CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Encountering the ‘Field’: Exploring the ‘inner world’ of the University

Introduction

This section outlines the methodology and research processes employed in my empirical study. The first section will provide a theoretical account of qualitative research, along with my justification for choosing this method. Second, the study will reflect on what is involved in case study work and explain its suitability for this research study. Third, the study will elaborate on the methods utilised in this research for data collection, with reference to the interview process and, very briefly, the fieldwork notes. In the fourth section, the study will explain the use of coding and the procedural intricacies involved in analysing the data collected. Issues of reflexivity and positionality will be covered in the penultimate section. Finally, the study will discuss the ethical ramifications of the research study, followed by a summary of key points in my concluding remarks.

Case Selection: University-I and University-II

Higher education institutions in the country are organized into several types. The typology of institutions includes Institutions of national importance; Open University; Deemed universities\(^6\) (Private and Government), and the Private universities, in addition to the conventional public universities – the Central and the State universities. In total the country hosts 864 universities (AISHE, 2017). Amongst the types of universities, there exists 350

\(^6\) Deemed universities mean - “An Institution of Higher Education, other than universities, working at a very high standard in specific area of study, can be declared by the Central Government on the advice of the UGC as an Institution ‘Deemed-to-be-university’. Institutions that are ‘deemed-to-be-university’ enjoy academic status and privileges of a university.”
public state universities and 243 private-state universities, - 43 government deemed universities\textsuperscript{7} and 79 private\textsuperscript{8} universities in the country, followed by Institutes of National Importance (100); Central Universities (44) and State Open Universities (14) (AISHE, 2017). Thus, the two most popular types of universities providing access to the majority of the students in terms of enrolment, hence, the public state and private-deemed universities constitute as the main rationale for selecting the public state and private deemed universities as case-in-point.

Currently, the state of Karnataka hosts 55 universities distributed into the following typology of universities - 01 Central University; 25 State Universities; 15 Deemed-to-be-universities (04 Government and 11 Private); 11 Private State Universities; 02 Institutions of National importance (AISHE, 2017). The State of Karnataka reflects a typology of higher education institutions in the country. Further, the state of Karnataka is one of the few states to establish the State Higher Education Council, before it was made mandatory under the RUSA. Further, Karnataka hosts one of the oldest public state universities in the country. In addition to this, the State of Karnataka in the last two decades has engaged in a series of reforms in the higher education system and its institutions, viz., actively pursuing the role of Karnataka Knowledge Commission; introduction of the draft bill on Innovative Universities and introduction of major amendments to the Karnataka State Universities Act, 1976 (amendments in 2000 and 2017\textsuperscript{9}).

As a result of the composition of the university system and reforms in Karnataka, reflecting a similar pattern nation-wide, it is considered appropriate to prioritize public-state and private (especially) private deemed\textsuperscript{10} universities as the core type of universities as case studies.

\textsuperscript{7} For example, the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru established as per Section 3 of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956 in 1958.
\textsuperscript{8} For example, Jain (university), Bengaluru established as per Section 3 of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956 in 2008.
\textsuperscript{9} Passed in the Legislative Assembly in June 2017.
\textsuperscript{10} The growth of private state universities and private deemed universities has increased in the last two decades. The private deemed universities are of special interest considering the vision of the UGC per Deemed University
In Karnataka, the Public State and Private Deemed universities constitute as the majority in the overall typology of higher education institutions in the state. The study aims to investigate the proposed research objectives by selecting two universities in Karnataka as case in point: public-state university and private deemed-to-be-university. Based on a range of factors, the study opts to discuss the case of the public state university and a private deemed-to-be-university to examine university governance mechanisms and its response to larger policy reforms. Both typologies of universities constitute as the oldest among the respective typologies they represent in Karnataka.

