

Privatization of Higher Education and Excellence Without Soul

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Abstract

Privatization of education in both developed and developing countries over the last century has registered a positive trend in the field of education. With the rise of capitalism and privatization of higher education by the government of Uganda, there is an increasing attempt to privatize public services, including education, so that citizens will have to buy them at market value rather than have them provided by the government. The department of higher education in Uganda concentrates strongly on the role of education in servicing the economy through taxation to the neglect of its social and developmental responsibilities. The vision of the university as a place for the education of the elite and for elite education has had a powerful historical precedent in Plato's Academy. To what extent the Platonic view of education still dominates our thinking about the role and purposes of universities is arguable. Commercialization is normalized and its operational values and purposes have been encoded in the systems of all types of universities. Correlatively, what is happening in the universities is that they are being asked to produce commercially oriented professionals rather than public-interest professionals. While this may seem like merely a change in form rather than substance, the danger with this advancing marketised individualism is that it will further weaken public interest values among those who are being educated in private universities. In this paper, the writer presents an examination on the impact of privatization of higher education on the original purpose and values of education to the individual, the society and the Ugandan nation as a whole hence promoting privatization of higher education and excellence without soul.

Keywords: privatization, higher education, excellence with soul

Throughout this paper it is observed that the development of society is equated with economic development which focuses primarily on science and technology. Private education has grown for several reasons, which can be summed up in two categories: excess demand and differential demand for higher education (Banya, 2001). First, the social demand for higher education exceeds the public supply, and the private market seeks to meet the unsatisfied

demand. Secondly, demand for high quality and content in education also contributes to the growth of privatization. On the supply side, private entrepreneurs are ready to provide higher education either for philanthropic and the dividends could be social and political gains, or quick economic profits.

In the context of higher education, 'private' denotes 'not for profit' institutions that are expected to meet their operating expenses without government assistance. Privatization is the pursuit of non-governmental sources of revenue either to replace lost or inadequate funding from central government to acquire support for new research initiatives, programs, equipment, buildings, staff, and student assistance. Both goals can and do occur simultaneously (Hill, 2005). Some such activity is occurring throughout the developed democracies, and Uganda's academics are certainly familiar with it.

That there is a major global movement to change the nature of the university's role in society is beyond doubt (Angus, 2004; Bullen et al, 2004; Rutherford, 2005). What is notable is that the university is being pressurized to change from being a centre of learning to being a business organization with productivity targets to transfer its allegiance from the *academic* to the *operational*' (Doring, 2002). As the operational has encoded within itself many of the values of the commercial, adopting a purely 'operational focus', or treating change as a purely 'technical problem', means that the values of the commercial sector can be encoded in the hearts of the university systems and processes almost without reflection. The move from the academic to the operational does not happen in the name of serving commercial interests or values in all countries or at all times, although it seems to have happened in this way in the United Kingdom (Rutherford, 2005). Sometimes it is explicit, as in the development of joint ventures and conferences between business and the universities but at other times it comes in the name of efficiency, productivity and excellence.

Paper Objectives

1. To examine the concept of privatization
2. To highlight the forms and types of privatization in higher education
3. To study the factors responsible for privatization of higher education
4. To highlight the advantages and disadvantages of privatization of higher education

The Concept of Privatization

Privatization of university education can be described as the process by which universities acquire many masters and serve many masters (Fardanesh, 2006). In so doing, they have a better chance of preserving parts of their inheritance than if only one master pays the piper. I would argue that the thought is hardly original to the writer that the greater the number of possible sources of revenue and support, the greater are the chances that in today's dynamic and risk-prone economic environments universities will be better able to maintain valuable elements of their traditions and insulate themselves from

certain vagaries than under conditions where governments are the absolute source of funding.

The Uganda National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) defines higher education as education offered to post advanced certificates or its equivalent (NCHE, 2010), while privatization of education is the pursuit of non-governmental sources of revenue either to replace lost or inadequate funding from central (or local) authorities or to acquire support for new research initiatives, programs, equipment, buildings, staff, and student assistance. The term private university refers to a university that is owned by an organization or person/s other than the government, and is funded by private rather than public funds (UNESCO, 2011).

