

The Role of Private Universities in the Economic Development of Kurdistan: An Explanatory Study

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Abstract

Private Universities can play a very decisive role in the economic development of Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Presently, there are 32 private universities/institutes operating within its borders. KRI established in 2004 urgently need educated youths to economically develop this region (UNFPA 2018). The vision of Higher Education “Quality is the top priority” (MHESR, 2009) contextualizes the future direction laid down by KRG for higher educational institutions. Ahmad and Shah (2016) speaking positively of private universities in KRI view private universities as student-oriented and the education they impart can fulfill the economic development (see Todaro and Smith, 2015) aspirations of Region’s population. On the other hand, MHESR is making all efforts to fill the glaring gaps between the quantity and quality of higher education to improve the Region’s economy. Hence, this paper reports on finding of a qualitative analysis of recent research studies and policy documents on KRI education and economic development by leading global and local scholars. The overall aim of this inquiry was to determine in what ways private universities are contributing constructively to Kurdistan’s economic development.

Keywords: Kurdistan Private Universities, Economic Development, Vision and Strategy, Kurdistan Demographic Profile.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Institutions of higher education are keys to producing a new generation of graduates that have the skills to harness the opportunities provided by the Region’s growing economy for local benefit (IIG 2015). There is a broad consensus among politicians, policymakers and civil society of Kurdistan Region that education is indispensable to achieving prosperity, civic responsibility and social cohesion for they together form the foundational elements of economic development. Hence, education is very important (Sherwani, 2014) not only for improving competitiveness and economic wellbeing but also achieving the much needed social stability. The Regional Government of Kurdistan (KRG) is aware of the fact that: “The turbulent events of history prevented many of our older residents from achieving their educational potential. However with the creation of our region and the new powers of the KRG, the opportunity to educate our younger generations has arrived” (MOP - KRG 2013).

Commencing in 2009, KRG has taken steps to streamline equally public and private higher education institutions (Sherwani 2014). Higher education in KRI is being restructured and remodeled: funding, leadership, management, quality assurance, obligation, industrial relations, overall enterprise, and analyze and educations are carried out. In the course of the most recent decade, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) has undertaken strategic hard work to update and upgrade the higher learning system that it inherited from the previous regime. MHESR is focusing on higher education as the engine that could galvanize the working population and bring rapid economic development.

KRG has drawn a policy vision for ensuring a harmonious society. Their vision states: “A society in which all people in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq can achieve their maximum potential regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, place of birth, age, religion, or ethnicity” (MOP - KRG 2013). The government is banking on the private sector to contribute to this vision. The policy paper makes it amply clear the role to be played by the private sector in higher education: “Private colleges and

universities can make important contribution to education in the Region, for example by introducing innovative methods and new courses of study. We will endeavor to continue to welcome them while ensuring that their quality is high” (MOP - KRG 2013).

The first private university in Kurdistan was founded in 2007 and the private university sector has since developed quickly to become one of the most well-known features of higher education in Kurdistan, (Sherwani 2015) yet the contribution of private universities to the provision of HE has remained largely unexplored and as such, less understood (UNFPA 2018). The purpose of this paper, then, is to identify the role of private universities in economic development in Kurdistan especially on various dimensions that constitute the wellbeing of the whole population. Kurdistan has seen a paradigmatic change towards private expertise over the whole instruction range, including advanced education. The private part is as of now assuming a huge job in the improvement of private schooling framework in Kurdistan, and its impact and nearness will increment significantly.

1.2. Profile of Higher Education Institutions in KRI: A Brief Overview

Table No. 1 Higher Education Institution in Kurdistan Region

Sr.no.	Private Universities	Sr.no.	Public Universities	Sr.no.	Private Institute
1	American University of Iraq-Sulaimani	1	Salahaddin University-Erbil	1	Noble Private Institute
2	Branch of VSB-Technical University Ostrava-Erbil	2	University of Sulaimani	2	Rawanduz Private Technical Institute
3	University of Human Development	3	University of Duhok	3	Paitaxt Technical Institute- Erbil
4	Nawroz University	4	Hawler Medical University	4	Ayinda Private Technical Institute
5	Knowledge University	5	Koya University	5	Kurdistan Technical Institute-Sulaimani
6	Lebanese French University	6	Soran University	6	Haibat Sultan Technical Institute
7	Cihan University- Erbil	7	University of Zakho	7	Kalar Private Technical Institute
8	Cihan University- Sulaimani	8	University of Raparin	8	Duhok Private Technical Institute
9	Cihan University- Duhok	9	Halabja University	9	Rawanduz Technical Institute- Akre Branch
10	International University Erbil	10	Garmian University	10	Gasha Private Technical Institute
11	Komar University of Science and Technology	11	Charmo University	11	Ararat Private Technical Institute
12	Bayan University	12	Erbil Polytechnic University	12	Rozh Private Technical Institute
13	Tshik International University-Erbil	13	Sulaimani Polytechnic University	13	National Kurdistan Technical