State universities are the main destination for the majority of India’s postsecondary students. In particular, they cater to the requirements of a large population who cannot afford education in private institutions. State universities are mainly dependent on the state government for their financial requirements and possess limited avenues to attract alternate resources. In addition to grants from the central (through the UGC) and the state government, affiliation system of the public state universities constitutes the critical source of revenue. In addition to revenue generation, it is through the affiliation system; the state universities ensure accessibility to aspiring minds in the rural areas through their Post Graduate centers and degree colleges. De-facto, as result of such a system, affiliating state universities harness most of their resources in coordinating and conducting examination and award degrees to their affiliating institutions, in addition to its teaching, research and extension activities on campus.

Deemed-to-be-university is institutions that have been awarded “deemed” status by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) given that it has acquired the characteristics of a university as demonstrated by the diversity of its programmes, quality of

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Act, 2010 and ongoing 'controversies’ with regard to governance of private deemed universities (Tandon Committee report, 2009)
research, and proven contributions to innovation and teaching (UGC, 2010). According to the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), there are 122 deemed (private and government) universities in the country (AISHE, 2017), Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka constitute more than 50 percent of them (FICCI, 2014). It is in this context that studying the nature, culture, organization of the public state and private deemed university and its governance provides key insights into the higher education and university governance.

**Methods**

The study chooses to take a qualitative approach to examine two universities – public state and private deemed University in the state of Karnataka, South India. The qualitative research approach seeks to describe - the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects (Kvale, 1996, p. 12). The main task of interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say. In specific terms, the study adopts a qualitative case study approach, which addresses the case of two types of universities and its governance in the state of Karnataka. Therefore, this section presents an explanation and description of the case study approach. In the following section, the study illustrates the rationale for choosing the two types of universities as case studies. For any empirical research project, Munhall (2000) considers it is vital to gain an understanding of how a researcher is going to use a given method, and how that method works (p. 19). This is especially true of this study, given the flexibility of the case study approach and the range of methods it employs.

**Case Study Approach**

Case study method is considered as one of the classic qualitative research methods. Case studies are oriented towards a comprehensive examination of the case and the phenomena (Cohen et al. (Eds.) 2007). According to Robson (2002), the case study method enables – explanation(s) and interpretation(s) of diverse experiences of societies, nations, cultures, and
other significant macro-social units. She further states that; the case study strategy is very much an evidence-oriented strategy. Yin (2003:18-19) defines a case study as follows:

[an] in-depth investigation/study of a single individual, group or community, or an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context […] it is about understanding the uniqueness, complexity and interaction of the participants involved in holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events […] [It] provides insight into an issue and has no specific methods of data collection or analysis […] and uses whatever method that seems appropriate and practical as a method of enquiry […] and is often better approximated within a small number of cases that are closely related to one another.

The case study method seeks to describe a real environment, very often within a single organisation (such as a university) and requires the researcher to capture that reality in considerable detail. This is especially appropriate for my study given that one of my chief research objectives is to focus on the reality of individual – or individuals - experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) with reference to —underlying reasons in people’s feelings or perceptions of events (Gillham, 2000, p. 7). This reality may be accessed by studying individual activity in the real world, which can only be understood in context, and that which exists in the here and now (Gillham, 2000, p. 1).

There are, however, limits to the case study approach. Yin (2003) claims that the method’s disadvantages lie in an alleged —lack of rigor, as well as the potential - sloppiness of the investigator, and the —small basis [provided] for scientific generalization. Furthermore, Yin argues, producing an effective case study may take too long, and can result in —massive, unreadable documents (p. 9). However, the method provides a valuable framework for my research, as it has particular advantages in the exploratory phase of an interview-based investigation – it is an - appropriate explorative tool (Yin, 2003, p. 3) – and helps the researcher
to understand —the complexity of interviews in particular contexts‖ (Bassey, 1999, p. 36). Furthermore, Bassey (1999) identifies an element of —trustworthiness that highlights the ethic of respect for truth in the case study approach (p. 74).