Privatization of higher education is where higher educational institutions of learning are owned, managed and controlled by individuals, while their operation depends on guidelines set by ministry of education. Privatization of education has become a global issue that has moved along with globalization of education.

Private education has grown for several reasons, which can be summed up in two categories: excess demand and differentiated demand for higher education. First, the social demand for higher education exceeds the public supply and the private market seeks to meet the unsatisfied demand. Secondly, demand for different quality (presumably high quality) and content in education also contributes to growth of privatization.

The corporatization and marketization of the universities has its origins in neo-liberal politics that is premised on the assumption that the market can replace the democratic state as the primary producer of cultural logic and value. Neo-liberalism offers a market view of citizenship that is generally antithetical to rights, especially to state-guaranteed rights in education, welfare, health and other public goods (Chubb & Moe, 2000). The citizen is defined as an economic maximizer, governed by self-interest. There is a glorification of the consumer citizen', construed as willing, resourced and capable of making market-led choices. In this new market state, the individual (rather than the nation) is held responsible for her or his own well-being. The state's role is one of facilitator and enabler of the consumer and market-led citizen (Rutherford, 2005). This neo-liberal position is fundamentally Hobbesian in character (i.e., selfish and uncivilized competition), hence creating privatized citizens who care primarily for themselves. The privatized, consumer-led citizenry of the neoliberal model are reared on a culture of insecurity that induces anxiety, competition, and indifference to those more vulnerable than themselves (Rawls, 2012).

Forms and Types of Privatization in Higher Education

Privatization is one of the main global trends in higher education. Aspects of privatization include the development and expansion of private institutions, increased reliance of public institutions on private funding, and the operation of the institutions in a businesslike manner (Holzhacker, Chornoivan, Yazilitas, & Dayan-Ochir, 2009). The different countries' experiences are quite

different from each other, which helps illustrate different aspects of privatization. Some governments are actively involved in the regulation of privatization; others allow higher education institutions and independent agencies to regulate their activities; still others leave regulation to the market.

The most widespread forms of privatization in developing and post-communist countries are private higher education institutions, with a particular focus on proprietary institutions and cost recovery mechanisms: tuition and fees, and student loans.

Researchers and practitioners recognize the following forms of privatization.

Purely Private Institutions

In many parts of the world (for example Africa and post-communist Europe), private education is a recent phenomenon. The private sector includes non-profit institutions as well as for-profit or proprietary ones. Proprietary institutions with their market-driven and profit-seeking behavior, centralized and businesslike management systems and weakened academic culture are considered to be the pure form of privatization.

Moderate Privatization of Higher Education (Privatization as Cost-Sharing)

The cost of higher education may be fully or partially shifted from the state to the consumer, who pays tuition. In a parallel process, the state decreases direct funding to institutions and increases student financial aid. Thus, there are two forms of cost-sharing: cost recovery and delayed payment. Cost recovery is the tuition and fees students pay for their education; delayed payment is state support through loans and scholarships, which students later repay.

Privatization of Services at Public Institutions

Privatization of services is a phenomenon that has not yet spread around the world. In this model, institutions contract with private agencies for the delivery of various services, such as vending, food, laundry, travel, bookstores, entertainment, and health care. The reasons for outsourcing include financial (cost containment and revenue acquisition) quality improvement, equipment (technological expertise), human resources and staffing solutions, and safety.

Publicly Financed Privatization

Voucher schemes for student financial aid, which are being implemented in many countries including Uganda where there is Master Card in universities like Makerere. The principle of the money following the student levels the playing field between public and private institutions in their competition for students. Public money can also finance research, student loans, and grants at private institutions

Although countries differ in the significance of privatization, it occurs to some degree in all of them. Equally, all these forms of privatization have their supporters and opponents, and solving some problems may give rise to

others. However, it is worth to note that there is a growing importance of the private sector in higher education globally.

Universities and other higher education institutions have marketed themselves in the public sphere and justified public funding for their activities on the grounds that they serve the public good. They have traded on their enlightenment inheritance that they are the guardians and creators of knowledge produced for the greater good of humanity in its entirety and are seen and claim to be seen as the watchdogs for the free interchange of ideas in a democratic society. They claim to work to protect freedom of thought, including the freedom to dissent from prevailing orthodoxies and are quintessentially defined as public interest institutions where their research is granted status and credibility on the basis of its disinterestedness (Lieberwitz, 2004).

