

**THE CHALLENGES OF PRIVATE  
HIGHER EDUCATION IN EGYPT**

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## Abstract

Private institutions are strongly showing presence in the landscape of higher education in Egypt. This is not unique to Egypt, as private higher education is a significant global trend accounting for most of the growth in higher education in the world. This paper looks at the growing role of higher education institutions in Egypt and seeks to place it within the global experience of a growing share of private higher education. The paper also seeks to address some of the challenges this growing sector faces. This paper builds on two sources of data. Data from a recently fielded survey (2012) tracing university graduates aged 25-40 in two disciplines that have been the target of private education institutions, namely business administration and information technology. The analysis of survey data focuses on the variegated education and work experiences between graduates of private institutions and public institutions. The analysis shows that private higher education institutions primarily serve to absorb the demand for higher education. Qualitative data based on interviews with some graduates of private institutions and a case review of two private higher education institutions seek to describe the context to private higher institutions in Egypt. The evidence provided in the paper suggests that private higher institutions face challenges as they seek to provide affordable higher education, while making profit. The paper concludes with a discussion of reform policies to address the growth of private higher education and issues of education quality, market transparency and social accountability.

**JEL Classifications:** I2

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Private and Public Institutions, Education Quality

## ملخص

واحدة من الطرق الرئيسية لإصلاح التعليم العالي هي ربط المكافآت للمعلمين بنتائج تعلم الطالب و ذلك من خلال تنويع سبل التحاق الطلاب من خلال تشجيع المؤسسات الخاصة . المؤسسات الخاصة تظهر وجودها بقوة في مشهد التعليم العالي في مصر. تستخدم هذه الورقة قواعد بيانات فريدة من نوعها للنظر في التجربة التعليمية المتنوعة و نتائج سوق العمل من الخريجين في كل من المؤسسات الخاصة والعامة . هذا المسح الذي ظهر مؤخرا ( 2012 ) تتبع خريجي الجامعات الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 25-40 في اثنين من التخصصات التي كانت هدفا لمؤسسات التعليم الخاص، وهي إدارة الأعمال وتكنولوجيا المعلومات. ويركز تحليل بيانات المسح على تجارب التعليم والعمل المتغير بين خريجي المؤسسات الخاصة و المؤسسات العامة. يبين التحليل أن مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاص تعمل في الأساس على استيعاب الطلب المتزايد على التعليم العالي . تستند البيانات النوعية إلى مقابلات مع بعض خريجي المؤسسات الخاصة وتعرض حالة اثنين من مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة والتي تبين أن المؤسسات الخاصة تكون بمثابة الملجأ الأخير مع توفير البعض لتعليم ردي الجودة . وتشير البيانات النوعية أن مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاص تواجه تحديات توفير التعليم العالي في متناول الجميع، في حين تحقيق بعض الربح. ويبين تحليل بيانات المسح أنه على الرغم من ما يدفعه الطلاب في المؤسسات الخاصة ، ونوعية التعليم الذي يحصل عليها فلا مكان لهم ولا ميزة تنافسية في سوق العمل ، مقارنة مع نظرائهم من المؤسسات العامة. تخلص الورقة الى مناقشة سياسات الإصلاح لمعالجة نمو التعليم العالي الخاص وقضايا جودة التعليم، و شفافية السوق والمساءلة الاجتماعية.

## 1. Introduction

Egypt's higher education system has been described as "not serving the country's current needs well" (OECD, World Bank, 2010). This is probably one of the least sensational descriptions of the system. Describing the woes of the higher education sector in Egypt is a tradition, not only in academic circles but also among most Egyptians, particularly from the educated. With limited funding and a politically constrained institutional environment, the country's higher education system has been unable to cope with a growing demand for higher education and an ever largest youth population. The increasing demand for higher education posed by the sheer demographic pressure of the size of the youth population has placed significant pressures on the system with a direct negative impact on issues of quality. Concerns usually focus the four issues of access, quality, relevance to the labor market needs and research capabilities (ibid.). The system graduates hundreds of thousands every year, with little assurance that these graduates have the skills needed to enter an already constrained labor market. The outcome is an oversupply of university graduates, mismatch of skills, and weak research and institutional capacity.

One of the main approaches to reforming the higher education system has been to diversify higher education options and support cost sharing by encouraging private higher education (World Bank, 2008). This is part of a global trend, where most of the growth in higher education worldwide over the past decades has been in private higher education (Altbach et al., 2009). Some 30% of global higher education enrollment is actually provided by private institutions (ibid.). Egypt's experience of a growing role of private higher education is better understood by relating it to the global experience of expanding the role of this sector.

Private higher education is not new to Egypt. In fact, Egypt's oldest modern university, Cairo University, started as a private institution in 1908. The interesting development in the past decade has been the growth and diversity of these institutions in the higher education landscape in the country. This is a relatively understudied phenomenon. Most of the research on private higher education institutions stops at noting that they compromise issues of equity compared to public free higher education (e.g. Fahim, 2010 and Al-Arabi, 2010). The Private higher education institutions face the quintessential problems of higher education in the country, which center on issues of quality and relevance to labor market.