This study sets out to explore, analyse and gain insight into a single case situation (i.e. the university setting) featuring individuals of a group of interest (actors within University-I and University-II). The case is thus discussed —in its context (Robson, 2002, p. 89). Research is carried out in its —natural location (campus and the neighbourhood of University-I and II; Robson, 2002, p. 89) in order to explore the characteristic patterns of university life of the actors directly and indirectly associated with the university and its functions The participants’ individual experiences are - situated and observed in context, with open-ended interviews taking place within the university setting (Bassey, 1999, p. 23). Since individual experiences form an integral part of the case study approach, it is through the analysis and interpretation of how individuals think, feel and act are a critical source of information (Simons, 2009, p. 4). The study sets out to be evaluative: highlighting key issues that participants (including academic faculty members and students) encounter in the educational setting, and seeking to —describe, interpret, and or depict events uncovered during the research (Simons, 2009, p. 41).

Yin (2003) adds that the case study method has the —unique strength of empowering the researcher to ask useful questions. The method is —adaptive and flexible and gives the researcher a firm grasp of the issues studied (p. 8). The researcher can ask ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in order to gain a full understanding of the nature and complexity of the processes taking place. Simons (2009) observes that the case study method enables the researcher to - document multiple perspectives, explore contested viewpoints, and [...] explain how and why things happened (p. 7). For this study, the ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions are exploratory and lead in most instances to the use of case studies (Yin, 2003; Simons, 2009).
The case study approach provides an opportunity to collate qualitative data through interviews, and observations (Blaikie, 2003). Thus, the Qualitative case study approach in this study – the case of Public State University – University-I (Chapter 3) and the Private Deemed University – University-II (Chapter 4), provides a rich and thick description of a single phenomenon and of an organisation to discover insights relevant to the research problem.

While semi-structured interviews in University-I and II, have been an important source for empirical insights along with document analysis. In addition to this, non-participant observations on field assist in additional data points and sometime enable validation of data from other sources.

Data Collection

The study seeks data from primary and secondary sources to interpret the contours of higher education and university governance. Secondary sources of data (Annual reports, Prospectus, Research papers, National Education Policies, Committee and Commission reports and various online sources) have been collated and analysed. Content analysis of policy documents in higher education (Chapter 3) in line with expansion, equity and excellence and its interpretation within the universities have been the core aspect of the secondary sources of data and its analysis. Analyzing the secondary data sources, the study provides insights into the trajectory of historical beliefs and ideologies of policies and thought on higher education in the country. However, primary data sources were referred to collect additional source of information to ‘make sense’ and/or validate insights emanating from primary data sources in some instances.

The main source of data for analysis of the two case studies – University-I and University-II are collated from primary source through in-depth semi-structured interviews\textsuperscript{11} and non-

\textsuperscript{11} University I - interviews conducted in April-August 2015 (Revisits in August-September 2016) and University-II - Interviews conducted in September 2015-February 2016 (revisits in May-June 2016)
participant observations. In addition to interviews and observations, minutes of the Board of Management and Executive Committee meetings at the University were relevant to strengthen the empirical insights. There are three main kinds of qualitative data: Interviews and Observations and Document Analysis (Berg, 2004).

Document Analysis

The technique of collating and analyzing data from documents is known as Document analysis (Cohen et al. (Eds.) 2007). Document analysis is an organised procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material. Document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Documents for systematic evaluation as part of this study take a variety of forms. They include minutes of the meetings; committee and commission reports; policy documents; prospectus; annual reports of the University; newspaper clippings. Most of these documents were found in the library; online and university files shared by current and retired office bearers. The information gathered through these documents enabled insights into the analysis in terms of finding, selecting, appraising and synthesizing data contained in documents. Thus, document analysis yields data – excerpts, quotations, or entire passage(s) – that are then organised into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis (Labuschange, 2003).

Apart from documents, the qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple sources of evidence; that is, to seek convergence and corroboration, i.e., ‘triangulation’ (Denzin, 1970, p. 381).
Hence, the study collects data from interviews (semi-structured) and non-participant observations of relevant actors and their activities at the university.

