

**PRIVATIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
EMERGING COMMONALITIES AND DIVERSE
EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES,
AUSTRALIA, POLAND AND IRAN**

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Over the past two decades, public funding to higher education systems in many parts of the world has been reduced on a per capita basis, even as student enrolments continue to increase. Paralleling this phenomenon has been rapid privatization of the university sector, achieved through the transfer of costs to the community, either through state universities imposing student fees or new private institutions being established. The paper analyzes the course of privatization in the higher education systems of Poland, Iran, Australia and the Philippines and concludes that the various privatization pathways being followed are reflective of the differing national traditions of the countries concerned.

This paper aims to discuss the transformation of higher education systems through "privatization". Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing trend towards the reduction of per capita government funding to higher education despite the continuing escalation in student enrolments. Although the administrative procedures adopted have varied from country to country, in terms of their outcomes, these changes can be regarded as essentially a series of privatization measures, achieved through the transfer of a proportion of the costs to the community, either by state universities imposing fees, or new private institutions being established. The objective of this paper is to analyze the process of privatization in the higher education systems of Poland, Iran, Australia and the Philippines in order to examine the transformation pathways which have been adopted within the framework of each country's differing national tradition, and the way the changes have affected the quality of education being offered to students.

EMERGING COMMONALITIES

The shifting of responsibility for the funding of higher education to students and their families, as well as other outside government sources, can be regarded as a form of "privatization". This may result in the creation of

“private”, “independent”, “church” or other non-government institutions (which can be considered *independent privatization*), or take the form of directly imposing fees upon students when they attend formally state-funded colleges and universities (which may be labelled *public privatization*). The ideology underpinning this transformation has been summarized by Boumelha (1998: 37) as the assumption that “education is a private matter of individual choices and personal benefits” gained by graduates for the employment market. Behind this view stands the model of education that “devolves the responsibility for the common good to the aggregate of atomized individual choices”. This approach breeds a spirit of competition among the different higher education sectors, driving institutions towards the supposed rewards and incentives of the market place and away from the traditional concept of an academic community of scholars dedicated to the pursuit of learning.

A common feature to be observed in all the countries under study was the desire of the four governments to compensate for diminished per capita funding by retaining, or even increasing, the state’s influence or control over the institutions. Another outstanding characteristic of recent developments has been the widening quality gap between the relatively few elite universities, on the one hand, and the more numerous middle-of-the-road, mediocre or even sub-standard institutions designed for the mass market.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Even though the four countries studied are geographically and politically diverse, there are certain cultural and historical resemblances among them. For example, both Poland and the Philippines are overwhelmingly Catholic, with their Catholicism deeply influenced by the counter-reformation epoch of Trent and its aftermath throughout the XVII and XVIII centuries (Halecki, 1966: 316-49; Davies, 1996: 469-576; de la Costa, 1961). Even today, student attitudes to family and religion observed in the two countries show similar trends, and in both societies the Catholic church plays a leading role in education, including the tertiary sector. Although Iran, as a prominent member of the Islamic civilization, belongs to another religious heritage, recent history shows that monotheistic religions, such as Islam and Christianity (at least in their more traditionalist forms), can at times, present a common front, as happened in the case of the United Nations population conference in Cairo. It is also clear that religious leadership plays an important role in the education of all three countries (Smolicz, 1993, 1990b).

In the case of Poland and Australia, both countries are heirs to the

European tradition of the university, which the Philippines also shares through both its Spanish and American derived heritage. Poland and Iran, on the other hand, have both experienced revolutionary change in their societies, which has deeply affected their higher educational sectors. Most recently (1989) Poland has undergone a democratic political transformation and a profound shift away from state dominance to market economy, while Iran has gone through the trauma of the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79 and a shattering war with neighbouring Iraq, which ended only during 1988-89. One could also add that both Poland (under General Jaruzelski) and the Philippines (under former President Marcos) experienced periods of martial law during much of the 1980s, which had a similarly negative and stagnating effect upon university education in both countries (Szczepanski, 1978, 1983).

RESEARCH APPROACH

The common observation point for this particular study was provided by Australia's need to establish criteria for assessing the tertiary qualifications of immigrants who enter the country and whose degrees need to be judged as objectively as possible. Although the assessment has been carried out within the framework of the Australian university standards and norms, it can be regarded as attuned to generally accepted expectations of higher educational institutions. An internationally acknowledged outcome of these concerns has been the publication of "Country Education Profiles", a series of concise and authoritative reviews of the education systems of over eighty countries, together with evaluations of their higher educational institutions in terms of their academic performance and professional status (National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, 1992 - 1996).

The author's investigations in the Philippines, Iran and Poland, were carried out, at least in part, within the framework of the Australian National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR). This facilitated access to the leaders of the higher educational sector in the countries concerned and enabled the gathering of a variety of demographic, academic and socio-economic data in relation to both students and staff. It does not follow that such access was invariably easy, since the educational sectors in the countries concerned have proved sufficiently heterogeneous to have built up mutual rivalries that hinder communication. Considerable effort was required to research both the state institutions and the plethora of private universities and colleges, which have been established in Iran, Poland and the Philippines, in both the metropolitan and country areas. It should be noted

that the analysis of the findings are entirely those of the author, and quite independent of any government authority in the countries investigated or any assessment of their educational systems in Australia.

THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines' university system has been developed upon the United States' model, despite the country's vastly different cultural, political and economic setting. The non-government sector has traditionally been the dominant one, with over 85% of Filipino tertiary students being educated in religious or other "private" ("sectarian" or "nonsectarian") institutions, which rely on fees and endowments for their existence — with no governmental support whatsoever. This private sector is extremely diverse, with fewer than a dozen relatively high fee-paying universities serving the elite. Several hundred other institutions have attuned themselves to provide for students from a variety of income levels, ranging from middle class to those with very modest means who work at nights to enter what are sometimes called "diploma mill" universities or colleges at the bottom of the academic ladder. As one of the most distinguished Filipino educational leaders put it, "It is always possible for students to find some tertiary institution and get a four year diploma. It helps the massive unemployment problem in the country. Filipinos themselves know the pecking order among universities and the relative quality of the degrees concerned" (Gonzales, in Smolicz, 1990a: 7).

This "quality diversity" was documented in NOOSR's 1991 study of the then 700 odd higher educational institutions in the Philippines (National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, 1995a). Ultimately, the institutions were evaluated into four broad categories on the basis of their academic standing, in such factors as research activity, qualifications of the staff and the "track record" of graduates, as well as the quality of their teaching and learning environments, including their library resources, equipment and building facilities. Other features examined included the entry requirements, fee structure, degree of autonomy, the extent to which their courses were accredited and the performance of their graduates in the professional board examinations which determine the right of graduates to practise in their chosen profession (Smolicz, 1990a).

To some extent the NOOSR categories reflect the division between metropolitan Manila and the "outside regions" (or provinces), as well as the distinctions between social strata and ethno-linguistic groups (Smolicz and Nical, 1997). It is significant that among the eight universities that were

placed in the first or highest category, as many as seven were private, most of them run by the main religious orders of the Catholic Church (Jesuits, De La Salle Brothers, Dominicans and Opus Dei). Although the Philippines Government does not provide any financial support, it subjects private universities to controls through its Commission of Higher Education (CHED). They need to obtain prior permission from the Commission, for example, for the introduction of new subjects or an increase in fees (generally limited to a fixed percentage of the previous fees).

The state sector is also very diverse, with one university — the University of the Philippines (UP) — playing a unique and dominant role, through its powerful Board of Regents and institutional safeguards to protect its independence, even in course structure from the controls of CHED. The great competition among students to gain places at the UP, together with decreased government funding for education, can be held responsible for the introduction of fees which are currently being charged for those UP students who come from higher income families. The UP system has expanded over the years to some half a dozen locations situated in the provinces outside Manila. Although these are all linked federally, each sets its own standards and takes responsibility for its own degrees. Other state universities (generally labelled as “State Colleges”) are accorded a much lower prestige rating and their standards are below many of the elite private institutions.

Most of the recent expansion of tertiary education in the Philippines has been in the private sector, making the Filipinos a nation with one of the highest scholarization ratios in Asia. In fact, over the past eight years the number of institutions claiming higher educational status has climbed from some 700 to over a thousand. A recent survey commissioned by the National Youth Commission has shown that, in spite of economic difficulties, Filipino youth appear to be optimistic about the future and eager to grasp the educational opportunities that are being offered to them (Sandoval, Mangahas and Guerrero, 1998).

AUSTRALIA

Australia, with still only a very limited private tertiary sector, can be regarded as occupying a place at the other end of the spectrum from the Philippines. Originally, Australian universities were funded by the various states, which in 1901 formed the Australian Federation. Funding continued to be primarily a State government matter until World War II, when Federal (Commonwealth) Government began to provide funding for the sector's expansion — a process which culminated in 1974 when the Commonwealth

accepted full funding responsibilities, at the same time as it abolished tuition fees. While the provision of the central source of funding accelerated the expansion of the higher education system, it also led to a creeping increase of government control of the universities and a corresponding diminution of their traditional autonomy. The full effect of this became apparent by 1990 when the 50 colleges of advanced education, with a greater or lesser degree of "persuasion", were amalgamated with the 20 universities to form the "Unified National System" of 45 higher educational institutions, mostly labelled as universities (Mackenzie, 1995: 43). By 1995 the number of government-funded universities had stabilized at 36 large self-accrediting and publicly-funded universities (National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, 1995b).

A great surge of student enrolments during the eighties led to the government decision to cut public funding to universities. This was achieved by the 1988 introduction of what has been referred to as "public privatization" which, in Australia's case, involved recovering from students some of the costs of higher education tuition, under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). (Repayment of these charges is deferred by most students, until they are earning an income above a specified level.) The decision to charge fees breached the short-lived free higher education ideology which had prevailed from 1974. The process of fee payment has continued, with subsequent governments increasing the proportion of average tuition fees to be repaid by students, as well as decreasing the level of income at which repayment is demanded of former students. (The proportional increases to be repaid have become particularly large in medicine, science and engineering).

