual level. To strengthen the academic autonomy process some prerequisites should be observed. A panoramic vision of the university and departmental goals, mission, and plans inform the Faculty about the outline and limits within which the Faculty can maneuver.

As the present research is exploratory and it not only describes the phenomenon and finds explanations, it also defines the problems to be solved. The issue of how to shift from individual academic autonomy to collegial autonomy was disclosed in the present study and calls for further investigation. To my knowledge, the literature does not provide insights into this problem and thus calls for further investigation.

Communication as a channel of interaction among the Faculty and university managerial community is identified as another finding of the present study. The importance of communication is supported by the statement that academic autonomy is a result of interaction among the university communities (Jungblut et al., 2020). The present study added more knowledge about the role of communication as seen by the Faculty. Communication is interpreted as the means of interaction between the Faculty and university managers with the purpose to get approval for the decisions made by the Faculty and influencing academic matters. At what stage of academic developments communication among the university communities should be activated, for what issues the interaction should be held, and how the communication can be effective are the questions for further investigation.

5.5. Developing context-sensitive academic autonomy

As it was defined in the literature review, academic autonomy is a contextually bounded

phenomenon. It is not clear and underrepresented in the literatures how academic autonomy is adjusted to the context of the university. On the contrary, the approach proposed in Scorecard seems to ignore the role of context in academic changes. According to Scorecard project, all the universities across diversity of countries and contexts should perform academic autonomy relating to 12 indicators. Thus the evaluative studies used a similar measuring instrument to assess the level of academic autonomy regardless the fact how pertinent the measuring indicators are in the light of the given context.

The present study, though did not aim to explore how to develop academic autonomy to be more context sensitive, implied some findings in this area of interest. The present study was conducted within the context of the given university and the invited participants were involved in the discussion around their lived experiences which they acquired in the context. In addition, the research paradigm of phenomenology aims to explore the phenomenon as it is embedded in the context. Due to this fact, the data received about the phenomenon was closely connected with reality, no intermediary research methods such as surveys, or questionnaires interrupted the conscious reflection of the participants, who informed the present study.

I conclude that the present study gave an idea of how to make academic autonomy more sensitive to the context. The definition of autonomy was not presented to the participants; it was defined by them to the extent of their understanding and experience. Operating on the lived experiences and everyday practices, the participants let the academic autonomy concept appear and get shaped through their reflections and discussions. The contextual specification was anticipated in the Faculty's understanding as the participants operated on the issues, directly and closely related to their everyday practice. This research experience allows me as a researcher to suggest that one of the ways to ensure contextual sensitivity is to delegate the responsibility to the Faculty to identify the dimension and aspects of academic autonomy they would like to focus on. In this way, academic autonomy is not given, but appears and gets shaped by the contextually colored experiences of the university community.

As a result, this research defined some features of academic autonomy that are rooted in contextual specification. It was found that academic autonomy is shaped by the two powers with different implications, namely design of content of academic programmes, revision of curriculum, student admission policy, and student group size. The content of academic changes can be defined and designed by the Faculty, while the implementation of academic changes directly depends on the consent of managerial staff, who propose the rigid policy. Academic autonomy development is interrupted by the hierarchical traditions and the absence of coordination between the university players. This picture of academic autonomy development is a distinctive feature in the context of the given university. The crucial contextual characteristics

define the university as a less democratic society, with a strong hierarchy and the traditions of the centralized university system. Within this context, academic autonomy is shaped by the powers of Faculty and managers, which may have difficulty achieving a certain level of congruence.

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Appendix A

Dear Natalya Sergiyenko,				
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study.Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.				
Sub-Committee:		EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)		
Review type:		Expedited		
PI:				
School:		School of Histories, Languages and Cultures		
Title:		Working Title of Proposal or summary of study scope: Exploring Faculty Perspective in Academic Autonomy Development		
First Reviewer:		Dr. Marco Ferreira		
Second Reviewer:		Dr. Alla Korzh		
Other members ofthe Committee		Dr. Lucilla Crosta, Deborah Outhwaite.		
Date of Approval:		9th October 2020		
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:				
Conditions				
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdDThesis Primary Supervisor.		

