DOI:10.48047/intjecse/v18i3.1 ISSN: 1308-5581 Vol 18, Issue 03 2026

Diagnosing the negative roles of public universities in their dealings with private universities

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Abstract:

Haphazard and ill-conceived government policies that disregard the needs of public universities contribute to two main problems: First, they push students to seek opportunities at private universities, which in turn pressures the latter to increase student numbers at the expense of quality. This negative impact is evident in the absence of an integrated system that effectively supports the private sector, creates a fair competitive environment, and ensures quality education nationwide. The main obstacle facing most public universities is the creation of artificial hurdles in the area of partnerships, and they may resort to blackmail and materialistic practices to achieve what they consider their own self-interest and financial gain. This study discusses past and present observations regarding the role of public universities in hindering the progress and collaboration of private universities by creating obstacles that negatively impact academic performance. The interaction of official scientific and research institutions can lead to the development of the overall academic performance of society, regardless of its source, and this is what we aspire to.

Keyword: Education, private, public universities, fail, roles.

Introduction:

Public universities sometimes fail to offer a diverse range of academic disciplines and struggle under the weight of ever-increasing student numbers, while private education plays a pivotal—though sometimes flawed—role in providing greater educational opportunities.

Private education in the Arab world has expanded significantly over the past several decades, according to John Waterbury, a former president of the American University of Beirut, a non-profit institution. Waterbury, who has studied the region's major public universities, said that in countries with limited budgets, such as Egypt and Lebanon, "public education systems are in crisis, struggling with underfunding and overwhelmed by large student numbers." He added that, generally speaking, they provide a low-quality education.

This declining quality of education is leading governments to quietly relinquish their educational role and embrace the private sector. Waterbury said, "The expansion of private education really represents the government authorities' frustrated and desperate resignation, saying, 'Let someone else try.'"

Now, a range of private universities are proliferating in the region, from non-profit institutions offering a Western-style education to for-profit institutions of questionable credibility and universities with religious affiliations. While most students continue to flock to the public education system, the number of private universities in many countries across the Arab world exceeds the number of public ones.

However, Tunisia remains a bastion. Private education there remains limited, according to Waterbury. Algeria has no private universities at all due to legislative restrictions. And Morocco still has only five private universities compared to thirteen public institutions with high student enrollment rates.

But rapid growth in some other countries has sometimes led to harsh regulatory reactions, as governments have realized they need to keep a close eye on private institutions. The questionable quality of education at some of Yemen's 55 private educational institutions prompted the government's Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance Council to begin reviewing these institutions in 2012 in an effort to raise quality standards. "Most private universities don't have professional academic staff and rely on professors from public universities," said Ahmed Alwan, a member of the Council, which oversees both public and private universities in Yemen. "In addition, many of them use the same curricula as public universities, so they offer the same programs with the same professors, but at higher salaries."

As in Iraq, private universities in Egypt offer smaller class sizes and allow students with lower grades to study majors they cannot pursue at public universities due to the intense competition for places.

This has, of course, produced clear economic benefits. This prevents some students from abandoning their studies altogether and going abroad. “This way, they stay in the country and the money stays here,” said Ali Shams El-Din, president of Benha University, a public university in Egypt.

In Kuwait, there are nine private universities compared to one public one. Private universities educate nearly half of all university students, according to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education.

Doha Hajeri enrolled at the private American University in Kuwait because it allows co-education and because the language of instruction is English, which she prefers given her previous education in international schools. “Students usually prefer private universities because they offer more activities and have a larger number of qualified foreign professors,” she said.

Private universities are a preferred alternative for some Arab families who do not want to send their daughters to study abroad without a male relative accompanying them. “I enrolled in a private university because I wanted to study pharmacy, which isn’t cheap, but I don’t have any other option,” said Huda Al-Yousef, a second-year student at Zarqa University in Jordan. “I can’t travel abroad on my own.”

Despite the advantages, academics say that private universities can suffer from inconsistent quality standards. Students often complain that they are expensive.

Challenges Facing Higher Education in Iraq and Paths to Improving its Quality.

It cannot be denied that higher education in Iraq has made significant strides, in terms of the number of universities and institutes, the diversity of specializations at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the number of students attending or wishing to pursue higher education. A comparison between the current state of Iraqi higher education and its state fifty years ago clearly favors it. However, this does not mean it is without challenges and difficulties that must be acknowledged and addressed before they worsen and

become chronic problems that undermine its quality standards or transform it into a negative factor in building the state and society.

Key directions for reforming higher education include:

1-Restructuring the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in terms of its various departments and specializations.