Since 1994, when student enrolments reached just under 600,000 (a rise of 70 percent since 1980), universities have been actively encouraged to charge fees for postgraduate degrees, with no regulation of the level of fees charged. In this way the process of "privatization" been extended until at present the vast majority of postgraduate coursework degrees at the Diploma and Masters level have been excluded from the HECS scheme and the students concerned required to pay fees, even though Australian residents are being charged at a lower rate than international students. The most recent "concession" granted to universities has been permission to enrol undergraduate full-fee paying students who have 'just missed' a "subsidized" place, up to the limit of a quarter of the number of students accepted on merit criteria under the HECS scheme. This move has clearly opened the way for fee paying Australians to enter state universities. Under the impact of the economic downturn, the number of people paying full fees

is likely to grow, as universities are subjected to a reduction in funding through fewer subsidized (HECS) places. Although the number of international students exceeded 46,000 in 1994, the continuing upward trend in these enrolments, especially from Asia, remains in doubt due, to the economic crisis in that region.

At this stage it is expected that most students using the full-fee pathway will be applying to high prestige universities and entering prestige faculties, thereby further increasing the quality disparities in what is officially a unified university system. The widening of the 'academic quality' gap has been steadily increasing, as the so-called "Group of Eight" universities (Melbourne, Monash, Sydney, New South Wales, Queensland, Adelaide, Western Australia and Australian National University) have succeeded in securing close to two thirds of the country's research funding, while those at the bottom of the 36-university ladder receive less than 1% each.

A recent survey, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), which sought the views of staff at three universities with different academic profiles, identified several concerns over the way recent changes to higher education have affected teaching and research. Overall the survey found a rapid and pessimistic change of opinion about the quality of students in the 1990s. The report states that universities, especially the Group of Eight traditional research universities, "continue to prefer excellence in student selection but are under pressure to fill (HECS) government-funded places". In consequence, the segmentation of the university sector is being deepened as the Group is "determined to capture the higher ground at the expense of the other universities" (Taylor, et al, 1998). The belief prevailing in Australian universities, according to the ARC survey, is that higher education has been increased at the expense of excellence — a finding also confirmed in the poll of the National Tertiary Education Union (Richardson, 1998: 35).

These studies reflect a growing disenchantment with the reforms of former Minister, John Dawkins, who was responsible for introducing the Unified National System (UNS). According to one vice-chancellor, Michael Irving, the amalgamations between universities and colleges have left Australia with an "under-resourced, [functionally] homogeneous system whose quality of teaching and research has been compromised by government intervention". In consequence, the UNS experiment can be regarded as an "expensive failure which is likely to be replicated as technical and further education seeks to emulate universities" (Healy, 1988: 53). Irving's criticisms were echoed by the ARC study which found that universities were attempting to acculturate former college members into a "research culture", for which they were ill prepared. In addition, a recent Australian National

University study showed that while research quantity had remained constant, its quality had declined. This resulted in the Group of Eight standing even further apart from other members of UNS and claiming that scarce research funding had been spread too thinly.

These divisions within the Australian higher education sector have been exacerbated by deregulation and increased "private provider" competition. Early privatization initiatives, such as Bond University (founded by a formerly successful entrepreneur), a small Catholic university run by the Dominicans (Notre Dame) and off-shore campuses developed by some universities for international students were on a relatively new scale. In July 1998, the 142 year-old Melbourne University was the first to give rise to a private local off-shoot in the form of Melbourne University Private (MUP), which was approved by the state government as a bridge to new private-sector investments in universities. MUP has been designed primarily to cater for the post-graduate market in government and industry and among international fee-paying students.

As in the case of private universities in Poland and Iran (to be illustrated in subsequent sections), MUP is destined to rely heavily on the staff of the parent Melbourne University working under consultancy contracts. Officially this private "spin-off" from an elite state university has been established to strengthen endangered traditional university values, through the provision of what has been described as a "live, face-to-face interactive experience" for private students, as well as to supply new jobs and greater revenue. What is certain is that such developments will further deepen the divisions within the ranks of Australian universities, which the National Unified System, introduced but a decade ago, was supposed to have homogenized.

In this way, the Australian and Filipino higher education systems show convergence in a number of important ways, such as increased government controls and limitations of funding for the growing student population. Similar features can also be observed in Polish and Iranian higher education, although the rate of increase of student numbers in Iran, and to a lesser extent, Poland has been particularly spectacular and proportionally exceeding the Australian rate of growth.

POLAND

Under Communist rule, Poland possessed but one private university, the Catholic University of Lublin, which was established before World War II and remained the only non-government tertiary institution in Central and

Eastern Europe until the collapse of the communist regimes over 1989-1991 (National Officer of Overseas Skills Recognition, 1992; Smolicz, Wozniak, Smolicz, Secombe and Uszynska, 1993). After the enactment of a law in 1990 permitting the establishment of non-government higher educational institutions in Poland, their number increased to 16 in 1992 and to over 120 in 1997. These newly established bodies already cater for over 100,000 students, or more than 10% of the total tertiary student enrolments. This represents a growth rate of 63% over the first four years of their existence (Smolicz, 1997).

The rise has occurred most rapidly in areas that were neglected under the communist rule and which have been most vigorously developed by the private sector. For example, since 1990, enrolments in Social Sciences have risen five-fold, those in Business Studies and Marketing threefold and those in Law and Education two to threefold. Over twenty institutions are in some way involved in the in-service or pre-service training of teachers. This stress on the acquisition of additional pedagogical qualifications is partly caused by the requirement for all teachers to complete their higher educational studies if they are to retain their jobs — a situation which in the near future could lead to oversupply on the educational market.