Appendix B

Research Information Sheet

Researcher's name: Sergiyenko Natalya

Title of the research:

Exploring the perspective of Faculty in academic autonomy development

Key words of the research:

Academic autonomy development, involvement of Faculty in academic autonomy development, Faculty agency

Short description of the research:

The present research aims to define the perspectives of Faculty agency in academic autonomy development at the level of the department.

The research will answer the questions "Is the Faculty of the department ready to take an active role in academic autonomy development?", "What academic autonomy will the Faculty be able to shape and for what reasons, with the help of what structural support and interaction?"

The need for the research is underpinned by the facts: there is a need to develop academic autonomy in the university structure as it is stated in the documents such as "Strategic plan of higher education development 2011-2020", in the university strategic plan of development; there are some steps implemented by the university management with the purpose to instigate more active participation of the Faculty in academic autonomy development. The experience, accumulated by other universities, implies that the participation of the academic staff in academic autonomy development may lead to better results. Thus this research study will explore the capacity of the Faculty to

invest

their expertise and power into development of the academic autonomy.

As academic autonomy development depends on the contextual factors, as well it depends on the internal intentions, beliefs, opinion of the Faculty members, the present research attempts to offer a space where the Faculty members will be able to share theirinsights, state their perspectives towards academic autonomy. The participants, the Faculty members, will be invited to take part in focus group discussion. The quality data collected from the discussion will be analysed and used to outline the model of academic autonomy development in the context of the university, where the research is implemented. The findings will inform the university community about the available resource for academic autonomy development.

The research participants are Faculty members of Department of foreign languages. Theresearcher is an insider researcher, has contacts with the colleagues, is well aware of the department structure, work content and the academic autonym development measures, undertaken in the university.

The participation is voluntary, with the right to withdraw from the project at any stage, with no explanation. The data obtained from the participants is confidential, safely stored in a password protected hard disk, and is used for the purpose of the research only.

The researcher can inform the university community about the stages of research implementation and procedures at any moment. The final report will be available for university community upon request or will be in open access.

Duration of the research study: 2020

Signature of researcher **Date:**

The Head of Research and Science Committee

Name Date

Appendix C

Participant Information Sheet

Title of the research project

Exploring Faculty perspective in academic autonomy development

If you have any questions, please feel free to let me know by contacting me in my office 302 in building 5, PPU, or Whatsapp +77056137437. For email, please use natalya.sergiyenko@online.liverpool.ac.uk .

Alternatively, you can contact my Doctoral supervisor, Dr. Peter Khan at Peter.Kahn@liverpool.ac.uk

If you have questions regarding the conduct of the researcher, any question about the study or your rights, you may contact the Chair of the Liverpool Online Research Ethics Committee at liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com. When contacting Research Ethics Committee, please provide the name of researcher (Natalya Sergiyenko), the name of the study and details of the complaint or comment you wish to make.

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, you need to know why this study is being done and your role. Please take 10 minutes to read the following information and feel free to ask me, the researcher, any further details, or anything you want to understand. As some of your colleagues will also receive an invitation to participate in this research study, please discuss it with your colleagues, friends, and other people, who may have an interest in the studies similar to this.

This research study is my final stage in the doctorate program at the University of Liverpool.

About researcher

I am a Faculty member of the Department of Foreign Languages. In this research study, I take an inside researcher position as I will research at the university where I work. This gives me advantages as I am aware of the university organization, and I have contact with the Faculty , university managers, who approved my research plans. All issues related to this research study and my role as the researcher and

a Faculty member were discussed and acknowledged by the Department of Science at Pavlodar University (PSPU). Thus there is no conflict of interest in my role as a researcher and as a Faculty member.

Research purpose

With this present research study, I intend to understand what role and active position the Faculty can play in developing academic autonomy. This research is based on the assumption that the Faculty does have power and voice in making decisions concerning academic autonomy. This study will explore your opinion, your vision about your leading role in academic autonomy development.

Why have you been chosen to take part?

You are a Faculty member, with the experience of working in the Department of Foreign Languages/ History/ Social Science. You are a part of a team of professionals, and you have a good understanding of the internal processes in which you take part. You may provide a valuable insight, based on your individual beliefs, opinion, vision, and how to improve the quality of education provided by your Department.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

What happens if you take part?