					Institute for Technology
14	Tshik International University-Sulaimani	14	Duhok Polytechnic University		
15	Catholic University	15	University of Kurdistan Hawler		
16	Qala College for Religious Studies-Erbil	16	The American University of Kurdistan	-	-
17	Goyzha College for Religious Studies- Sulaimani				
18	Qaiwan University for Practical Sciences- Sulaimani				
19	American Stratford University-Erbil				

Source: MHESR of KRG 27-02-2019 (<https://www.mhe-krq.org/node/3347>)

In Kurdistan Region, there are 16 state and 32 state-recognized private higher education institutions at present. There are two semesters in each academic year. The standard examination time frame in which a degree program can be finished is something like eight to ten semesters at University. The institutions include universities and equivalent higher education establishment such as technical universities level. (Medical institutes, engineering studies, philosophy and religious studies). Only universities and equivalent institutions are entitled to confer degrees. The total numbers of students in private higher education institutes in KRI are 94,700. The percentage of female students is 48% (MHESR).

The private segment has outpaced the open segment and is quickly growing extraordinarily in numbers. Examination of accessible information by Ahmad and Shah (2016) demonstrate that critical contrasts exist among open and private Universities as far as understudy arrangement, affirmation and choice. With respect to the understudy choice, private Universities select qualified understudy free of the administration intercession, for example understudy straight forwardly apply for the *University of their Choice* and the private universities select the qualified ones. Contrasted, with state funded universities, private universities have a higher staff-understudy proportion. The staff-understudy proportion at state funded universities go from as low as 4:1 to as high as 48:1; the proportion at private Universities run from 6:1 to as high as 40:1. By and large state funded universities have a staff-understudy proportion of 16:1, while the proportion is 22:1 in private universities.

According to MHESR report: In 2009, the education minister called the presidents of state and private funded universities for a preliminary colloquium where he emphasized the important role played by the private Universities in Kurdistan's development. He stated "Private Universities complement the role of State-funded Universities and bring internationally diverse models to Kurdistan. Private investment in our higher education system is even more important than investment in our infrastructure. We will support their efforts, and put robust measures in place to ensure quality. These two go hand-in-hand to the best interest of the students, the country and the investors." This is a clear endorsement that Private universities have a pivotal role to play not only in regional development but more precisely economic development of the citizens.

Kurdistan higher education is interplay between the number of state and state-recognized private higher education institutions which is 38.77%, 32.65% and 28.57% respectively. The private sector has outpaced the state division in tertiary education and promptly extending. KRI is the newest established autonomous region of Iraq and the most dynamic (Sherwani 2018). It is reflected in its approach to education as a strategic tool for economic development. For the most part, a solid sense that KRI is pushing ahead rapidly to integrate its education and economic development and they are not pausing for national government direction, however, are resolved to advance with significant

changes inside their higher education system to bring synergy between their vision for a prosperous and economically sustainable region.

2. Conceptual Clarification: Private University and Economic development

Private University

A "private" university is essentially a university whose financing originates from educational cost, investors, and private benefactors, not from citizens. The real distinction between state funded universities and private lies in their financial arrangement. This negatively influences students because educational cost is tied to subsidizing. This influx of government capital is the reason educational cost is lower at state funded universities (Sherwani & Singh 2018). The genuine expense of participation is financed. All things considered, just a little bunch of universities on the planet are genuinely autonomous of legislative help, for some, advanced education programs are bolstered by the administration, and universities will in general get critical tax cuts in light of their non-profit status (Khan & Mohsinuddin 2018). Contingent upon their area, private universities might be liable to government guideline. This is in contrast to state funded universities which are completely controlled by the administration.