The rapid growth of the non-government sector of higher education, after over forty years of repression of all private initiatives in education, has gained for Poland the label of “a little America in the heart of Europe”. The new institutions have filled a niche within an underfunded and overcrowded educational market, which has been expanding rapidly to meet the needs of the fledgling market economy. The founders of these institutions, all of them non-profit making, were mainly associations, foundations, educational co-operatives, trade unions, school communities and corporations, as well as groups of individuals made up of experienced university academics, who perceived a need which was not being met by the frequently outdated structures established under the former regime. The founders included, for example, fellows of the Polish Academy of Science and professors from the University of Warsaw and other long established universities.

One of the outstanding features of the growth of the non-government sector is the way it has run counter to the former communist government's centralization of education in the large cities. Although Warsaw continues to act as a magnet for all new educational ventures (with over 30 new establishments), several new institutions have been created not only in the larger cities such as Cracow and Poznan, but also in small country towns which were previously quite distant and isolated from the mainstream educational developments. In a few cases these new provincial centres have acquired an

international reputation.

Since the newly established private sector was obviously incapable, on its own, of providing staff at the academic level required to achieve accreditation, it has made use of academics employed at the State institutions. Academics themselves, because of the low pay at State universities, almost invariably have been anxious to secure additional employment, frequently holding two "full time" appointments, one of which is held to be "primary". The "primary" place of appointment is normally held at an established state institution, which provides the prestige, while the non-government position secures additional pay, at a higher rate than the State.

While recognized institutions officially frown on the practice of double or even treble appointments, they are helpless to forbid it in the face of the poverty of academics, especially those with large families. Since many new institutions are being established in country towns formerly without any academic base, staff members are obliged to travel long distances each week, a situation detrimental to their performance, especially their research endeavour (Pelczar, 1996).

While the greatest innovation is clearly taking place in the private sector, the state sector has also been dramatically affected by the liberalization of the political system and the market economy. In 1997 this consisted of 97 institutions, divided into universities and other higher educational institutions, with specialized functions (eg. Engineering, Medicine, Agriculture or Music). This large and unwieldy group has been challenged by decreased government spending on education and increased pressure on entrance quotas. The effects exerted by this kind of "market economy" were particularly profound, amounting to "shock therapy", following the stagnation of the pre-1989 period, brought about by the imposition of martial law in 1981.

There is little doubt that competition from the private sector has also played a significant part in stimulating the state sector. The latter did not respond through the imposition of partial fees on all students (as in Australia), but through fees being imposed on selected groups, particularly part-time, night-time and external students. Hence "free" higher education, traditionally offered in Poland, is now limited only to that fraction of students who are able to pass very highly competitive examinations for "day" study places. The extent of competition for the "day" or "free" places at the prestigious universities, such as Warsaw, is shown by the number of applicants sitting entrance examinations at that university in 1997 — 12 candidates for each place in Management Studies, Economics and Sociology; 10 candidates for a place in Computing, 9 for Psychology, 8 for Law — with the latter faculty offering an equal number of places in its "evening" classes for

fee-paying students. The designation “evening studies” also has frequently been illusory, since this label is being applied to classes held virtually any time in the afternoon or evening. Students missing out on university entrance examinations now have the opportunity of joining the “evening” classes at the state universities or of entering private sector higher education institutions — their enrolment in both cases being dependent on their ability to pay fees. The differences in the academic standards achieved by full-time, as opposed to part-time or external students, are very significant, especially in the case of the non-government sector.

IRAN

Iran has witnessed a dramatic escalation in the demand for higher education among its fast-growing population. The increase in student enrolment in the private sector has been particularly spectacular, so that both the size of the increase and the rapid rate of growth, have far outstripped the similar expansion of non-government higher educational institutions in Poland.

While the imperial government of Iran encouraged university education, there was only a small number of students receiving higher education at universities in Tehran until the early 1950s. Rapid increase followed until 1971, although student enrolment stood at under 70,000 during 1969-70. This grew each year up to 1978-79, when enrolments reached 175,675. Further increase was arrested by the Islamic Revolution when, for a period of time, all universities were closed (since students were regarded as the most radical element in the country and a possible danger to the newly established order, as they had proved to be with the previous one). The numbers fell until 1982/3 when they stood at 117,148, almost down to the level prevailing in 1972/73. From then on, there followed a rapid increase, with pre-revolutionary levels being exceeded in 1987/88, when the student numbers reached 204,862. State university enrolments subsequently escalated to 312,072 in 1990/91 and up to 576,070 in 1996/97 (Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education, 1997).

Even such a significant increase in the State higher education system, however, has been eclipsed, in terms of percentage growth, by the unprecedented explosion of the private sector, which virtually from scratch, grew in the post-revolutionary period to reach the record number of 550,000 students in 1996/97. The Iranian tertiary education system as a whole, both State and private, has grown approximately tenfold since 1982, to reach over 1,100,000 students in 1997. Growth in the numbers of students has resulted in an increase in the number of graduates and of teaching staff (from over

5,700 graduates in 1982 to over 80,000 in 1997, representing a fourteen-fold increase; and from some 9,000 teaching staff in 1982 to about 40,000 in 1997, a four-fold increase only) (Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education, 1997). Mansouri (1998) estimates that over the last ten years, the number of students has jumped almost five-fold from approximately 250,000 to nearly 1.2 million.

