

ferences in how states view their for-profit sectors in terms of information policy, regulation, financial aid policy, and level of involvement in state higher education planning.

While not able to gather sufficient data to validate nuanced policy posture constructs, we could determine that states fall into two broad categories—displaying either *laissez faire* or *active* policies in regard to the degree to which they pay attention to for-profit higher education. There are serious measurement problems here, and most of our research had to rely on incomplete and sometimes impressionistic information gleaned from Web sites, selected phone interviews, and national data gathered for other purposes. We used definitions and distinctions that were found plausible given the information available rather than strictly defined and fully measured variables. After estimating the number of resident-in-state enrollments in for-profits in 2000 and 2010 (i.e., excluding primarily online enrollments in cases where the state of the student's residence cannot be determined), our fairly confident statement is that

Using a variety of sources, we documented state policies toward for-profit institutions across several dimensions, to the extent possible given data limitations.

states that display *active policy* tend to be more populous, to have larger for-profit sector enrollment shares, and greater policy capacity. These states also showed significantly larger percentage growth in their for-profit enrollments relative to *laissez-faire* states. Rates of for-profit enrollment growth across the states, at least in the boom period of 2000–2010, did not seem to be influenced by the contextual variables that influence nonprofit and public sector growth—i.e., state population growth or unemployment rates.

THESE RELATIONSHIPS

One possible conclusion is that, as initially hypothesized, state policy accounts for some of the variation in for-profit enrollment growth across states. Yet, there is also another possibility. Perhaps the causal arrow points the other way—the growth comes first and then elicits what Daniel C. Levy calls “reactive regulation,” (i.e., active policy). Certainly, as the sector grows, policymakers may feel responsibility (and political pressure) to monitor it, perhaps seek to regulate it (i.e., for quality assurance or at least consumer protection), or utilize it to expand limited state educational capac-

ity cheaply, and seek to further state workforce development goals. Private institutions, whether for-profit or nonprofit, surely have a role to play in meeting state and national needs for more educated people, if they provide a quality product. So, one needs to better understand the workings of policy systems in their sphere and the relationship of these workings to results. Enrollments, of course, are only a readily documented outcome of interest and perhaps not the most important one. ■

Inside African Private Higher Education: Contradictions and Challenges

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It would be erroneous to suggest that all quality challenges reside in the private higher education sector in low-income countries. Unfunded expansion and overall lack of human and material resources are also enemies of quality and standards throughout the public sector. However, it is pertinent to focus on the rapidly expanding private sector as now, worldwide. The rising social hunger for higher education and fiscal constraints have meant that the state, in many national locations, can no longer meet demands; and the private sector is seen as a response to capacity challenges in both developed and developing countries.

The market ideology of the private sector is often perceived as a contradiction to the core values of education for all, and critics fear that it will contribute to elite formation and social exclusions. Fears have tended to focus on the commodification of knowledge, the changing ethos, curriculum and values of higher education, a possible abdication of state responsibility, and the belief that new providers are compromising quality and standards by producing poorly regulated diploma mills. The private sector is also conceptualized as a threat to social diversity and equality of opportunity, with the potential to exclude students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA AND TANZANIA

In a recent empirical study of Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania (<http://www.sus->

sex.ac.uk/wphegt/), it was found that private higher education played a contradictory role in widening access and opportunities. The project was a mixed-methods study of two public and two private universities. Two-hundred life history interviews with students explored their experiences of primary, secondary, and higher education, and their future plans and aspirations. Two-hundred university staff and policymakers were interviewed about barriers and enablers for nontraditional students. The project produced statistical data on participation patterns presented in Equity Scorecards and collected evidence to build theory about sociocultural aspects of higher education in Ghana and Tanzania. The three main structures of inequality included in the Equity Scorecards were gender, socioeconomic status, and age.

One striking finding was the different way in which quality and standards in the private universities were represented by staff and students. Staff often stressed quality and expansive facilities and resources, whereas many students reported lack and deficit—especially in relation to information and communications technologies and library facilities. The sense of massification was also widely discussed by students, with reports of between 800 and 1,000 students in some classes. Spatial injustices led to cognitive injustices, according to the students who argued that these lecturer/student ratios unequalized their opportunities, to learn and participate in any meaningful manner in the classroom.

The area that appeared to attract the most concern was assessment. This was frequently reported by students in the vocabulary of instability and unfairness. It was also seen as a major relay of power, with the potential for corruption, exploitation, and sexual harassment. For example, the lack of quality-assessment procedures, including double-marking, meant that some unscrupulous lecturers offered to enhance grades in return for sexual or monetary favors. In spite of paying private-sector fees, students tended to lack basic consumer rights—including the existence of grade criteria and service-level agreements and the right to appeal. Students complained that they never know why they received particular grades; and when they sought explanations, they were told to make a formal complaint. However, when they tried to complain, there were no procedures or even forms to complete. There were narratives of chaotic timetabling of examinations, with some students scheduled to write two examinations at the same time. The result, of course, was failure. Assessment exemplified some of the tensions when educational matters collide with financial considerations—with several students reporting how they were evicted from exams or refused access to their examination results for non- or late-payment fees.

LOSSES AND GAINS

While many students complained about their private universities in terms of the second-class status and services, others saw these institutions as providing an opportunity structure for those who had been failed by the state. In their view, any access to higher education was better than none at all as it facilitated them “becoming a somebody,” with positional advantage and the potential for long-term material rewards. This was especially noticeable in students from poor, rural communities, who were motivated to enter higher education as it represented an escape from poverty. More women and mature students were also entering the two private universities, than the two public universities studied—again raising questions about whether the private sector is opening up new opportunities for formerly excluded social groups. Or, indeed another question is whether less socially privileged students are getting diverted into less prestigious institutions.

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The development of private higher education raises questions about values—for money and how students are valued. Does the private sector represent enhanced, demand-led opportunities, market opportunism, or a complex combination of opportunity and exploitation? It seems as if the symbolic power of being a university student in countries that sometimes have only 1 percent of participation rate compensates for all the shortcomings experienced in private universities. Many of the students in these universities were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and had a history of being failed by the education sector. However, it seems that many private universities are operating way below minimal quality standards, with no sense of student entitlements or service-level agreements. This urgently needs to change in order to halt the vicious circle of poverty, low expectations of educational institutions, and low standards of delivery. ■