This paper provides preliminary descriptive analysis of a recent tracer study following graduates of both public and private institutions. The analysis in this paper depends on both qualitative and quantitative data. The paper also builds on qualitative data collected in 2013, with focus on two case studies of private institutions and accounts of graduates of private higher institutions. The analysis of survey data in this paper compares the education experience of graduates of private higher institutions to that of their peers who graduate from public higher institutions. Additionally, the paper seeks to place Egypt's private higher education experience within the global landscape of private higher education and to draw lessons learned from international models to the experience of Egypt.

The findings of the analysis of survey data show a great similarity between the teaching methods in both public and private institutions. This can be explained by qualitative data showing that private institutions depend on faculty members from public institutions. Even their junior full-time faculty members are graduates of the same public system. Similarly, both private and public institutions fail to allow students to provide feedback on the performance of instructors or the whole learning experience through exit surveys or interim satisfaction surveys. These important quality assurance tools are ignored by both types of institutions. Both private and public institutions in Egypt fail to maintain a connection with alumni, who could constitute a significant group of donors to an education institution. When asked about how they evaluate the suitability of the education they received to their post-graduate

experience, a general observation is that the majority of graduates felt that the education they obtained did not prepare them for any of these issues.

Findings based on the case studies and the qualitative data show some alarming issues related to compromised quality in some private higher education institutions. The two case studies show that private institutions manage to achieve partnerships with international institutions and with the private sector. However, interviews with graduates from private institutions highlight the compromised quality and many challenges facing this type of education. Graduates note that rote memorization remains the key to passing exams and lecturing is the main pedagogical method adopted.

The paper concludes with a discussion of policy options for further developing the role of private higher institutions and improving their quality of education. It is clearly the case that private higher education are and will continue to play a strong role in the provision of higher education in Egypt given the increasing demand on the system. The role of the state in quality assurance needs to be more effective, providing more incentives for high ranking institutions and allowing for knowledge transparency, where existing and prospective students are better informed about the choices among higher education institutions. A focus on *post priori* evaluation methods; as opposed to the current *a priori* focus on education inputs remains a key policy challenge.

## **2. Methodology**

The paper benefits from the analysis of a recently fielded survey (2012) tracing university graduates aged 25-40 in two disciplines that have been the target of private education institutions, namely business administration and information technology. The survey data collection tool collected information on graduates' socio-economic background and household characteristics, education experience, first job experience, current job experience and employment history and mobility.

The sample for the survey has been extracted from recent rounds of the Labor Force survey, with the help of Egypt central statistical bureau, CAPMAS.<sup>1</sup> The interviewed graduates are a sub-sample of Egypt's Labor Force Survey (LFS). The sample of the LFS is a nationally representative sample extracted based on a two-stage stratified cluster sample and self-weighted to the extent practical (CAPMAS, 2012). The first sampling stage selects primary sampling units from the 2006 population census at the level of the enumeration area, stratified by governorate of residence and then by urban and rural sub-strata. The sample of EA was selected with probability proportional to Size (PPS), with the number of census households. The household sample was then selected from each sample EA with equal probability, using the systematic selection method normally.

The survey sub-sample of the national labor force survey was selected based on a number of criteria. Because university graduates are highly heterogeneous in terms of skills and specialization, we limited the sample and the analysis to a small number of specializations, namely business administration and information sciences. These specializations were selected because of the larger role of private universities play in the production of these skills. The survey focused on graduates aged 25-40 in these two disciplines who are currently working or have ever worked.

The final sample of the survey was 1713 graduates. Out of this sample, 413 graduated from private higher education institutions, constituting 24% of the sample. This is a good representation, as it resonates with national statistics about private higher education in the country as will be shown in the paper. About 74% of the respondents in the sample were male. This is due to the fact that we limited the criteria for inclusion to graduates who ever worked.

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<sup>1</sup> Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics

The increasing de-feminization of the Egyptian labor market (Assaad, 2005) explains the low representation of female graduates in the sample.

The paper also built on qualitative research conducted as part of this study. Qualitative analysis focused on two case studies of two private higher education institutions in Egypt. The analysis focused on their history, expansion, mission, vision, methods to attract students, staffing and governance issues. The selection of the two institutions was purposive. As the following section shows, a key typology of private institutions is by looking at their fees structure, which would help dividing them into elite, semi-elite, and demand-absorbing to borrow the terms from Altbach et al. (2009). Case One, presented below, fits with the semi-elite category. Case Two is clearly a demand absorbing institution, with some of the lowest fee structure in the country. The choice of the two cases was also informed by the size of their student body and their representation in the survey data. Data on both case studies was obtained through the examination of the websites of the institutions and by follow up phone calls seeking general information related to admission and fees. While I do not identify the two institutions by name, the data included in this paper on the two institutions are all publically available. The paper also uses qualitative data from interviews with some graduates of private institutions the context to private higher institutions in Egypt. Interviews were conducted by the researcher during the period from January to June, 2013.