Factors Responsible for Privatization of Higher Education

Various authors have explained the emergence of private universities in different environments. Typically, the rationale for the existence of private universities is explained in terms of: a) the demand for more education (Yee & Ghee, 1995); demand for better education especially by the elites who seek a social advantage and considers public universities a failure (Pike, 1991); demand for different education because what the state is providing is inadequate and private universities would emerge to meet such specific demands. Groups that could demand this type of education are religious, cultural or those who require special courses (Levy, 1986a).

In the case of Uganda, private universities emerged in 1988 and were accelerated by a number of factors, namely;

Population Increase

Increase in population that was not matched by state expansion of new universities or the capacity of Makerere University to absorb more students. Privatization in education has increased the opportunities by increasing the scope of admissions at all levels of education.

Donor Demands for Structural Adjustment

There has been the requirement by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that Sub-Saharan African countries such as Uganda should adopt certain policies known as structural adjustments. Between 1987 and 2000, Uganda underwent seven major structural adjustment operations that called for among other things, the removal of subsidies from higher education, cost sharing in university education, private provision of schooling at all levels, and the diversification of funding from university education to primary education as a condition to borrow money, which led to a decline in government funds to support public universities (Ochwa-Echel, 2013).

Increased Enrolment at Lower School Level

The government of Uganda's introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 doubled primary enrollment. The introduction of

universal primary education was followed by the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2007, and this action further increased the number of potential applicants for university entrance (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

Thus, private universities in Uganda as in other parts of the developing countries emerged primarily to absorb the excess demand for higher education institutions that the state was not able to meet or provide and addressing specific interest group education/career needs.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Privatization of Higher Education

Advantages

In an examination of privatization as a necessary strategy for higher education, it is a means for responding to pressures generated from the outside but also from the inside; and if pursued carefully, with a clear understanding of the process, it can also be a means for crafting structures and procedures more consistent with professional academic inheritances.

Certainly, the special ideal qualities of a university as the home of independent thought, and the place where the outcomes of such thought are openly circulated, require certain vigilance. Overall, the pilot privatization ventures have had positive results, including the following:

The management of the institution has become more accountable and creative in an effort to attain what seems best as each seeks to stand out of the crowd.

The quality of education has improved significantly as institutions strive for excellence so that they attract more students.

Teachers are more committed because they have a better work environment and higher salaries, including annual bonuses and periodic salary increases.

The management pays attention to the professional development of teachers. For example, some teachers in some specialties can be sponsored such that they acquire more skills and use them to the benefit of the university.

Operation of public sector enterprises is considered inefficient. It is believed that private ownership and control are more efficient in terms of resource allocation and work.

Privatization of higher education has helped in absorbing some of the numbers of students whom the public universities could not accommodate.

Higher education in Uganda is in financial stress. The government can no longer bear the financial burden of public enterprises. Therefore, there is a need to evolve policy through which private resources can be mobilized.

Growing number of schools has naturally pushed the demand for higher education which the government is not able to provide; therefore, demand for privatization of higher education is the need of the hour.

As much as private universities have some degree of autonomy, they are by and large governed by the National Council for Higher Education to the extent that they fulfill the national human resource goals. Also, as much as there

are some deviations in terms of education content, the activities of private higher education institutes culminate into varied solutions to society's needs.

Privatization of higher education provides autonomy to institutions and there will be less dependency on the government. This has removed political interference in areas of administration, management and finance. Instead of letting the politicians decide what students should learn, the private institutions of higher education can design customized curricula that will benefit the needs of the community.

Over the years education has been considered as a free public good thereby devaluing education. Privatization of education where the recipient will bear the full cost will help to bring greater responsibility in them. As a consequence, students are likely to demand greater efficiency and quality in teaching (Gaille, 2019).