Then again, the term private university passes on various implications to various partners, since what establishes such organizations to a great extent relies upon factors received by a specific nation. (Mabizela, 2007, p.20). In certain nations of East Africa for example, lawful administrative definition decide the privateness of a university (Munene, 2009), whereas in the U.S. privatization appears as diminishing state endowment for open HEIs (Ehrenberg, 2006). In some European Countries private advancement education has been vigorously sponsored by the administration, which implies charging ostensible educational cost expenses and presenting understudy credits (Pritchard, 2004; Weiler, 2000).

In KRI, proprietorship and subsidizing are the primary determinants of privateness of universities. Private universities are characterized as degree giving establishments that are established by private business visionaries and associations and don't get open financing for activity and upkeep, yet do work inside the limits of the guidelines of MHER of KRI (Ahmad and Shah 2016). They further expound that the distinctive highlights of Kurdistan's private universities are ostensibly fixated on their capacity to pull in those students who can pay the educational cost charges and bolster themselves. This implies most of students accepted at private universities are from middle – and upper - class background. This can be credited to the recently discovered Kurdistan's educational and learning fever or instructive goals established in the social regard for training and education.

2.2 Economic Development

Economic development as a process is measured with macroeconomic indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), life expectancy, literacy and opportunities for employment in the country. It upholds new innovations; modify a few laws, modify the dimension of physical condition and natural changes too. All these prompting individual flexibility, dignity, and more fulfillment. The idea of social capital draws from different controls and divisions has inhaled new life into contentions concerning the job and remaining of "the social viewpoints" of advancement. There is an expanding mindfulness that network life and institutional quality together could improve to upgrade the limit of social orders, oversee hazard, acknowledge change, and snatch openings. In the light of the referenced issues, there is an earnest need of gifted HR, or taught think tanks, which can comprehend and handle with the given circumstance. (See Todaro and Smith 2015). Taking Todaro and Smith (2015) as the basis for our understanding of economic development, I hereby list the eight dimensions of economic development as follows:

1. Quality of life: A people group's feeling of "self" and "vision" are basic assets, and an expansive based monetary advancement program will advance from its remarkable qualities and conventions.
2. Creation of capacity: The economic development is not only the production of occupations, yet is the limit made in a network to recognize and utilize assets for long term development.

3. Optimum utilization of Resources: Economic development is some portion of network improvement. A decent financial advancement program starts with an investigation of neighborhood assets, both human and material.
4. Make citizens more competitive: Techniques incorporate setting up employment preparing programs, giving business advising and helping firms improve their advertising abilities.
5. Encourage youth to education: Procedures related with this goal endeavor to open doors for youth to move towards instruction so as find profitable work in the nearby markets or those outside the network.
6. Making local economy more efficient: Actualize the projects that urge organizations to buy products and ventures locally are another viable procedure for catching the neighborhood dollar.
7. Attract new employers: Enterprises can enable a network to broaden, raise pay levels and fill voids. Alluring a maker to situate in a network may include the utilization of expense credits or framework enhancements.
8. Access outside sources of capital: The variety of projects and administrations accessible from bureaucratic and territorial governments and other open part offices increment a little network's chance to develop.

All these above dimensions are interconnected with education, educational attainment, research and innovation. In a clear way, it is additionally articulated as human capital. The first-run through market analyst Theodore Schultz designed phrasing during 1960s to copy the perspective on our human capital points. He believed human capital takes after some other kind of capital that can be placed assets into guidance and getting ready to update benefits for an improvement in the quality and measurement of age. So, human capital is most imperative factor in economic development and social change Todaro and Smith (2015).

Resolving problems to accomplish advancement is a knotted assignment. Expanding national gross domestic product, raising dimensions of living, and advancing far reaching work openings are all as much a dimensions of the neighborhood history, desires, values, motivations, dispositions, convictions, institutions and control structures of both the household and the worldwide society as they are the immediate results of the control of vital monetary factors, for example, funds, venture, item, factor costs, and remote trade rates. As the Indonesian scholarly Soedjatmoko, previous minister of the United Nations University in Tokyo, so apropos put it:

“Looking back over these years, it is now clear that, in their preoccupation with growth and its stages and with the provision of capital and skills, development theorists have paid insufficient attention to institutional and structural problems and to the power of historical, cultural, and religious forces in the development process” (Todaro and Smith p.15-16).