The pressures exerted upon Iranian universities by the growing demand for higher education among the Iranian population became even more severe after the end of its war with Iraq. Unable to provide for this demand through a further increase of the State universities, the Islamic government turned to its own religious establishment for help.

According to official sources, the "Free" (sometimes translated as "Open") Azad Islamic University first established in 1981, some two years after the Islamic Revolution, by leading religious leaders (Ayatollahs), including the current religious leader Ayatollah Khamenei. It remained small, however, until the end of the Iran-Iraq war which devastated both these Islamic countries for over eight years. When a large mass of demobilized and unemployed soldiers flooded the university market, a substantial number of them were rewarded with a place at the Azad, with scholarships provided to cover the fees. In this context, the Azad has not been "free", either in the financial or the academic sense, because it has remained under orthodox Islamic control and dependant on indirect government support for its survival and development. Following the Islamic Revolution the new leadership never appeared fully convinced of the loyalty of the State universities, with the result that Azad found particular favour among the more conservative factions of the religious establishment. Although formally responsible to the Minister of Higher Education, the Azad has relied, ever since its inception, on its religious connections to by-pass ministerial guidelines which attempted to control and slow down its incredibly fast expansion.

Such an expansion clearly raises the question of the quality of instruction that students receive in an institution which (with over half a million students) can be regarded as one of the largest universities in the world. The university is governed by Central Management under a President which oversees its "units" or "branches", which by 1998 reached a total of 114, scattered throughout the country. Despite its geographical spread, it remains financially and administratively centralized, with its branches in the capital providing the greatest concentration of academic talent and infrastructure. Of the five branches in the capital, the Tehran branch (together with the Tehran Medical Branch) represents the nucleus of the original

system and can be regarded as the nearest in academic standing to the better State universities.

The evaluation of this highly distinctive type of privatization of higher education differs widely, depending upon the sources that one relies upon, although personal observation can help in estimating their reliability (Smolicz, 1998b). Information from within the Azad is difficult to acquire and is largely based upon oral sources. It claims to have hired some of the best State university professors through its higher salary offerings. As a result Azad views its standards as being the “same” as those in the State system, with the advantage that it has a high percentage of mature students who are “better motivated” because of the “wealth of experience that they bring with them” (Barandan, 1998). Although its fees would be regarded as moderate to low by international standards, they are far from easy to meet for many Iranians. As a result, most of the students are either working, financed by their parents, or under contract to some government ministry. Such a contract system with sympathetic sections of government ministries seems to have been, and continues to be, one of the most important pillars of support for Azad.

It is generally assumed that the initial capital for Azad was provided by government grants, which enabled the new university to engage in large scale building operations and the hiring of large premises. Currently various ministries sign contracts with Azad, and pay their employees’ fees, in order to help them to upgrade their qualifications. Under this system, government public servants are almost invariably assured of ultimate success in their studies, as well as of the promotion, which is linked to the gaining of additional qualifications.

A much harsher light is thrown upon Azad by officials from the Ministry of Higher Education, who are prevented from intervening to correct what they perceive are its many failings. An example of such a “failing” is provided by the way Azad succeeded in gaining recognition for its degrees on par with the State system. The Azad leadership waged a systematic campaign which, it was claimed, only gained the approval of Majlis (or Parliament) after a number of its members were granted Azad’s own law degree — on the grounds of the parliamentarians’ self-evident expertise as legislators.

Azad’s status in the eyes of the intending students may be observed at the time of the annual universities’ entrance competitions (or “Konkur”), with candidates who gain highest scores opting for the top State universities, such as Sharif University of Technology, Esfahan University of Technology, Tehran University, or Medical Tehran University in the first instance

(Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education, 1996). Of some 1,200,000 school leavers competing for university places no more than 10% can be admitted to the free places at the State universities. Those who fail to get places but are determined to pursue their studies and have the money to pay for them sit for the "Konkur" organized by the Azad University. The elite branches of Azad in the capital, particularly its Tehran Branch, which have the ability to secure the services of those State university professors in the city, are those that most students seek to enter.

The question upon which there is no agreement is whether Azad, for all its alleged failings, fulfils a useful social function in society by admitting at least a portion of the high school students who otherwise have "nowhere to go", due to the very high youth unemployment in Iran. According to an internationally renowned physicist, turned educationalist, Reza Mansouri (1998: 10), however, the admission of young people to university studies in Azad merely delays the time of reckoning by four or more years. He comments caustically that "the quantitative developments are worrisome (...) [and that] the arguments made by some policy makers that the economic development of the country necessitates the increase in the number of students is certainly an imprudent and primitive one".

Researchers at the Institute of Research and Planning in Higher Education also point to the dysfunctional aspects of the Iranian private sector. Instead of regarding Azad as solving the problem of providing greater educational opportunities and helping with youth unemployment, it is seen as an institution that compounds or even creates new dilemmas. In their view, Azad has insufficient resources and staff to cater for such vast numbers of students. Hence, many leave the university not adequately trained but having sacrificed their own, or their family's resources to pay for this type of private education.

