

Trends in Global Higher Education

Introduction

Global higher education can be defined in a variety of ways and may be understood in different manners in different contexts. One working definition is as follows: global higher education implies effective education in the present era of globalization. Global education is therefore at all times impacted by the continuously mutating features of the broader economic and cultural processes, which are now commonly termed, globalization.

Globalization is an ongoing process of modernity, it is not a system and not an ideology. As such, it develops in an environment of uncertainty, risk, and volatility. Moreover, its development is occurring at unprecedented rates of speed, scope and magnitude. Globally, an advanced level of rationalization and integration is paralleled by an unbalanced degree of chaos and disintegration.

"In a 2004 report, UNESCO stressed that the role of higher education has increased as a key factor in stimulating sustained economic development in countries with knowledge-intensive and information societies, emphasizing that larger sections of the population need to acquire advanced levels of knowledge and skills"¹.

The report also clarified that: "institutions of higher education need to provide their graduates with competencies and skills that will enable them to adapt to the requirements of the knowledge economy, including: academic capacities (e.g., specialist training, critical thinking, problem solving), personal and social development skills (e.g., self-confidence, motivation, moral and ethical values, and broad understanding of the world), and entrepreneurial skills (e.g., leadership and team work abilities, and computer and other technology skills)"².

¹ M. Bastedo *et al.*, *Educational Policies for Integrating College Competencies and Workforce Needs*, Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), Washington 2009, p. 2.

² *Ibidem*.

Global versus national

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Within the scenario of global education, there is from the start, a gap between the fast progress of international global change and the very slow reaction of existing national educational systems. National systems have much that could be reinvented; their states' managerial capabilities are challenged and stressed. The integrative and disintegrative aspects of globalization mean also an erosion of the national stature of administrative entities, as primary reference points for education, on multiple fronts. The tension between globalization and extant institutions creates a contradictory and chaotic environment for the education of young adults; participants constantly find themselves running up against barriers, both academic and administrative. Structural 'national' resistance is often the most significant barrier.

Education systems are firstly national systems. These systems find themselves at conflict with both the disruptive and constructive developments produced by new, unexpected phenomena, which have been typical of the recent decades of globalization. This situation makes the reality of effective higher education nearly unmanageable, within the national framework. Moreover, the available education systemic instruments may quickly become obsolete, inappropriate, or unusable.

For these higher education systems, being national means the system was constructed in the era of nation-state formation, according to visions and missions crucial and valuable for those centuries. That time is now a historical, ancient era. The assets of the past are liabilities in the present. What matters now is that these systems find themselves boxed into a confining national structure: the structure is both bureaucratic and also philosophical. Higher educational systems of the past centuries were constructed and based on systemic principles and structures, and not on processes. Therefore, they are static (or terribly slow to adapt), unable to match modern society's changes, and incapable of providing solutions to 21st century needs in a timely manner.

Thus, global education does not exist for those many states where higher education is presided over by entrenched state administrators; it only has a potential to exist in the future. However, globalization does exist absolutely, and continues to define the foreseeable future; it is already dictating current society progress. Furthermore, it has already built up a history for our consideration.

Global education, or better, the role of higher education, has emerged as a crucial and strategic key issue around the world, both in developed and in developing countries. The knowledge society characterizes today's world, knowledge has become the core strategic production factor. This kind of society requires both vertical and horizontal management of strategic knowledge. The production of knowledge, and its transfer, requires people and institutions that are capable of reaching excellence and innovation.

Thus, higher education in the era of globalization, presents several specific characteristics with ramifications reaching into the broader social con-

text, and therefore it is subject to intense political debate and articulated theoretical speculation.

Private versus public

The issue of “public” versus “private” (in reality this implies state versus market support), also known as the “public/private divide” is certainly one of the major questions under discussion. This division is traditionally based upon the principle of legal identity and ownership of an institution, a clear heritage of the 19th century national state culture. Today, this traditional definition transported into the arena of globalization appears substantially obsolete. Moreover, it is hard to contextualize, too problematic to be workable. Most of all, it impedes integrative practices in society at large.³

The identification of a “public” higher education institution, based upon the state ownership of that institution, has become reductive and incoherent in practice. Furthermore, such identification appears to be conceptually contradictory in 21st century liberal-democratic societies. The scope of higher education has been transformed, significantly across many academic sectors, and deeply into relevant players. These processes reflect (often anticipate), broader trends of society development. The current society presents a developmental path characterized by cluster configurations; a path determined by global dynamics in terms of process and progress.

Therefore the qualifiers of “public” and “private”, applied to higher education, are becoming inadequate for describing the 21st century reality; in fact, many institutions have mutated beyond these two separate identities. The so called “private” sector at large, with its articulations and procedures, has been rapidly diversifying. (See for example the case of training schools, professional retraining schools, and permanent-continuing education). Finally, the private sector has been assuming more prominence and relevance within the arena of education itself, and the greater society.

The increasing prominence of the private sector happened under the almost equal impact of globalization upon the public and private sector. We can see it when looking at the world scenario, taking under equal consideration developed and developing countries. Public and private sectors continue to coexist in higher education. What is changing is their configuration and their traditionally stable nature. They have entered an era of uncertainty.

