

Abstract

The relationship between a university and the government has long been a common topic of study in educational research. Concepts often associated with the issue of university governance are the elements of autonomy and accountability.

Autonomy is claimed as a necessity to enhance institutional development while accountability is a safeguard of ensuring social needs are properly met. As autonomy means self-governance without external control while accountability refers to a high level of transparency and responsibility to the public, it may seem contradictory to have the two features contained in one system. Scholars like Berdahl (1990) suggested that a balance of both would constitute an ideal situation.

The Macao higher education sector has been undergoing changes after the handover of sovereignty to China in 1999. In 2002, the government of the Macao Special Administrative Region announced the revision of university charter of Macao's only public university, the University of Macau (UM), for the purpose of providing a higher degree of autonomy to the institution. This aims at encouraging appropriate changes to accommodate international trends and developments.

After a long negotiation, the new charter was finally approved in early 2006. In this study, the relationship between UM and the government is examined to understand if the institution could have benefited from a required higher level of autonomy to promote its future development.