One explanation of the uncontrollable growth phenomenon has been provided by Farjadi (1998) who lists the factors which explain what he calls "the excess demand for higher education". These include the relatively low cost of the private sector; unemployment among young people competing for higher education places; and the phenomenon described as "diploma-disease", a term used to explain the desire for a university degree, in the belief of the economic rewards awaiting graduates. Such misguided aspirations, it is claimed, contribute to the inflated parental demands for university education for their children, causing families to strain all their resources to achieve this end. The dominant role of the public sector in the employment of graduates results in pressures being put on the government to keep increasing bureaucratic structures in order to swell the number of public

servants required. The democratization of the electoral process for the Majlis has meant that each member of parliament has been subjected to demands from his or her constituents, who press for a university in "their village".

The rather precarious present condition of the majority of Iranian universities appears to have been characteristic of the history of the higher education system in Persia. (The country changed its name from Persia to Iran only in 1935 (Frye, 1975). While information on pre-Islamic higher education in Iran is very limited, medical schools have existed in almost all historical periods. Following renewed development during the earlier periods of the Islamic era, higher educational institutions were eventually converted to religious schools, with natural science replaced by theology. The flourishing medieval Islamic colleges of the earlier epoch can, therefore be regarded as "non-reproductive", since the sudden sprouts of excellence in a particular institution at an earlier period ended in decline, with no sustainable continuity among any of these original ancient seats of learning (Mansouri, 1998). The current spasmodic and erratic upsurge could be interpreted as yet another of these episodes, representing a sacrifice of quality for the sake of satisfying demands for quantity.

ISSUES OF QUALITY CONTROL ASSURANCE

In all the countries in this study, the question of academic standards in teaching and research is of vital significance. This applies both in relation to the mushrooming number of private higher educational institutions and the parallel growth of the government funded universities which are often based upon former teachers colleges or technical institutes.

With its long established private sector, the Philippines has evolved both a formal and informal system of quality control for its institutions. The informal system is based upon the reputation that universities enjoy among the public, both on account of their perceived social status and their "track record" in ensuring good employment prospects for their graduates. With regard to the formal system of evaluation, the system of accreditation has come to acquire an increasingly important role for private tertiary institutions. The unusual aspect of the system is that it is not compulsory, but self-imposed and voluntary. It was pioneered by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), and virtually all significant Catholic institutions now enjoy some degree of accreditation from this body. Of the other two accrediting bodies, one represents the accreditation branch of the "non-sectarian" association of colleges and universities. The other body is a grouping of mainly Protestant universities and

colleges (Smolicz, 1990a).

The system of accreditation is still incomplete in the sense that only subjects and disciplines have been accredited at this stage, rather than universities and colleges as a whole. It would also appear that the Catholic sector applies its quality control in a particularly consistent manner, with teams of external visitors making at least two visits to an institution that has requested accreditation, and a series of periodic tests at subsequent dates. The three accrediting agencies are federated to form the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP). There exists Congress legislation which provides support and recognition for the accreditation process, but many aspects of this legislation still remain unfulfilled.

The main benefits of accreditation, apart from increasing the prestige of the university concerned in the eyes of prospective parents and students, is a reduction in the supervision of the institution's programs by the Commission for Higher Education (CHED), since accredited subjects can undergo a series of internal curriculum changes without prior reference to and approval from CHED.

Another important feature of the Philippine method of quality control, which can provide a valuable indicator of the worth of a given degree at a particular university, is to be found in the requirement for all graduates to pass a professional board examination before being allowed to practise in their profession. This applies currently to all the "professions", including medicine, nursing, teaching, engineering, forestry, dietetics, architecture, medical technology, dentistry, law accounting, business management, etc. Only the study of arts and sciences per se, (which does not attract a great number of Filipinos in any case) appears to lack this type of extra screening test, since it relates to no particular profession.

Hence, successful completion of a professional degree does not signify the opening of gates into the practice of the profession — but merely permission to sit for the examination that is set by the board of a particular discipline. Except in the case of the teaching profession, these examinations are conducted by professional licensing boards that come under the orbit of the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). The examinations are conducted independently of the universities by the boards of examiners whose members are appointed by the President of the Republic on the recommendation of professional associations.

The results of these examinations are almost invariably regarded as representing the "worth" of a particular university in the subject concerned. The lists of successful candidates are published in the daily press, with "top-notchers" accorded the distinction of having both their rating and their uni-

versities announced publicly. Top ranking universities take success in such examination almost for granted, expecting almost all their students to pass. But the less successful, especially provincial universities, advertise their success in particularly good years. Hence scrutiny of the results of board examinations forms an important criterion of the proficiency of its graduates, as well as the esteem in which a particular university is held in the community.

The situation in Australia stands in contrast to the Philippines, since universities are empowered to accredit their own programs. Programs which are designed to meet the registration or membership requirements of various professions must be approved by the professional bodies concerned, but graduation from an accredited course of study satisfies the requirements for admission to membership of the profession. At the same time, professional bodies, such as the Institution of Engineers, accredit all engineering programs leading to a Bachelor of Engineering degree and, by occasional inspections, attempt to ensure that professional standards are maintained.