### **3. Private Higher Education: Issues of Quantity and Quality in the Global Experience**

Private institutions traditionally formed a small part of higher education in most countries worldwide (Altbach et al., 2009). This tradition has been challenged more recently. By the year 2009, about 30% of global higher education enrollment is private (ibid.). This growth is attracting research on this relatively recent phenomenon. The growth of private higher education worldwide has been described as one of the most remarkable developments of the past several decades (ibid.). Private higher education institutions emerged as a solution to support public institutions in meeting the global demand on higher education. They also posit a solution to cost-sharing the provision of higher education, particularly in countries where higher education was heavily subsidized by state budgets.

The expansion of private higher education is described as being part of a global academic revolution relating to what has been termed as the “massification” of higher education (Altbach, 2007). Higher education has long shifted from a privilege to the elite, trickling down to children of more lower income households. Such massification of higher education has presented a major challenge for systems where the tradition has been to provide access to free or highly subsidized tertiary education, similar to the case of Egypt. In most developing counties, this has resulted in “overcrowded lecture halls, outdated and poor library holdings, limited support for faculty research, deterioration of infrastructure and more seriously faculty brain drain as the most talented faculty move abroad” (Altbach et al., 2009:xiii). The situation opened the way for demands for a bigger role by private higher education to alleviate the pressure on subsidized public education in these countries.

Quddus and Rashid (2002), focusing on the experience of South East Asian countries, trace the global support to private higher education to limited funding and increasing dismay about the quality of higher education in public institutions, particularly in development countries. They argue that there has been a mindset change among policy makers since the collapse of the Berlin Wall to a greater openness to private education. This shift stands in contrast to the state of thinking in the 1950s and 1960s, where the university was seen as "the great equalizers", propagating merit and encouraging the social and economic advancement of the underprivileged (ibid.). They also rightfully note that the shift to private institutions was supported by evidence showing upper income groups have most benefited of subsidized university education and called for cost sharing. The mindset change was also supported by

international institutions, primarily the World Bank, advocating for a stronger role in higher education (ibid.).

The most notable experience of private higher education is that of the United States, where private higher education institutions make it to top tier in international rankings. Twenty one private American institutions make it to the top sixty three in both rankings of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking and the Times Higher Education World University ranking (2011-2012) (Levy, forthcoming, cited in Altbach et al., 2009). For many policy makers, the model of the United States is seen as the definitive of world excellence (Crow and Dabars, 2012). After all, American institutions, both private and public occupy seventeen of the top twenty in the Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking and fourteen of the top twenty in the Times Higher Education World University ranking (2011-2012). Elements of the American higher education system continue to be highlighted in policy reform recommendations in international documents. These include a decentralized approach, a highly competitive academic “marketplace”, university autonomy and a focus on research.

However, the global landscape of private higher education institutions is ripe with different models. Surprisingly, the United States is not the country with the highest share of private higher education. In the United States, private higher education is stable at around 25% of enrollment (Altbach et al., 2009). East Asia countries, on the other hand, register the highest proportion of private higher education, providing 70% of higher education enrollment in some countries (ibid.). These include Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines and South Korea. These countries are followed by Malaysia approaching 50% of higher education provided by private institutions, and India and Pakistan both at and close to the 30% mark. The Latin American region registers 45% enrollment in private higher education, with some country variations. As opposed to the experience of the United States, Western European countries remain the only developed region with marginal private higher education contribution. A significant characteristic to this region is that the growth of the share of private higher education is not by the establishment of new private institutions, as in the case of Egypt and most other countries, but by the privatization of existing public institutions (ibid.).

In the Middle East and North Africa region, private higher education is making headway towards further expansion (Altbach et al., 2009). The region is marked by an expansion in quantity of institutions and a significant increase of student joining “for profit” private institutions, foreign universities with local campuses, virtual universities, and partnerships between local and foreign universities (ibid.). The experience of Egypt, detailed in the following section, provides a clear case for a growing trend of private higher education.

While the above discussion focused on issues of access and the quantity of private higher education, the literature centrally focuses on issues of education quality among these institution. One of the key concepts in understanding private higher education institution is that not all private institutions are equal. A key typology is by looking at their fees structure and ranking, which would help dividing them into elite, semi-elite, and demand-absorbing to borrow the terms from Altbach et al. (2009). Some of the semi-elite or even demand absorbing institutions hold the designation of a university, although the majority are designated as higher institution.

It has been repeatedly noted that most private sector contribution worldwide has been "demand absorbing" in the provision of higher education (ibid.). With the exception of elite private institutions, the global experience shows that the majority of these institutions seek to provide access to students who might not be qualified for the public institutions or who cannot be accommodated in other universities because of overcrowding (ibid.: 82). However, this prompted Altbach et al. (2009) to argue that the private sector serves a mass clientele and is not seen as prestigious.

A major exception to this rule is in the United States, where private institutions show on the top ranking of universities. The model of the United States stands in contrast to Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil who aimed to keep public higher education “small, elite and selective”, shifting the burden of educating the masses to private higher education (Altbach, 2009: xiii).