Disadvantages

The following are some of the problems and disadvantages related to privatization of higher education:

The criteria and requirements for establishing a new higher education institution are weak, which makes it too easy for institutions to be established. This has led to situations whereby some universities do not meet the required academic standards or they meet the required standards but fall short of the moral and social responsibility of raising good and dependable citizens.

In some newly established universities with limited resources, there have been instances where teachers lack experience, and there are no in-service training or professional development courses offered for university teachers and administrators to achieve the required experience.

Salaries vary widely. At one university, teachers are paid highly, while at another, salaries are low and irregular. This has led to increased staff turnover in some universities, affecting the quality of learning as management has to take time to get replacements.

Private institutions bear the burden of high taxes imposed by the government, including income taxes, value added tax (VAT) and forceful subscription to certain bodies – some of which are quite irrelevant to the life of the university.

Vague government policies and procedures have led to poor implementation of some privatization projects.

Governments do not have the ability to properly evaluate and monitor the performance of privatized institutions. Monitoring and evaluation guidelines for the privatization process are generally low.

It has also been noted that the modern world of competition for markets and reputation has led to exaggerated claims on outputs, learning outcomes and productivity gains that are shallowly measured by what is now termed metrics.

In order to formalize and regulate the higher education sector in Uganda, the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001 set up the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE, 2001) as a regulatory agency,

with a mission to set standards and regulations to ensure that all public and private tertiary education institutions in Uganda create, sustain, and provide relevant and quality higher education for all qualified Ugandans and to meet the local, national and global higher education challenges.

However, as much as the NCHE has tried to ensure that all institutions offer quality education by use of harmonized curriculum and education policies, it has been realized that graduates from private universities are not recognized as those from public universities, during job selection and even at some workplaces. Similarly, sometimes, staffs from some private institutions of higher education get looked down upon by people who think they are not well qualified and cannot compete with people from the public universities.

This view is similar with Sawyer's (2004) claim that public universities remain the destination of choice in all African countries because of their standing and prestige, and private universities not being competitive with the public universities for students, their role being mostly a supplementary one of absorbing the spillover from the pool of fully qualified but unsuccessful applicants to the public universities Rawls (2012).

Regarding the quality concerns, the instruction is also due to who the instructor is. Most of the faculty lecturers are people who teach at the public universities, and moonlight at the private universities as a way to earn additional income to meet their family's needs. However, sharing lecturers comes at a cost to the private universities, since these lecturers are rarely able to devote the attention and time required to create a learning environment of appropriate quality.

In addition, most of the courses/programs offered at these universities are so theoretical, and are not necessarily relevant to the current job market. The curriculum is very much reflective of the pre/ post-independence curriculum, which were designed to produce civil servants, and yet the liberalization of the economy has meant that there are very few public service positions for civil servants.

There are also very many similarities in courses/programs across universities both public and private, which makes for very stiff competition for students in a very small market. In addition, the curriculum being offered is not very relevant to the needs of the country, and is not skills- driven to be able to compete for global participation. The problem with the curriculum is not only at private universities but it is a national problem. Uganda, as a country, needs to consider reforming the entire educational system (New Vision, 2013; Uganda National Council of Higher Education, 2012).

The curriculum (curricula) offered does not depend on the philosophies, missions, and values of some private universities. For instance, courses offered are not responsive to the missions of some universities.

Quality related issues have also been one of the most serious concerns in higher education. No doubt there has been proliferation but this has possibly been accompanied with evil of compromising quality. There have been serious

issues of quality in all three parameters namely, inputs, process and output. Majority of them are internal issues relating to motivation, university management style among others. Regulators primarily focus on input aspects and those too quantitative parameters like number of faculties, required quantum of infrastructure, among others. Much less emphasis is laid on ensuring quality issues in processes and resultant quality of final products and their acceptability in the job market place and society at large. The globally prevalent mechanism of enhancing quality through self-regulation and accreditation is possibly the need of hour (Hill, 2005).