2. Focusing on strengthening the autonomy of universities in general and protecting academic freedom and the sanctity of the university campus.

3. Continuously emphasizing the promotion of security and stability within universities and higher education institutions, and distancing them from local, racist, and extremist politics that are alien to the academic environment.

4. Developing curricula and programs for various disciplines to meet future expectations and the community's need for diverse scientific, professional, and administrative expertise that addresses the actual needs of a growing society. - Adopting a clear and wise policy for coordination with private colleges and universities to ensure a comprehensive vision for both sectors and avoid unnecessary duplication in the establishment of new colleges or specializations.

5- Enhancing the status of scientific research and elevating it by linking it to the needs of the local community and providing all means of support to facilitate it, including funding and access to knowledge resources such as information networks, libraries, and the internet.

Challenges of university education:

There are a number of challenges facing our university education, as noted by many working in this sector. However, these challenges are sometimes downplayed or not discussed for various reasons. Among the most prominent of these challenges are the following:

The first challenge: The wide gap between the outputs of university education and the inputs of government employment.

By this gap, we mean the percentage of graduates who are officially employed compared to the total number of graduates from universities, both public and private.

To determine this gap, we consulted official reports and data issued by Iraqi government institutions, including the Central Statistical Organization of the Ministry of Planning. This organization provided information on the number of students admitted to and graduated from undergraduate and postgraduate studies (Master's and PhD), but only for the years 2015-2020. This data does not include the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, nor the governorates that were considered "hot spots" at the time due to the fight against terrorist organizations, namely: Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Anbar, and Kirkuk. - Iraqi university education is constantly and increasingly fueling unemployment due to its expanding base resulting from the continuous establishment of more universities, colleges, and public and private institutes, while the public and private labor markets are unable to adequately absorb the graduates.

There are enormous numbers of unemployed graduates, both undergraduate and postgraduate, across various disciplines, working in jobs unrelated to their degrees. This means that the Iraqi government and families have spent vast sums of money and exerted strenuous efforts for many years on an education system that is not truly needed.

Unemployed and underdeveloped young graduates have become a far more destructive and negative force in society than their non-graduate peers who can work in available jobs without the psychological barrier of a degree. This suggests that our university education system, in its current form, may become a threat to the security and stability of the state and society in the future. Because feelings of disappointment and frustration among young people make them easily susceptible to radical and extremist ideas and movements, as was the case with Nazi and chauvinistic movements in the past, and as is happening with populist and far-right movements today. Fear of the future and job insecurity are dangerous threats to social peace.

The dominance of quantitative over qualitative criteria in shaping our educational policy stems from the continued opening of scientific specializations that are not needed in the labor market, or the excessive allocation of students beyond the capacity of universities and the actual needs of the job market. This is not limited to humanities disciplines but extends to

scientific fields, including medicine. The absence of sound planning and fruitful cooperation between the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has led public universities and investors to establish numerous colleges and departments within the same specialization. This is the case with law, pharmacy, and other specializations that were once in demand but have since become a burden on the job market.

The second challenge is the instability of educational policy.

For institutions to succeed and develop, they need a clear, stable, and long-term policy for their management, organization, and the definition of their short-term and long-term goals. The clarity, stability, and consistency of this policy help create a cohesive system of norms, values, and functional controls for its leaders and employees. This enables them to understand their institutions' directions, grasp their vision, mission, and objectives, and then develop plans, programs, and activities to ensure their achievement.

Unfortunately, this important principle has not been respected or implemented within the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research—regardless of the reasons. Consequently, the ministry's directions and those of its other departments change from one minister to the next, as there is no integration between the work of previous and subsequent ministers and university leaders in defining the ministry's strategy, its management methods, its organizational structure, and how to achieve its vision and objectives.

Third challenge: A degree is the primary criterion for employment in these institutions, as in other government institutions, without considering experience or personal qualifications. Consequently, our universities are saturated with a large number of unqualified employees and contractors. Even the one-year requirement for permanent employment is often disregarded or overlooked.

In addition to this flaw in the employment system, another problem is the acceptance of an excessive number of employees, far exceeding the needs of universities, particularly faculty members. This includes those hired through the Federal Civil Service Commission and those transferred from other government ministries. This has disrupted the work of these institutions, forcing their administrative leadership to focus primarily on providing teaching loads for these large numbers, rather than on their development,

training, and monitoring of their suitability for the work. Such a system of employment in university institutions is unsuitable for maintaining and advanteges.

Improving university education in Iraq requires serious steps toward its development by influential leaders in both the government and the private sector. The anticipated steps toward this goal can be summarized as follows:

1. Decision-makers must believe that education is a top priority. The building of the state and society depends on this principle.