#### **4. Private Higher Education in Egypt**

The higher education system in Egypt (both public and private) is the largest and one of the oldest in the Arab region (Al-Arabi, 2010). The system enrolled 2.6 million students in 2009/10 (CAPMAS, 2012). System expansion has been a key development in the recent decades. The number of students enrolled in higher-education increased by 115 percent between 1996 and 2006, a trend that is likely to continue in future with almost 35 percent of the current population below the age of 15 (Al-Arabi, 2010). With the projected population growth, the system is expected to enroll additional 1.1 million students in 2021, assuming a rise in higher education participation from 28% to 35% over the same period (OECD & WB, 2010). The system is experiencing what has been described in the previous section as a stage of “massification”, where access to higher education is trickling down to lower income segments of the country.

A large proportion of higher education in Egypt is not provided by universities, but by higher institutes, both technical and non-technical as the following table shows. Together, technical and non-technical higher institutes provide about 19% of the tertiary education in Egypt as Table 1 shows. The tables shows the increase in higher education enrollment from 2001/02 to 2009/10. It is important to note that there has been a drop in enrollment in 2010/2011 due to the return of the sixth grade in the primary education system, which technically meant there was no incoming student cohort in 2010/2011.

The promise of the higher education system in Egypt is that it is free and open to the masses. This goes back to Egypt’s development project and socialist policies of the 1950s and 1960s as higher education was declared a free right to all Egyptians in 1962. This has been the case, despite the fact that the first modern university in Egypt, Cairo University, was established as a private university in 1908. Until the 1990s, Egyptian universities were almost exclusively public. A key exception was the American University of Cairo, which was founded in 1919 as private non-profit American institution.

A significant development to the structure of the higher education system in Egypt has been in 1992, when Law 101 was passed to authorize and regulate the establishment of private universities. Following the promulgation of the law, four new universities opened their doors in 1996, followed by five institutions in 2000 and six universities in 2006 (OECD and World Bank, 2010). Private higher education institutions provide education to about 23% of tertiary education in Egypt (CAPMAS, 2013). The bulk of private higher education in Egypt is provided by private higher institutes. As Table 2 shows, the share of these institutions in total enrollment in 2006/07 was 16.8%.

The legal framework in Egypt does not make a clear distinction between for-profit and not-for-profit institutions. In fact, most private higher education institutions in Egypt are for-profit institutions. Limitations of the laws governing the non-profit sector and the tax policies that recognize not-for-profit status further encourage the establishment of for-profit institutions. According to OECD and the World Bank (2010), having a clear legal foundation for non-profit institutions is an important prerequisite to developing strong private higher education. The major shortcoming is that while not-for-profit institutions are forced to spend surplus income on quality improvement, these are distributed as profit shares to owners. In absence of a legal framework for non-profit higher education, private higher education institutions in Egypt rely exclusively on student fees to pay for operating expenditures. The fees structure is very diverse

as the following two case studies show. While higher institutes can charge as low as LE 3,000 per year, foreign private universities could reach LE 100,000 per year. The diverse fee structure is reflected in a diverse student experience and learning outcomes.

The Ministry of Higher Education oversees the process of approving new private institutions and regulating existing institutions through the Supreme Council for Private Universities (SCPU), an entity established by Presidential Decree No. 219 in 2002. The Minister of Higher Education serves as chair of the SCPU. Admission to private higher education in Egypt is, similar to public institutions, based on the grades of the secondary stage completion examination (*Thanaweya Amma*), which is currently the cumulative results of the final two years of the secondary stage.<sup>2</sup> The admission to private universities, similar to public ones, is coordinated by the Admission Co-ordination Bureau of Egyptian Universities (*Maktab Tanseek Al-Jame'at Al-Masriyah*). The number of student places available in each institution and program is determined by the SCU. In general, private institutions require lower grades in *Thanaweya Amma*. Some would require additional admission exams, particularly foreign language exams.

The National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established under a Presidential Decree in 2006 to serve as an independent accrediting body for all types and levels of education in Egypt (higher education, pre-university, and technical and vocational education and training). The main purpose is to foster quality assurance measures, prepare institutions them for accreditation, and granting them accreditation (OECD and World Bank, 2010).

The global categorization of private higher education institutions into elite, semi-elite and demand absorbing discussed in the previous section is quite relevant to the experience in Egypt. The very diverse fee structure is a good proxy for this categorization. While elite foreign institutions would be at the high end of required fees, demand absorbing institutions, similar to the ones provided in the case studies provided in the following section, would be at the lower end of the spectrum.

Similar to the global experience, reform efforts focusing on encouraging private higher education are relatively new. The state of thinking in the early 1980s and the early 1990s in terms of higher education reform focused on stabilizing university enrollment and boosting non-university technical institutes. (e.g. Richards, 1992). This has significantly changed, particularly with the continued emphasis on the need for educated labor force for global competitiveness. The need to stabilize the number of students in least emphasized. The narrow access and limited opportunities for students was highlighted are now highlighted as key challenges to the system (OECD and World Bank, 2010). A discussion of financial efficiency is becoming central to higher education reform issues, which leads to other serious discussion for the need of a bigger role for private higher education institutions. Studies focusing on the Middle East and North Africa region support going from full government monopoly over education to partnership, highlighting the role of contractors, alternative providers, and complementary sponsors of educational activities (World Bank, 2008). However, this requires governments to shift their role from service provision to quality control to ensure better education outcomes (ibid.).