A major change since 1989, however, has occurred in the evaluation of university research, with a government initiative towards a more competitive allocation of research funds by identifying national priorities in research. Such allocations have favoured the previously identified Group of Eight sandstone universities which have emerged as an elite entity in the supposedly unified system. The regular publication of unofficial guidelines on relative university performance in teaching and research has also demonstrated increasing inequalities within Australian higher educational institutions.

In Poland the government has officially exercised control over the registration of new tertiary institutions, both academically, through the General Council for Higher Education and politically, through the Ministry of Higher Education (Pelczar, 1996). These bodies have determined a set of academic standards which must be reached for the purpose of licensing the institutions to grant degrees, which at this stage have been limited to the Licentiate (equivalent to Bachelor degree) or the more advanced Magister degree (at the level of an Honours or Masters degree). An institution is only reviewed at a subsequent date if it wishes to be upgraded from the level of granting Licentiate only, to one of granting Magister degrees. The fact that as many as 120 new institutions of varying quality have succeeded in getting accredited in less than a decade shows that the system is not yet fully effective in ensuring satisfactory measures of quality control.

The qualifications of academic staff have been used as the yardstick in accrediting new institutions. The rules in this regard are less demanding for institutions applying to grant the Licentiate only, than for those claiming the

right the grant the Magister degree, a prerogative so far limited to less than a dozen institutions. The rules specify the number and rank of the academic staff employed by the institutions: four senior academics (at habilitated doctor level) are needed for granting a Licentiate and as many as are eight required for those awarding Magister degrees.

Staff qualifications are easier to determine and evaluate across institutions in Poland than in countries such as Australia, where each institution awards its own higher degrees and dispenses its own professorial titles. Poland has retained a centrally controlled system for the academic ranking of university staff members and has evolved a three-tier system of higher degree titles, namely those of doctor (Ph D), habilitated doctor and professor, used in the sense of the highest academic title, rather than just a position in the employment hierarchy (Smolicz, Wozniak, Smolicz, Secombe, and Uszynska, 1993). The habilitation procedures are complex and Faculty Boards of only the most established research-oriented universities can initiate a proposal for such an appointment, which ultimately needs to be reviewed by the Committee for Academic Degrees and Titles, which either approves or disapproves the decision of the Faculty Board of the particular university. So far, none of the non-government institutions is qualified to award a doctorate, let alone initiate habilitation procedures. The centralized control of academic qualifications of staff is one means of safeguarding the standards of the "newcomer" institutions against national standards based upon international comparisons.

An unofficial quality review of Polish tertiary institutions, conducted annually by Wprost (1996-98), as well as the evaluation undertaken by the author (Smolicz, 1997), selected 12 Polish higher educational institutions as operating at the level of first-class international universities. The universities of Warsaw, Cracow and Poznan are invariably singled out for inclusion in the elite list. Also included are other famous Warsaw higher schools specialising in Technology (Politechnika), Medicine and Economics. However, for the second successive year two private colleges, both specialising in Business Studies and Management, have made the first dozen list, one in Warsaw and the other in the provinces'. In their area of economics/business/management, these two colleges appear at the top of the rankings together with only one state institution.

Overall, on the basis of the existing material, there were some 30 institutions, out of the 120 existing in the private sector in June 1997, that could be regarded as generally granting Licentiates at levels expected of good state sector institutions. This suggests that in Poland the newly emerging private sector has already found a niche for itself and been able to reach, in at least

some instances, good academic levels.

In contrast to the other three countries, Iranian universities lack procedures that could ensure some general measure of quality control, especially in relation to the private sector. The State universities, just like those in the Philippines and Australia, vary greatly in quality, so that with the help of research staff at the Institute of Research and Planning in Higher Education, it was possible to distinguish among universities classified as "outstanding", "very good" and "good", with the remaining described as "average, to below average" (Smolicz, 1998). The Institute's influence resides in the developmental and supervisory role which it may exercise on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education.

The private Azad sector is formally subject to ministerial guidance and supervision. In practice, however, its uncontrollable growth has occurred in spite of the Institute's warnings about the inability of the Azad to maintain even a modicum of academic quality, especially in its branches outside the capital. Some of the latest country branches have been established in small towns, at great distances from the nearest library. They fill "vacant spots" in the country's educational map, and can be regarded as adaptations of the long established Islamic tradition of a village teacher, who had another occupation, such as a blacksmith, but in his spare time gathered together a group of students, who literally sat at his feet to learn the Koran. Some of the small Azad country branches appear to have been built upon that model, with the assumption that a room, a blackboard, and a part-time teacher will suffice to satisfy the aspirations of students and their parents. Such an Islamic tradition cannot be despised, but it does not satisfy the country's current needs for well qualified graduates.

An awareness of the need for quality improvements in higher education through accreditation is already evident in the State sector at least, as shown by Abbas Bazagan (1998), who has developed an accreditation model, involving both self and external evaluation, based on a pilot study of the medical science and health services. Such pilot research projects, reported at international conferences, are still a long way from developing the type of accreditation procedures that are taken for granted in the Philippines.

CONCLUSIONS

A common concern which occurs when reviewing both the Iranian and Polish expansion is the question of how the newly established institutions have been able to find academic staff of appropriate calibre. The answer for both of these countries is very similar: the senior staff at least come over-

whelmingly from the state universities. By keeping academic salaries at a level below the country's average wages, and often below those provided for skilled manual labourer or secretaries, the governments concerned have been virtually obliging academics (particularly those with families) to seek additional income, thus providing relatively cheap and readily available labour for the supposedly independent fee-charging institutions. In this way the governments have achieved a double saving effect, by avoiding the creation of extra places at universities, as well as saving money on staff salaries.