2. Focus should be placed on restructuring existing institutions to ensure qualitative and quantitative development that meets the demands of the labor market. Ensuring high quality and efficiency in their material and human resources is fundamental to this process.

3. University admission and registration systems should be continuously reviewed to align with students' interests and preferences, while also ensuring their academic level and accommodating individual differences.

4 - Putting an end to the confusion and chaos occurring in academic structures and the multiplicity of front centers issuing dilapidated and contradictory decisions at the same time.

5-. Educational and university institutions have suffered from this, and continue to suffer from it, which necessitates putting an end to it so that these institutions can focus on their professional function and fulfill their expected role, far removed from any political polarization.

Twinning and networking between Iraqi universities and their counterparts in developed countries is of paramount importance. This should not be limited to academic fellowships and joint scientific events, but should also focus on the exchange of students, lecturers, and researchers. The absence of foreign teaching and research staff in Iraqi universities, and the lack of exchange programs for students, has deprived our universities of the element of competition and the exchange of expertise and knowledge with the outside world, confining them to their local sphere and leaving them largely unaware of developments in developed countries.

We can say that the level of higher education in Iraq in the late 1970s was advanced compared to universities in the region, when there were only six

universities: Baghdad, Mustansiriya, Technology, Mosul, Basra, and Sulaimaniyah. However, the overall political situation was dire, with restrictions on academic freedoms for professors and years of sanctions and economic hardship imposed on these institutions, which crippled their ability to serve society and conduct scientific research. As a result of the deteriorating economic and living conditions, faculty members began to emigrate to other Arab countries and leave their universities in the 1980s and 1990s.

This deprives these institutions of their most experienced teaching and research personnel. The infrastructure necessary for developing higher education, including scientific libraries, laboratories, internet networks, and various information resources, has deteriorated. Much of it has been burned, completely destroyed, vandalized, or deliberately stolen to empty universities of their contents, such as references, books, research, and course materials across various disciplines. Entire graduate studies departments have been closed under the pretext of a lack of teaching staff.

The spread of corruption in its various administrative and financial forms, including nepotism, embezzlement of funds allocated to the education sector, forgery of certificates, and manipulation of grade records, is a major problem. This is achieved through pressure and blackmail on department heads and deans to award undeserved grades to underachieving students, or to undermine high-achieving students and manipulate their grades out of revenge and retaliation under various pretexts—political, sectarian, religious, and others. Weak coordination between private universities and colleges, on the one hand, and public universities and colleges, on the other, leads to confusion due to the duplication of similar specializations in both sectors and the lack of integration between disciplines in public and private higher education institutions. This hinders development and the ability to meet the need for diverse specializations. Furthermore, private education lacks an administrative structure that ensures its effective, not merely nominal, oversight by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, while respecting its administrative and financial independence. In many cases, private education becomes a competitor to public education and a drain on academic and teaching staff in public institutions, driven by financial incentives. As a result, many graduates of private universities and colleges face unemployment and limited job opportunities later in life due to the low demand for their specializations. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of private

higher education institutions, which has more than doubled in number compared to the previous system, raises serious questions about the viability of this expansion and the actual need for it.

confining them to their local sphere and leaving them largely unaware of developments in developed countries.

The arbitrary dismissal or forced retirement of university faculty members, including those with advanced academic ranks (professors and assistant professors), under flimsy pretexts and justifications such as old age or alleged incompetence, is carried out covertly through political or sectarian affiliations. This deprives these institutions of their most experienced teaching and research personnel. The infrastructure necessary for developing higher education, including scientific libraries, laboratories, internet networks, and various information resources, has deteriorated. Much of it has been burned, completely destroyed, vandalized, or deliberately stolen to empty universities of their contents, such as references, books, research, and course materials across various disciplines. Entire graduate studies departments have been closed under the pretext of a lack of teaching staff.

Conclusions:

The academic and educational level of students has deteriorated due to the worsening security situation and the resulting dropout from studies. Students are forced to succeed at any cost under the threat of university professors from political and sectarian militias. Distorted standards of academic excellence are imposed that do not reflect students' actual abilities but rather prioritize political, sectarian, or religious affiliation. This is reminiscent of the Ba'athist practices of manipulating academic results and selecting students. Corruption will become rampant in its various administrative and financial forms, including nepotism, embezzlement of funds allocated to the education sector, forgery of certificates, and manipulation of grade records. This is achieved through pressure and blackmail exerted on department heads and deans to grant undeserved grades to underachieving students or to undermine high-achieving students and tamper with their grades for reasons of revenge and retaliation under various guises—political, sectarian, religious, and otherwise.
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