## **5. Qualitative Data: Two Case Studies of Private Higher Education Institutions in Egypt**

The following two cases were purposefully selected for two reasons. First, their presence among respondents in the survey data. Second, the cases represent two cases of what can be labeled as a semi-elite institution and a demand absorbing institution. The distinction is

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<sup>2</sup> The system used to depend on the grades of the third year solely. There are debates about the viability of depending on the score of the two years.

primarily based on the fee structure. The case studies depend on publically available information about the two institutions analyzed. Some clarification questions were answered through inquiries over the phone with administrative staff at the institutions. These primarily related to admission and fees. The analysis of these cases focuses on issues of governance, quality assurance along with descriptive information about the institutions' histories and evolution.

### ***5.1 Governance and quality assurance structures in a private institution: case one***

Established in 1993, Case One shows one of the highest number of graduates in the survey sample. The institution has the rank of an "academy", a state that is less in ranking than a university but places it above the regular institutes. The institution does not have a board of trustees but a management board headed by the owner's son. The founding owner is also a member of this board. The board includes senior faculty members. A clear observation is that most of these board members have other jobs and are senior faculty members in public institutions. Some of them are retired high ranking government officials. In its statement of purpose, "affordable" higher education is clearly stated. Affordability is mentioned in conjunction with "distinction", which summarizes the conundrum facing this type of institutions. As a "demand-absorbing" institution, the quest to reduce cost of education comes at the expense of the quality of education provided.

A closer look at the profile of faculty members shows two main categories of faculty members. There are the senior faculty members, who are all moonlighting for their job at the Academy as a side activity to their main jobs at public higher institutions. The full time faculty are predominantly young, with recent PhDs from local universities and show a very weak publications record if any.

The academy prides a section for quality assurance, unfortunately misspelled on its website as "the Quality Assurance Unite". The unit is headed by the head of the managing board, include senior faculty members at the Academy, who predominantly have other jobs in public higher education institutions, top students from each department and an external member, whose name is not identified. A look at the activities of this unit shows that it primarily functions as a faculty affairs unit primarily looking at grievances and issues of misconduct and reporting on school activities.

On the main website of the Academy, two sources of pride are highlighted. One source of pride are the Academy's successful alumni. The website showcases pictures, name and occupations of a handful of graduates on its main webpage. This is a positive sign showing efforts to follow up on alumni as a way of attracting new students.

The main attraction for the Academy is its partnership with an American institution. Following a growing global trend, the Academy partnered with an American higher education institution. The program offers the foreign institution's Baccalaureate degrees in accounting, business management, computer science and electrical engineering. Faculty members from the American institution attend the graduation ceremony at the Egyptian academy to bestow the degree on graduates of the program, who are a small sub-group of the larger student body of the Academy. The Academy is treated as a Middle-Eastern campus of the American institution and it is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Needless to say, the partnership program with the American institution is provided at a different rate than the other main programs of the institute, which runs for around LE 10,000.<sup>3</sup> details about the profitability of the model to the American institution were provided as part of a larger investigation on the travel expenses of the President of the American institution. On its

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<sup>3</sup> Fees differ by specialization. The highest in 2013 was accounting, at LE 11,300. The lowest was business administration, at LE 8,200. Information technology hovered in the middle at LE 9,000. Numbers provided are based on a phone query.

website, the trip of the university president to Egypt is justified by showing the income made from this off-shore campus.

The reported profitability of the program to the foreign partner institution is an indicator of its profitability to the local partner . This highlights the shortcoming of having for-profit institutions. A not-for-profit institution would be forced to direct its revenues to program advancement. However, it is important to note that the presence of this international program caters to a need within the market either among students or employers. The presence of this international partner vouches to the level of autonomy private higher institutions in steering its programs and for potentials for quality improvement in response to market needs and expectations. The cost of the program is not announced at the Academy's website, and there is little information about the details of the program and its accreditation. Interestingly, the Academy only shows pictures of the alumni of the American program. While they are all young graduates, they show positions in international companies, some at managerial levels.

### ***5.2 Governance and quality assurance structures in a private institution: case two***

Case two is also an Academy with programs in accounting, computer science, hotel management and hospitality. The Academy evolved from being a two-year institute for secretaries in 1975. In 1978, a section for computer science was established, also providing a two-year diploma. This was followed by a two-year diploma in hotel management in 1990. In 1992, the latter two degree were upgraded into four-year degrees and accredited by the Supreme Council of Universities. The institute was upgraded into a higher institute in 2001.