The two sectors are also interacting with each other at an unprecedented fashion and pace. Therefore, it may be useful to adopt a more flexible and articulated approach when defining “private” and “public”, and when defining their role amongst the numerous players (or stakeholders) of differing importance and duration. In fact, on one hand, many players are participat-

³ S. Marginson, *The Public/Private Divide in Higher Education in the Global Era*, Higher Education Colloquium, Association for Studies in Higher Education (ASHE), Philadelphia 2005, s. 18–19.

ing in the globalization of higher education. On the other hand, some institutions adapt, while others effectively refuse to adapt, to that globalization which continues to surround them.

This issue, of whether an institution is private or public, would be better approached from a different perspective: instead, focus squarely on the outcomes of higher education. The outcomes may be evaluated in terms of “public goods”. These goods might in fact be produced by the public and private sectors, or sometimes they may result from hybridization between the two. Public policy could seek to optimize interaction between public and private “goods” for the benefit of the global community, even across national boundaries; this is not the situation at present. Moreover, many players have impacted the field including: corporate business, finance, banks, insurance industry, service industry, logistics, and the transportation sector.

Workforce development

At the beginning of the 21st century, within the context of a newly created knowledge society, higher education has occupied a central position in the knowledge economy. Furthermore, it has become a core strategic factor in the production of tangible and intangible goods. Its role in the development of the workforce has become a key factor in globalized societies, both of developed and developing countries worldwide.

Higher education, as the factory of knowledge and the agent of knowledge transfer, has attracted increasing attention both from the market and the public sectors. The most advanced private and public players were the first to pay attention to, and then later to raise the issue of the traditional university’s capability in this mission of knowledge transfer. “Corporate universities”, “for profit universities”, and public-private educational and research consortia are examples of advanced educational players.

Primarily, the issue was, and still is, if universities actually are integrating new knowledge and adaptive capacities into the workforce. Are they preparing graduates with the necessary analytical skills to be: 1. immediately productive in the globalized market; 2. competitive in the dynamic economies; 3. capable to navigate globalized cultures?

A general growing interest in global education, generated by new economic and social conditions in the last few years, has driven academic, business, and political leaders to focus more attention on the role of higher education in workforce development and integration. All countries, independently from their level of achieved development and their differences, are confronting the challenge to adjust to an increasingly dynamic economy, to cope with expanding competition, and to manage unexpected levels of complexity and quality.

There are several complications within this scenario. Among players and stakeholders there is no consensus as to how to establish the specific re-

quired competencies for graduates entering the job market. In fact, in many countries there is a wide discrepancy between what universities teach students, and what the market expects from graduated students when they enter the workforce. This discrepancy produces a tension/conflict in the market based on the difficulty in balancing demands for specialized training, with needs for basic and applied academic skills⁴.

A further complication consists in establishing what would be the correct regulatory role of government in driving higher education institutions toward utilitarian results for the market and for the society. Public policy also is faced with the necessity of promoting increasing access to higher education. At the same time, the "state university" has to deal with the consequent overall decreasing academic preparation of this expanding pool of students⁵.

A major issue to be addressed is how specific academic programs would develop the academic and applied skills needed by a specific market. This implies the involvement of external stakeholders from the business community. They would be able to understand what is requested by the real world market, and which qualifications graduates should have in order to successfully enter the workforce.

College graduates seeking employment, should be able to offer a set of basic academic skills, which make them productive on the job from day one. Critical thinking and skill in mathematics, writing, and foreign languages, are all fundamental for a graduate to offer to the market (and society). Traditional (usually public) higher education has become detached from this reality, and is not fulfilling this mission. This happens in spite of the fact that many excellent universities exist in North America and Europe.

This situation is particularly evident in those countries where a state education monopoly survives, for it is now often inefficient, highly bureaucratic, and corrupt. A representative example of this is Italy, where the very governance itself, the decision making process, and the entire structure (of the university monopoly system) remains in the hands of an untouchable, unqualified, and corrupt cast of baron-professors⁶.

One example of workforce development, which is already in place in many systems, is the instrument called "internship". This is a valid procedure to expose students to direct experience in the workplace. With respect to internships, more work is needed in order to create accountability mechanisms, for both the university and the business. It is necessary to ensure that the internship instrument serves to engage the student in important functions. It should not be used to provide cheap labor for low compensation to a business, and it should not create frustrating and humiliating experiences

⁴ M. Bastedo *et al.*, *op. cit.*

⁵ *Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Paris 2007.

⁶ R. Perotti, *L'università truccata*, Einaudi, Torino 2008.

for the student. Internships should be organized by universities in close collaboration with businesses, and with student input. Businesses and organizations offering internships, should view internships as a long-term investment in creating professional links. Then, the internship may constitute a natural bridge from academic study to real-world work.