Interviews and Observations

Interviews are face-to-face sessions dealing with specific questions and answers. In general, interviews provide data from respondents and are helpful to seek information from an expert in the domain (Kvale, 1996). Research in most of the disciplines depend on three modes of interviews to collect primary data – structured, semi-structured and un-structured/open-ended interviews (Bernard, 1988). In addition to the types, there are many modes of conducting interviews – face-to-face, telephonic and email (Kvale, 1996). Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were pursued with the respondents in University-I and University-II. Only in a couple of instances, respondents (one each in University-I and University-II) shared their opinion through email. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to build the narrative by taking a cue from the responses whilst offering insights to the researcher as a non-participant observer. For instance, during most of the interviews with students in University-I, interviews were conducted in isolation from respective departments, usually, in the stadium or canteen located on campus (but away from the academic block). All interviews were paper based, with the permission of the respondent’s audio-recording was pursued.

Semi-structured interviewing, according to Bernard (1988), is best used to get deeper and diverse insights into the phenomenon. In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews provide key parameters and questions to the researcher which are to be carefully constructed to elicit the respondent's ideas and opinions on the topic of interest, as opposed to leading the interviewee toward preconceived choices (Schmidt, 2004). They rely on the interviewer following up with probes to get in-depth information on topics of interest. Thus, the University Governance Framework (see Chapter VI) was the point of reference to guide the interviews.
During the interviews, most of the respondents were inclined to share their personal experiences, while doing so they digressed from the main aspects of university governance. Such an experience was more in the case of interviews with students and administrators in the vernacular language (Kannada and Hindi). See figure 1 and 2 for an illustration of a number of interviews by actors in University-I and University-II.

Field visit

The field visits were divided into two phases – Phase I field visit to University-I between April-August 2015 and Phase II field visit to University-II between September 2015-February 2016. Further, Phase III of the field re-visits in University-I between August-September 2016 and University-II between May-June 2016. The thesis constructs a framework on University Governance - informed by literature in the domain of higher education and university governance and the empirical insights from the field. The framework provides a systemic and systematic approach in engaging with the field to collect, organise and analyse the data from University-I and II. The framework was validated during field work and further substantiated as the conceptual framework to analyse university governance and its linkages with policy ideals and practices of expansion, equity and excellence on campus.

Based on the contact details listed on the university website, the respondents (especially faculty-members, faculty-administrator and university administrators) were sent an email request - seeking an appointment for conducting an interview. However, acknowledgement to email requests was limited in University-I as against University-II.

Two different approaches were operationalised to enter the field at University-I and University-II. In University-I, contact with one of the members of the Syndicate was established over a phone call and with his assistance, contact with few senior faculty-members was initiated followed by meeting with the Vice Chancellor to seek permission for interviews was sought.
However, in University-II, contact with the faculty-members yielded initial contact, but interviews were provided subject to the permission of the Vice Chancellor only. Subsequent to the permission of the Vice Chancellor (in consultation with the Registrar (Administration) filed work commenced at University-II. Interestingly, at University-I there was hardly any query about the objectives of the study and interviews as such. In University-II, the Vice Chancellor demanded a summary of my research study and a brief on who are the potential respondents and the rationale for the same. Subsequent to this, a formal letter of permission was issued, and head of the constituent institutions was informed (via email) introducing the researcher along with the summary document mentioning the purpose of research. Each of the respondents in this university (in most of the cases), asked for the permission letter or acknowledged the circular regarding the research and researcher, before commencing the interviews.

Most of the interviews have been audio-recorded with prior consent of the respondents per declaration (see Annexure-I). In some instances, few of the respondents, especially in University-II, requested for validation of the data. For instance, one of the faculty administrator at University-II requested for the soft copy of the interview notes to validate the appropriateness of his statements. It is interesting to note that the respondents in University-I, seldom hesitated to permit for audio recording, to share their affiliations and names vis-à-vis respondents in University-II, wherein respondents (most of them) asked for the data to be anonymous, and amongst them, few of them asked for validation of the data. Such concerns of confidentiality and anonymity uncovers (potentially) a sense of ‘surveillance’ among actors in University-II, considering most of them are on contractual positions and not permanent employees, unlike in University-I.