The Academy prides having the (2000 - 9001 ISO) for quality assurance and for having a quality assurance unit. The Academy does not provide any details about the composition of this quality assurance unit and only includes description of government program for quality assurance (the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education, NAQAAE) and a direct link to its website. All the details included about quality assurance at the Academy are about NAQAAE and not about the Academy.

Similar to first case, the Academy prides international partnership. Its website highlights partnership agreements with international corporations such as Microsoft and Oracle. There are also partnerships with national universities allowing assistant professors to work and one American institution for a student exchange program. It is also obvious that the Academy takes pride in its infrastructure of computer laboratories, air-conditioned and well-furnished teaching halls and outer green space. This observation can also be made about Case One. Priding the infrastructure can be a strong attraction given the deteriorating infrastructure in many public institutions.

Also similar to the first case, the governance structure is very similar to private companies, with the founding owner's son serving as the head of the board. The board includes previous deans and senior faculty members from public universalities. The hiring model for faculty is also similar to the first case. Senior faculty are predominantly seconded from public universities. Only junior faculty members are full-time faculty. These show a very weak, if no, publication record. Tuition fees are less than case one, and hover around LE 3,000. <sup>4</sup>

### ***5.3 A student perspective***

The diverse fee structure is reflected in a diverse level of education quality among private higher education institutions. In this section, I provide an account of a number of students who went to some of the lower-tier private higher education institutions in Egypt. It is important to note that these students are not from the two schools identified in the case studies. This was a deliberate decision for research ethics purposes of anonymity and confidentiality. The

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.futureacademyheliopolis.com/ar/index.php?page=ro>

following details speak to situations with serious hampered quality and very weak learning outcomes. The purpose of the section is not to tarnish private higher institutions but to provide an account to some of the challenges they face.

One of the key informants was Sherief, who graduated from a four-year higher institute in information technology. At the time of the interview he was unemployed. Upon graduation, he worked as an IT support staff in a small-scale software company. He did not explain his reasons for leaving his job, but the conversation included a lot of reference to the deterioration of business after the revolution. Describing his education experience, he says:

*The institute has no education. Yes, there were good curricula, but how were we taught? Study and memorize for the exam (we are taught). I had colleagues who used to memorize the programming codes. I had colleagues who could not do a word processing document. All we cared about was what to do for the exam. You ask what exam do we have? ... ok, then you memorize and just throw it up all in the exam .. (Cairo, May, 2013)*

Rote memorization is a commonly identified problem in the education system in Egypt at all stages. It is also a commonly identified problem in public higher education institutions and documented in numerous reports (e.g. Richard, 1992 and OECD and WB, 2010).

Asked about the main problems he would identify with his learning experience at the institute, his immediate answer was “the relaxed rules (*el tasahol*)”. Explaining his point, he notes:

*We had the same professors of the (public university of the city). But they come with a different personality (attitude). All they want is to pass the students. They know it is all about passing. And that the student in the private institute are not like the students they have in public universities, who had higher scores (in thanawia amma). I could skip classes for the whole year, just go for the exam and I passed. The professors do not care. They do not care if students understand (the materials) or not .. they don't spend time in grading papers. Just let them all pass. It is like we are buying tiles from a shop! (Cairo, May, 2013)*

The commercialization of the education process is clear theme in accounts of students in private institutions “all they care about is the money” was a repeatedly noted concept. Sherief puts it in a very direct way and connects it to the lower quality of education received. He notes:

*... it is a problem in the management. This institution is run as a business. They don't care to have a hundred excellent students but to have a thousand students who pay. (Cairo, May, 2013)*

Asked about the reputation of the institution and the issues of quality, he notes:

*The institute wants to have the reputation that students pass. They want people to say (about the institution) that this is an easy academy (and that) my son succeeds while all it costs is 6,000 pounds a year*

This qualitative data speaks to the conundrum of affordability and the quest for excellence. Because lower-tier private higher institutions are primarily demand absorbing, they offer relatively low fees. The private sector positions itself in response to the massification of higher education. This comes at the expense of quality, perpetuating a cycle of low performance on the level of the institution and the student body. It also speaks to the danger of the commercialization of higher education.

Credentials, not the learning of skills, seem to be a main attraction of lower-tier private higher education institution. It is important to remember that credentials were central for public sector/government hiring as part of graduates guaranteed employment scheme. A job in the government continues to be a dream for many young people for its generous benefits scheme compared to what the predominantly informal private sector offers (Barsoum, forthcoming). Credentials of higher education are a means to the end of getting a government job.

Interviews with young people show that credentials are also important for migration to work in oil-rich Arab countries. Broker offices arrange for interviews for these young people with employers. Although learned skills matter in this process, the degree is a first step into the process. Most of these jobs are not highly technical and young people fill in the ranks of shop assistants, sales staff or low-level administration. These do not require a higher level of skill.

## **6. Analysis of Survey Data: The Learning Experience of Graduates of Public and Private Higher Institutions in Egypt**

This section addresses two issues based on survey data. The first part seeks to describe the education experience among students of public and private higher education institutions. In the following analysis, graduates of private institutions were a distinct group. However, the category of public institutions also included Azhar University graduates along with graduates of the Open University for clarity. There was a handful of cases that went to public higher institutions and paid fees. These were included with the rest of the graduates of public higher institutions due to their small sample size.