The development of Kurdistan advanced education, with the open doors for private universities, will insight-fully affect the employ ability of individuals. This opportunity will prompt chances and power for the general population of KRI to accomplish the eight dimensions of economic development in their life.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Question

1. What is the relation between higher education and economic development?
2. How Private Universities are contributing to higher education in KRI?
3. What is the contribution of private universities in fulfilling the vision and strategies of MHESR?

3.2 Research Design

This study is primarily based on a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a valued paradigm of inquiry and requires a rigorous and methodical method to create useful results. As per (Kothari 2004) the following three methods in the context of research design for such studies are talked about:

Literature review;

Experience data and

Analysis of 'insight-assessment' examples.

3.3 Data Collection

- **Documents Analysis:** This specifically included KRI higher education related policy document research studies both off line and online. The relevant paper on private universities by Ahmad and Shah (2016) provided a sought of pivot point for this study.
- **Research Presentations:** The Researcher has been attending and presenting in workshops and seminars in India conducted by Private universities (Integral University and Ram Swaroop University). Thought out the period (2007-19), the researcher was able to acquire substantial evidence on issues surrounding the provision and priorities of higher education.
- **Field Notes:** This included reflective accounts taken by the Researcher following participation at a series of workshops and seminars related to higher education conducted by Aligarh Muslim University, Lucknow University, and IIM Lucknow (all elite public institutions of the Indian government). The reflective account of the Researcher was on many respects, the catalyst for this study.
- **Reflections:** Data was also drawn from informal discussions, observations, feedbacks from public and private universities, policy makers, officials, administrators, teachers, students, support staffs, and other stakeholders of KRI at elicitation their reflection about universities in general and private universities in particular.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data from various secondary sources were analyzed based on the research design and attempts were made to discover ideas and insights relevant to the research questions laid down for this study. The results of the study are presented below.

Results

4.1 Findings

KRI is a post-conflict society and has been devastated as a result of previous conflicts in the region. One of the most affected is the education sector leading to a chronic shortage of educational infrastructure. To overcome the infrastructural problems, the KRG leadership is aware that the public universities alone will not be able to fulfill the educational needs of the citizens. Endorsing this policy Dr. Honar Issa explains:

The liberation of Iraq and Kurdistan in 2003 created a lot of opportunities for establishing private universities in the region. It has been shown in many regions around the globe that the emergence of private educational institutions has brought significant changes in the quality of education. What distinguishes private educational institutions from their public counterparts is that they bring accountability, credibility and flexibility to education and research and consequently they attract people of high caliber (Insight-IIG 2015).

While supportive of the increasing array of choices that the proliferation of private institutions has helped create for students, KRG education officials are keen to point out that their support is dependent on those institutions meeting government standards in terms of quality. The Ministry's strategy is to prevent higher education from becoming a commercial product (IIG 2015).

Remaining faithful to the directives of the Education Ministry (MHESR) most of the private universities are striving to upgrade themselves to the quality expected from them. Relying mainly on education fees to cover their operational costs, unlike the public universities, they have been fairly successful with the great workforce and authoritative staff individuals expected to make a helpful domain for the advancement of advanced education system in private domain.

Higher education extension driven by private universities has given more chances to higher education in all the three cities inside KRI. It is discovered that there are increasingly private universities situated in Erbil contrasted with Sulaimani and Duhok. Ahmad and Shah states: "One clarification might be that Erbil is the capital of Kurdistan, which is home to more than 12000 national and universal international working in different areas, which make it less demanding for students to get a new line of work" (MHESR 2016). But there is disconnect between higher education and employability for economic development.

At the moment, numerous universal and nearby firms can't discover candidates with the specialized foundations and correspondence capacities important to fill accessible occupations. Tolerating this profound detach, in its "Roadmap to Quality," the Ministry recognized the basic to make higher education progressively important and successful, clarifying: "The higher education institutes (public universities) were originally developed to suit a country with a closed market and a people with little hope of a high standard of living or rapid educational advancement. In the new Iraq (and Kurdistan), reformation of higher education is now urgently required in order to harmonize the heretofore antiquated system to the needs of the Region for highly skilled professionals" (IIG 2015). Unfortunately, the pattern of outdated system still proceeds in funded universities bringing about new alumni winding up at a focused weakness in the work advertises.