Although the effect on academic quality, including teaching, but particularly on reduced research output and diminished or peripheral supervision of research theses, has been very serious, no prohibition on the acceptance of additional work has been possible. In this way governments may have been saving money on student fees, general university expenditure and academic salaries, by sacrificing the academic standards of their universities and colleges and reducing the calibre and potential of their graduates.

The situation in the Philippines is somewhat analogous, with a proportion of staff seeking additional employment in a variety of educational institutions and agencies. In a highly feminized profession, especially in faculties such as Education and the Humanities, women are also made to rely on their husbands' business or professional enterprises as the means of being able to "afford" to teach at a university. This type of situation is likely to occur even at the elite private colleges where the academic salaries are also low by western standards. Educational leaders have commented that the "double employment" situation, although officially only temporary because of the transition to market economy, will be difficult to reverse, once people have become used to this type of supplementary income (Pelczar, 1996).

The effect of government frugality in cutting back university funding, accompanied by the often indiscriminant expansion of student numbers (partly in response to electoral pressures) has been deleterious, across a range of countries as different from each other as the four investigated in this paper. It has affected students' families and their available resources, but also forced many into part-time employment, diminishing the time that can be devoted to studies. The effect on staff in countries such as Poland and Iran has been particularly unfavourable, including health and family life. The quality of academic teaching has suffered in diminishing student contact, especially with senior staff, who often appear intermittently and whose lecturing standards may lose much through constant repetition and lack of new material update. More obviously, one has witnessed a decrease in the standards expected in the supervision of theses and examining, with

Poland's "open defence" of Ph D theses at times unearthing the absence of both. Although Australian academics have not suffered to the same extent, the recent "downsizing" perpetrated on Australian academics in more than one Australian university has cut deeply into the heart of education, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

The greatest sufferer in this regard has been academic research - particularly strikingly demonstrated in the case of Iran. According to Reza Mansouri (1998: 10),

A fivefold growth in the number of students within a decade and the inflation in the number of universities, fields of education, particularly in post-graduate studies, should be compared to the nearly fixed number of faculty members, particularly those possessing Ph. D, or with the number of scientific papers published by Iranian scientists in international journals.

Mansouri (1998: 10) further notes that, since the academic standards were below the international levels before the 1996 inflation in student numbers, it may be assumed that it has decreased even further. He adds that, "there are still university students among the presidents of the universities and colleges", and he quotes the example of one scientific department of Teheran university, which "has accepted approximately 70 students for Ph. D, whereas its faculty has failed to publish even five international papers in the same year". It can be estimated that the number of research publications in the sciences and humanities before the Islamic Revolution (1978) stood at approximately 500 papers annually. This fell to some 200 papers immediately following the Revolution, to recover to the present level of some 500 papers once again. According to Mansouri, this represents one paper annually per 81 staff members, so that even a hundredfold increase in research output would still be insufficient to reach an acceptable level.

While Iran stands at the extreme end of the four countries under consideration there has also been an obvious decline in Poland, with the former Rector of Warsaw University and a world renowned physicist claiming in 1998 that his former university colleague and current Minister of Finance was "murdering" Polish higher education, through budgetary cuts. Although the Philippines appears more stable, because of its long-established elite private universities and its single privileged government-funded university, the general standards of tertiary education have been falling there, too, as testified by the Education Office of the Philippines Congress (Congressional Commission on Education, 1991). The privatization trends and public spending cuts are already perceptible in Australia in discourag-

ing student demand in vital areas and leading to demoralization of academic staff who feel they may be subjected to dismissal at the whim of "strategic plans" developed under the newly emerging rule of market managers Department of Employment, Education and Training, Higher Education Division, 1993). In Iran the lack of soundly educated graduates, well-grounded in their disciplines, is compounded by the increase in under-educated mass-market graduates, who are likely to swell the numbers of the unemployed.

This study showed that while higher education is becoming open to an ever greater number of students, the move to privatization tends to favour those who can afford the fees involved. The defects revealed in the functioning of the privatization measures, especially in relation to the calibre of graduates produced and the research quality and output of academic staff, demonstrate the danger of placing the fate of universities at the mercy of the market-driven forces of globalization. Both the Philippines, with its tradition of private enterprise in higher education and voluntary accreditation and Poland, with its tradition of university procedures for ensuring the maintenance of academic staff standards appear, at this stage, to have in place more effective means of controlling the quality of privatization expansion than those countries without such safeguards. The Australian expansion of higher education, on the other hand, has occurred without reference to formal safeguards in, for example, professorial appointments, which can be made by each new institution at its own discretion and in the absence of any national or international control mechanisms.

Overall, the study highlighted that while each country has responded to the demand for expansion in the higher education sector, the rate and manner of these responses have reflected their particular culture and heritage in education. It would seem that while the world wide trends towards economic and cultural homogenization persist and grow in their intensity, they evoke a variety of adaptations that accentuate the uniqueness of each country's tradition, as well as its current political, social and educational situation and needs.

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