### ***6.1 The learning experience in both private and public higher education institutions***

The following table shows that graduates of private institutions were more likely to have access to English as language of instruction, than graduates of public institutions. In a globalized economy, access to the *lingua franca* is a key asset for job placement and advancement.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, not all those who went to private institutions had this as their first choice as Table 4 shows. The choice of specialization shows little difference between graduates of public and private institutions. However, more students had public institutions as their first choice than private institutions. This highlights the role of the Admission Co-ordination Bureau of Egyptian Universities (*Maktab Tanseek Al-Jame'at Al-Masriyah*). The table shows that private institutions are higher institutions of “last resort”, where those who could not find place at public institutions go.

Looking closely at teaching approaches and learning experience in both private and public institutions, some patterns clearly show. As Table 5 shows, lecturing was the modus operandi for teaching in both private and public institutions. Interactive learning tools of group and research projects were rarely used in both types of institutions. Surprisingly, more of the graduates of public institutions noted that they had applied knowledge. This is a bit of puzzle since the programs of private institutions in general tend to be applied in focus. It is probably the case that, similar to the informant quoted above, graduates in private institutions were seeking more applied knowledge than what the curricula could offer.

The following table shows that teaching methods were quite similar in both public and private institutions. This can be explained by the fact that private institutions depend, as noted earlier, on faculty members from public institutions. Even their junior full-time faculty members are graduates of the same public system. This explains the similarity between the two types of institutions. The only striking difference is in access to technology, with more graduates from private institutions reporting access to technology. This resonates with the earlier description of the two cases, where private institutions pride their computer laboratories as an attraction to new students.

Students' evaluation of the learning process and their assessment of the experience are key to quality improvement in education. Both private and public institutions do not generally allow students to provide feedback on the performance of instructors or the whole learning experience through exit surveys or interim satisfaction surveys. Interesting, there is a statistically significant difference between private and public institutions. While both are getting little

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<sup>5</sup> The author acknowledges the support received from Ali Rashed for statistical analysis of data

feedback, private institutions were eight times as likely as public institutions to allow students to assess professors and nine times as likely to participate in satisfaction surveys. These are important quality assurance tools that are ignored by both types of institutions.

Both public and private institutions also fail to maintain a connection with alumni as shown on Table 7. In higher education contexts where private institutions are not-for-profit, alumni constitute a significant group of donors to the education institutions where they studied. This purpose is defeated as all private institutions are for profit and are not in need of contacting alumni for fund-raising. The same table also shows, more seriously, that both public and private institutions fail to provide employment services to their graduates.

Finally, we asked graduates about how they evaluate the suitability of the education they received to in preparing them to get their first jobs, the skills needed in their current jobs, life-long learning and self-development and creative skills. A general observation is that the majority felt that their education did not prepare them for any of these issues. In fact, graduates of private institutions were slightly more inclined to note that their education prepared them to get their first jobs and current jobs. However, there were no significant differences along the other parameters.

## **7. Concluding Remarks and the Way Forward**

It is important to remember that the growth of private higher education in Egypt is part of a global phenomenon. Private higher education is a trend that is on the rise in many countries, which suggests that it is likely to increase in Egypt. Reports by international donors, primarily the OECD and the World Bank (e.g. OECD and World Bank, 2010 and World Bank, 2008) recommend a stronger role for private higher education as a measure for cost sharing, for the expansion and diversification of higher education alternatives and as a measure to meet the increasing demand for higher education.

The analysis of data in this paper shows a great similarity between the teaching methods in both public and private institutions. This can be explained by the fact that private institutions depend on faculty members from public institutions. Even their junior full-time faculty members are graduates of the same public system. Similarly, both private and public institutions fail to allow students to provide feedback on the performance of instructors or the whole learning experience through exit surveys or interim satisfaction surveys. These important quality assurance tools are ignored by both types of institutions. Both private and public institutions in Egypt fail to maintain a connection with alumni, who could constitute a significant group of donors to an education institution. When asked about how they evaluate the suitability of the education they received to their post-graduate experience, a general observation is that the majority felt that their education did not prepare them for any of these issues.

There is a number of global models for quality measurement in higher education. In fact, the higher education field is witnessing a paradigm shift, where comparable standards of quality are increasing displacing the tradition of internal academic peer review. Governments' involvement in quality assurance is becoming the new norm worldwide (Hazelkorn, 2011). Two approaches have been highlighted by Hazelbkorn (2011) for their opposing approaches for assessment. The first is the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, which is highlighted for its approach in assessing higher education institutions based on their own criteria, with the objective of helping them to improve their efforts. The opposite model is that of the Australian government. The latter emphasizes standards and outcomes, with teaching standards put in place by the government. the system is very stringent with significant implications on institutional legitimacy, financial support and reputation (ibid.). Interestingly, Hazerbkorn (ibid.) notes that the stringent Australian system has been in response to the growth of private institutions as a measure of ensuring quality. In the United States, the College Score

card system was established as an interactive on-line tool to provide comparable information about colleges to help students decide where to go.<sup>6</sup> The site provides details on cost, graduation rate, loan default rate for students loans and median loan sizes. Of great relevance, the jobs that graduates of these institutions get.