Apart from providing basic hygiene factors in terms of physical facilities that include residential, computing, and library facilities among others, this also includes creation of an academic ambience suitable for bringing out implicit talent of the faculty. However, a number of the basic hygiene factors are virtually non-existent or grossly inadequate in some universities. The classrooms in most private Universities are barely adequate and conducive for learning; there are no provisions for group learning / work; there is no or scarce budget for buying good books; the books that are available are neither the recent ones, nor contain current information. More than sixty per cent of the institutes do not have hostels / residential facilities that are imperative not only for extended classroom teaching but also for beyond-classroom socialization process. The computing facilities, particularly the Internet, play a very important role in facilitating the knowledge dissemination.

Inadequate research orientation at some institutions of higher education is the other critical issue. This is crucial in two ways. Firstly, output of research becomes input for classroom teaching enhancing effectiveness of learning process. And secondly, it provides a good opportunity to students who along with lecturers can understand and dissect real life issues. As a result of the above factors, mediocrity among faculty fraternity has become a common place phenomenon. This may result in creation of mediocre outputs by some institutions (Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2014).

Although the goal of the privatization of education is to lower the costs for each community, the opposite impact usually occurs especially in institutions of higher education. The only way it can be cheaper is if there are organizations already prepared to step in to take over part or the whole funding responsibility. It is not unusual for the expenses of a public institution of higher learning to be less than 60% of what is charged in a private institution of higher education. This implies that the poor may not afford to attend the desired education from a private institution and will resort to a public institution which may offer a lower cost but the student fails to do the desired course.

As much as some private institutions of higher education offer high quality education in order to attract more students, some of these institutions aim at profits and compromise on quality of education given to the students.

It undermines equity, diversity and transparency in admissions as the main focus is money as opposed to the government institutions that consider regional balance, gender balance and special needs aspects during admission.

It may be difficult to have a well-balanced approach to passing on civic, democratic, social and economic values to the student, which may lead to academic excellence without soul

Private institutions have also been blamed for favoritism in such a way that they favor students from either their religious affiliation, family, race, political ideology and those that do not belong in such categories are sidelined.

Recommendations

The following can however, serve as remedies to the challenges caused by private higher institutions of learning;

Instead of yielding to the pressures to simply service the market, and to import its values and methods unquestioningly into higher education, universities both collectively and individually are in a powerful position to challenge the new neo-liberal orthodoxies. Academics have the space and the capability to work collaboratively to create strong alliances and networks not only among themselves but also with the entire civil society sector whose interests are so central to the public interest, and whom the universities have a duty to serve. This will revive the soul of higher education from the economic forces and the drive for excellence in order to acquire names.

The university operates in a complex cultural location in many respects. It is at the one time a product of cultural practice and a creator of culture and also it is a powerful interest and a creator of interests. There is a sense in which its intellectual independence is always at risk, given its reliance on external funding from many sources, and yet its history grants it the capability to reclaim its own independence. To maintain its independence, the university needs to declare its distance from powerful interest groups, be these statutory, professional or commercial. Maintaining a critical distance from the institutions of power in society is vital if one is to protect the public interest role of the university.

As the world has become increasingly dependent on higher education to drive the social, political, cultural and economic infrastructure of society, access to higher education is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for survival. We need to challenge the neo-liberal agenda in education, not least because higher education is increasingly a necessity for the majority but also bear in mind the relevance to society and need to carry on the values of higher education.

Conclusion

University education is necessary if countries and societies have to progress. In Uganda, this used to be a privilege of few who were chanced to enroll in only the public university until 1980s. The role of private universities cannot be underestimated although this does not mean that they do not have any challenges.

The pros and cons of privatization of higher education serve as eye openers to base on as decisions are made by government, civil society, individual families and societies on what works best in the interest of the student, the university, society and country at large. Further examination indicates that there must be integrity from each stakeholder for the education process to be beneficial to all parties.

It can also be said that as much as the private sector is seen as being morally and ethically better than public services, deeper analysis may reveal that both government aided and private institutions of higher learning can give a similar result if government through institutions like NCHE can set up policies and standards whose implementation can be efficiently and effectively monitored and evaluated.

As stated by Harry Lewis (2006) that the College's most engaged and proactive deans, should be determined to sustain the College's mission, and not simply to manage or market it.

Privatization of higher education is necessary but it needs a lot of government and civil society intervention to promote quality education and to protect the consumers of education from exploitation and compromise of the purpose of higher education.

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