To overcome these deficiencies, through initiative like the annual Kurdistan Careers event, private universities are working hard to connect employers with their students. Dr. Nawzad Kameran, a partner at Kurdistan Careers highlights: "At most universities everything is theoretical. Mostly the *private universities* have been responding by putting in work placements, career planning, and outreach to companies to establish a bridge with students. We are trying to change the culture so students see the reality of things in the field" (IIG 2015, emphasis mine).

Our findings make it clear that the private universities are making constructive role to the economy and development of the society. Fulfilling the criteria set by the MHESR, they are tailoring higher education to the skill sets requested by neighborhood and global firms working in the Region. This while meeting not only the adapting needs and desires of students to build up their scholarly capacities but also the programs offered by them reflects the market demands. The private universities are definitely changing people's lives for the betterment of future.

4.2. Discussion

Until the years 2004-2005, tertiary education was regarded as a public good to be equally and freely provided by the government for anyone who graduated from high school. In recent years, however, unprecedented increases in demand for higher education, coupled with the insufficient growth of public universities created ideal conditions for the emergence and rise of private universities (See Ahmad and Shah 2016). Since 2010, the MHESR has adopted a visible and recent system for evaluation, certify and accreditation of private universities.

Filling gap left by public universities, the private universities are totally focused on the economic development of the Region. Evaluating the Education sector, Rebaz Zedbagi pertinently points out: Zedbagi 2013 state that "Kurdistan is in a boom period, so it's easier for people to make money than ever before. Students associated with newfound wealth may not always see the importance of schooling or see the role that education plays in success. However, when the economic development slows, these same students will find themselves in a much more challenging position. We need to teach these young people about the role of education in creating rewarding, long-term careers". The private education sector is working on all the eight dimensions of economic development that has been highlighted in this study.

The KRG vision for building an inclusive society by 2020 hinges on how best private universities are nurtured and supported to fulfill the goals of economic development of the diverse population of this Region. The private universities with innovate methods and courses of study can come up with assistance and live up to the expectations of students of different abilities and different backgrounds. KRG wants private universities to contribute to the economic development of “women and girls, the impoverished, widows, and orphans, political prisoners, the victims of oppression, and relatives of martyrs and genocide victims; and ethnic and religious minorities” (MOP - KRG 2013). Universities in general and private universities in particular are casting their net far and wide by not only opening their doors for employment as academicians and administrators to the local population but also to people from other parts of Iraq as well as international community. There are a substantial number of foreigners serving in various private institutions at different positions. Hence, private universities can positive contribute to transform the post-conflict society of Kurdistan into the knowledge society of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

The documentary data and the broad transformation in tertiary education in KRI uncover a framework experiencing deliberate change. There is a feeling of earnestness in lawmakers, policymakers, tertiary education pioneers and academics to extend the framework at a quick enough pace to satisfy the great need, while expanding quality and guaranteeing training for economic development. The local government is empowering private universities to play a main job to achieve the adult populace requirement for training that can empower them to accomplish all the eight dimension of economic development actually and expertly. However, there is a lot of alert about the way in which the system will spread out; advance is presumably going to seek after an unbelievable course.

The private universities collectively and individually are deeply committed to changing people’s lives for the better by offering state-of-the-art programs tailor-made for the demands of the market. To allay the concern of conservative people with regard to quality of education offered by the all private universities, the KRG education ministry (MHESR) has been taking proactive measures to ensure quality. The MHESR has put in place a Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) for all private universities. According to the QAP: “The quality assurance procedures for higher education outlined in the Plan focus on curriculum reform, increased autonomy for universities and technical institutions, programs offering staff the chance for continuous professional development, and the promotion of research. The strategy also establishes a system to evaluate teaching methods, course material, exam design, and lecture styles in parallel with a planned accreditation system to ensure that institutes, colleges, and universities conform to acceptable academic standards” (IIG 2015). Hence, the legitimacy and the recognition of the private universities have be acknowledged and officially sanctioned.

This research has discovered varied possibilities and potentialities open for private universities in KRI. While fulfilling the Regional government mandate, it is very important for the private universities to understand the true purpose of secular education. Merriam Webster dictionary defines education as “learning, ability, and understanding that you get from going to a school, college or university”. This definition demonstrates that secular education has instrumental qualities and goal orientations. In this research, I have tried to prove that higher education offered by private universities can be instrumental in fulfilling every KRI citizen economic aspirations and the cherished goal of economic development of this region.

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