If you decide to participate, you will be invited to discuss in a group of 3 of your colleagues. At the time of quarantine, the meeting will be arranged in the Zoom platform. This allows for avoiding personal contact. It will be a discussion around the questions proposed by me as a researcher. Some of the items will ask you to share your opinion; some of the questions will ask the focus group to think of the solutions to the problems. It is important to regard this event as an opportunity to discuss the questions and think together as a team openly. The duration is approx. 60-90 minutes.

This focus group discussion is a source of data for my research. With your permission, it will be recorded.

Benefits and Expenses

You will not have any expenses by taking part in this study except the time you will need to invest in studying the relevant documents (this information sheet and Participation Consent Form) and focus group discussion. Your primary benefit is that you will gain insights into academic autonomy development and explore what role the Faculty can have and must have in this process. You will also have experience as a participant in the research study, informing you about the research study's organization.

Confidentiality

Only the researcher has access to data. The audio-recording will be done with the mobile, to which only the researcher has access. The researcher understands that the data produced in the discussion group by the participants is confidential. The researcher takes on the obligation to, first, use the information for the research purpose only; second, to store the data on a password-protected folder on an external hard drive disk; third, the participants have the right to ask the researcher to delete the information at any stage of the research, have access to it and do other manipulations with it.

Before the data analysis stage the name of the university or the department as well as any identifying information will be deleted from the recordings. The participants' names will be replaced by pseudonyms.

It is also vital to for all the participants to confirm that they will keep all the information provided by the researcher and the group participants confidential. By signing the Consent Form (clause 7) and by agreement between the researcher and participants before the group discussion assures data privacy.

Potential conflicts of interest

The researcher 's role in the present study is that of inside researcher. The research participants and the researcher are the colleagues, working in the same department. The researcher has no managerial relationships or any responsibility for the colleagues and their work. The participants have freedom to make their own decision about their participation in the research, have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage without giving reasons or explanations.

Risks

The focus group discussions and interviews will occur in Zoom, where confidentiality and privacy will be assured. However, as with any activity online, some inconveniences cannot be ruled out.

The focus group suggests the dynamic development of the discussion. Any conflict of opinions or interests will be discussed and minimized. The rules of mutual respect and friendly communication will be addressed at the beginning of the meeting. The researcher will monitor the discussion and prevent the development of any conflict.

If you are unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy or there is a problem you want to discuss, please contact me, Sergiyenko Natalya, and let me know about the issue of concern. If you feel you cannot contact me, you can address the Head of the Department of Science, provide the study's details, and detail the concern you wish to share.

Please note, you have a right to withdraw from the study any time without explaining. It is also essential to inform you that as a researcher, I would like to make your participation in the focus group a pleasant experience and acquire new insights and motivation. My study aims to open the chances for collegial cooperation, interaction, and mutual understanding.

What will happen if you withdraw?

You can withdraw any time without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used. Otherwise, you may request that they are destroyed, and no further use is made of them.

Final note

Please keep a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (and the Participant Consent Form) for your reference. Please feel free to contact me by phone, Whatsapp, or in the office with any questions or concerns.

I will be grateful to see you as a participant in the research study.

Sergiyenko Natalya (date)_____ (signature) _____

Appendix D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the research project

Exploring Faculty perspective in academic autonomy development

Researcher: Natalya Sergiyenko

If you have any questions, please feel free to let me know by contacting me in my office 302 in building 5, PPU, or Whatsapp +77056137437. For email, please use natalya.sergiyenko@online.liverpool.ac.uk .

Alternatively, you can contact my Doctoral supervisor, Dr. Peter Khan at Peter.Kahn@liverpool.ac.uk

If you have questions regarding the conduct of the researcher, any question about the study or your rights, you may contact the Chair of the Liverpool Online Research Ethics Committee at liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com. When contacting Research Ethics Committee, please provide the name of researcher (Natalya Sergiyenko), the name of the study and details of the complaint or comment you wish to make.

	Please mark
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated (data) for the above study. I had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and get the answer	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any explanation.	☐
3. I understand that I can at any time ask for access to the information I provided and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.	☐
4. I confirm that will keep all the information provided by the researcher or the group participants confidential (e.g. the details in the discussion, which may incur disfavour to the other participants or the researcher).	☐
5. I agree that the focus group discussion will be audio-recorded.	☐
6. I agree to take part in all the phases of the research study.	☐

7. The information you have provided will be published as a report; please, indicate whether you would like to receive a copy. ☐

Participants Name	date	signature

Researcher	date	signature