108 **Privatization process**

Escalating privatization of higher education has been a worldwide phenomenon for some time. Today, privatization is the dominant trend in global education. The process presents some well-defined and distinguishing features. First, new private universities, colleges, and schools are being founded. This is paralleled by the appearance of a variety of corporate-owned, professional, training centers, and the expansion of already existing private institutions. Second, we see increased collaboration between public institutions and private businesses, and escalating private funding of public institutions. Third, a business model is frequently adopted even by public institutions as they strategize for the future; this is apparent when looking at the administrative, academic, and increasingly non-academic activities being provided to students, which are all part of the development and income strategies of universities⁷.

The process of privatization, as it is unfolding (rapid and uncontrolled) assumes a variety of different forms and features. This in turn produces a cascade of new questions that should be addressed by different stakeholders and players in society, and presumably first of all by the state governments.

An important set of questions relates to the state (and academic) authorities and their regulatory roles. Governments respond (and are continuing to respond) in different ways to this challenge, from liberally favoring private education (e.g. Mongolia), to adamantly opposing it (e.g. Italy). We can recognize different strategies by governments in dealing with private education including: 1. government (with the state machine, ministries and offices) assumes direct control in regulatory and normative activity; 2. government allows independent players, agencies or academic entities, to act as regulators; 3. government leaves regulation to the free market. A combination of these options can also be found in some countries.

In Western Europe there is a relatively little presence of private education, while in Eastern Europe privatization or quasi-privatization is more common. In Asia, many governments opted for total or almost total privatization. The U.S.A. instead, is a relevant example of a fully developed system in which private and public higher education models are equally prominent.

⁷ *Privatization in Higher Education: Cross-Country Analysis and trends, Policies, Problems, and Solutions*, Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), Washington 2009, s. 1.

This system is widely acknowledged as being successful in satisfying global education expectations.

Problems, more inherent to private education itself, are of two kinds. First, proprietary (for-profit), as well as some non-profit, institutions are substantially business operations. This means they are based on a cost-recovery model that consists primarily of tuition and fees. They may also utilize other instruments such as student loans, voucher schemes, fund-raising, proposals to foundations, and a variety of services (from entertainment to vending), in order to increase revenue and reduce costs. Essentially, they are mining the market for students, and thus their revenue stream will be impacted quickly by changes in that market.

These private institutions, sometimes, can actually become complex structures in terms of economic and financial management. Management efficiency remains crucial to success. On one hand, it can impact negatively two vital elements of education: academic quality of the student body, and the qualifications of the faculty body. Entrance standards might be lowered in order to quickly increase student recruitment and retention. The faculty body might be transformed from permanently employed professors to non-tenured and less costly part-time faculty. Managerial (market) efficiency has its price, in several senses. In reality, academic standards are a delicate issue. Often, private education institutions are associated with lower quality in terms of teaching, curriculum, exams, and outcomes. In extreme cases fraud can be recorded, and a variety of non-validated, not accredited “Vanity Universities,” exist everywhere.

Conclusion

Higher education, and its general principles and procedures, are being implemented in different national contexts. The resistance of entrenched local and state interests in the present evolution of higher education (i.e. localism) is certainly a factor, in the implementation. National governments are encouraged to accept the challenge and to produce efforts to make their education systems relevant to the global scenario. Governments are encouraged to ensure that the skills of graduates do have some relevance to the needs of the market, and the graduates are promptly and consistently integrated with the needs of the national and global cultures and economies.

Global higher education implies the existence of multiple stakeholders working together: students, faculty, officials, policymakers, businessmen, politicians, and community leaders. All these players, interacting at national and international levels are shaping current developments in global higher education. Governments are reacting differently to the new challenges, unfortunately sometimes are more concerned that global education and privatization will further erode traditional academic and even national culture (indeed it might!).

The private sector in higher education is gaining increasing importance, on a global scale. In many countries, both higher education institutions, and governments, have a tradition, or what can be described as faith, in low-cost public higher education. Thus, they can hardly conceive of an alternate model. Global higher private education is expanding ambiguously (in a contradictory way), and higher public education is ambiguously facing increasing challenges. Meanwhile, the costs of private and public education, both direct costs to the student and family and the indirect costs, are escalating... a pattern seen across many countries. Perhaps, a new way of conceptualizing the support of higher education systems, is urgently needed now.

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Streszczenie

Trendy globalne w zakresie szkolnictwa wyższego

Artykuł koncentruje się na problematyce globalnych i lokalnych wyznaczników procesu edukacji. Autor wskazuje i opisuje w nim potrzeby w zakresie wsparcia rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego, odnosząc się do założeń raportu UNESCO z 2004 roku, precyzującego kompetencje i zdolności, które winny zostać wykształcone na poziomie edukacji wyższej. Analizuje wymiary i wyznaczniki edukacji – globalny vs narodowy, prywatny vs publiczny, wskazując ich wzajemne zależności, eksponując tezę, iż system edukacji pierwotnie jest systemem narodowym. Wskazując rolę kształcenia wyższego we współczesnym świecie – produkcja wiedzy, transmisja wiedzy i jej integracja – autor określa wymiary dyskusji dotyczącej publicznej i prywatnej edukacji, eksponując podstawowe aspekty i wymiary koegzystencji i wzajemnego uzupełniania się obu sektorów.

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