In total 129 respondents (63 University-I and 66 University-II) were interviewed and the interview data was systematically organised by respondents’ roles in the university (faculty
members, student, administrator). Figure 1 and 2 illustrate the number of actor-respondents interviewed in University-I and II by their roles and affiliations.

Figure 1: Number of Respondents in University-I

In University-I, the total number of faculty-members interviewed are 18 (Professors, Associate Professors and Assistant Professors) and members engaged with administrative functions are 21 (Administrators, Dean, Faculty-Administrators, Leadership and Government Representative). Students on campus were forthcoming for interviews. Majority of the interviews with students and administrators were in the vernacular language (Kannada). These interviews were translated into English, with validation of key points with the respondents. Students, Faculty-members and Faculty administrators shared detailed information on the questions discussed during the interview, hence constitute as the key respondent for the study.
In University-II, the total number of faculty-members interviewed are 15 (Professors, Associate Professors and Assistant Professors) and members engaged with administrative functions are 17 (Administrators, Faculty-Administrators and Top Management). Similar to University-I, students on campus assisted cordially with interviews, rather enthusiastically, in contrast to members of the administration. Faculty-administrators, faculty-members and students provided in-depth perspectives on dimensions of university governance and the policy ideals of higher education.

Data Analysis

Subsequent to data collection, the interviews and notes from the primary and secondary sources were analysed for each of the research objectives. Chapter II provides an analysis of the trajectory of higher education policies establishing an argument that the expansion, equity and excellence have been the core ideals of higher education in India.

Chapter III and IV, provide an in-depth descriptive-analysis of University-I and University-II regarding meaning, practices and conflicts among university actors in engaging with the ideals of policies on higher education. Chapter V provides a critical analysis of governance in University-I and University-II by illustrating and substantiating the university governance and
its framework by the typology of universities. Firstly, primary data from interview transcripts (few being translated from Kannada to English) were coded in NVivo.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the respondents and name of the university were designated with unique codes (see Annexure-II). For instance, for the Public State University – University-I and Private Deemed University – University-II. For respondents in each of the university, unique codes for each of the actor per his/her designation/roles were attributed. For instance, Faculty-members from University-I – UIRESFM04…similarly for faculty-member from University-II – U2RESFM07. UI stands for University-I; RES refers to Respondent and FM means Faculty-member and 04 refers to the number given to member belonging to that role during the field visit.

Based on these codes, the data was coded in NVivo by respondent and university with reference to components listed in the University Governance framework (see Chapter VI). Coding of the raw data resulted in meaningful cluster analysis by the university and/or respondents. Cluster analysis enabled the researcher to visualize patterns in the study by grouping sources or nodes that are coded similarly by nodes for University-I and University-II. Based on these visualisations and close reading of the interview data, the study pursued content analysis to interpret the data and drive at key findings and conclusions.

Content analysis has been the critical mode of analysis for the study. Content analysis enables systematic methods used to analyze the contents of data in the textual form (Mayring, 2000). Researchers regard content analysis as a flexible method for analyzing text data (Cavanagh, 1997). The content analysis describes a family of analytic approaches ranging from the impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses (Rosengren, 1981). Policy reports and interview notes provided close to 650 pages text data. The need for a systematic method of analysis was inevitable. Organising text data and coding
the text manually into NVivo has been instrumental in ensuring the comprehensive and coherent method of organising and analysing textual data.

Based on the background literature and methodological approach, the following chapters are presented in the thesis. Chapter III illustrates the landscape of higher education policies in the country since-independence. The core aspect of this chapter is to examine the trajectory of higher education policies based on the core ideals of expansion, equity and excellence. Following this, Chapter IV and V provide ‘thick’ description of the Public-State University (University-I) and Private-Deemed University (University-II) to set the context for some of the observations that follow in the analysis chapters. The concluding chapter tries to summarize the findings of the research by drawing attention to the contours of higher education governance at the macro level and its linkages to construction and contradictions of university governance across typologies of universities in the country.