It is key that students make informed decisions about the education institutions they join. Students deserve to have “consumer-type” information about higher education institutions. This requires a concentrated focus on accountability through market transparency, increased open competition and perhaps a ranking system. In 2011, Hazelkorn counted 50 national rankings worldwide and ten global rankings (2011:4). Ranking is a status and a reputation issue (ibid.), which would force participating institutions to seek to improve their performance. Ranking data would force institutions to trace their alumni and provide post-graduation job search assistance to their graduates to have such data to attract prospective students. A significant challenge to improving the quality of private higher education is the compromised quality of public higher education. If the government is to take the role of quality assurance, what yard stick to use to measure quality if its own institutions are not equally measuring quality? In an eco-system where quality is compromised, quality assurance methods focusing on education inputs, are inadequate. It is clear that NAQAAE has a more serious role to play in terms of ensuring the transparency and efficiency of private higher institutions. At the end of the day there is also need for measures that would protect the rights of students in these institutions to quality education. This signifies a different role of the government, from service provision to quality control, where there is a need for focus on outcomes as opposed to only standards (World Bank, 2008). Such role will seek to ensure that quality, rather than profit, is at the core of private higher institutions. This also requires a serious discussion for the reform of laws governing the not- for-profit sectors to play an active role in private higher education.

The analysis in this paper highlights the need for an effective state steering role with policies geared towards propelling both public and private institutions to focus on education outcomes. In countries with excess demand for higher education, as in the case of Egypt, private institutions suffice with their role to address the access challenge and absorb demand. Competition for quality and innovation take less priority in an eco-system of this nature. The requires a paradigm shift in the state governance structure, with policies to hold institutions accountable for education outcomes and performance. Whether this can be done by adhering to government standardized outcomes or by holding institutions accountable based on their identified objectives (Hazelkorn 2011), students and their parents deserve to be able to make informed decisions.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/college-score-card>; see also [http://www.udc.edu/docs/spark/Spark\\_Vol4\\_Issue\\_15.pdf](http://www.udc.edu/docs/spark/Spark_Vol4_Issue_15.pdf) for a description of the program

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**Table 1: Enrollment in Tertiary Education Institutions by Year and Type**

Tertiary Education in Egypt	2001/02	2003/04	2005/06	2007/08	2009/10	2010/11	% in 2010/11
Enrollment in both public and private universities	1,563,445	1,695,327	1,963,250	1,916,324	2,004,870	1,722,968	82%
Enrollment in public universities*	1,494,647	1,615,267	1,880,460	1,868,920	1,928,112	1,649,986	78%
Enrollment in Private Universities	68,798	80,060	83,108	47,404	70,309	72,982	3%
Higher Technical Institutes	117,200	143,168	145,074	128,153	103,281	76,483	4%
Higher Institutes and Academies (public and private)	284,156	344,824	371,000	375,752	355,318	308,554	15%
Governmental academies	n/a	n/a	20,119	21,303	26,964	24,688	1%
Total	1,964,801	2,183,319	2,499,443	2,441,532	2,490,433	2,132,693	100%

Notes: \* includes Azhar students

Source: Compiled from CAPMAS (2012)

**Table 2: Share of Private Higher Education Institutions in Students Enrollment, 2006/07 and 2011/12**

Higher Education Institutes	Number of Institutes	No. of enrolled students	% of Total Enrolment	% of Total Enrolment in 2006/07	% of Total Graduates in 2011/12
Public Universities	17	1,101,431	43.30%		
Al-Azhar	1	401,956	15.80%	79.90%	77%
Public Technical Colleges	8	397,383	15.60%		
Private Universities	17	131,189	5.20%		
Private Higher Institutes	121	48,329	1.90%		
Private Middle Institutes	22	428,211	16.80%	20.10%	23%
		34,241	1.30%		

Source: Reproduced from data provided by OECD and World Bank (2010) for 2006/07 statistics and CAPMAS (2013) for 2011/2012 statistics on graduates

**Table 3: Language of Instruction in Public and Private Higher Education Institutions**

Parameter	Graduates of Public Institutions	Graduates of Private Institutions	Total
Language of Instruction			
Arabic	89.1	69.3	84.3
English	2.2	4.6	2.7
English and Arabic	8.8	26.1	12.9
French	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

**Table 4: Do Students Get What They Choose for Higher Education Institutions and Specializations?**

Parameter	Graduates of Public Institutions	Graduates of Private Institutions	Total
<b>Was the specialization your first choice ?</b>			
First	81.9	79.0	81.2
Second – Third	12.9	10.4	12.3
Fourth – Fifth	3.4	4.4	3.6
Other	1.9	6.3	2.9
<b>Was the institution your first choice ?</b>			
First	73.4	64.5	71.3
Second - Third	16.1	16.7	16.3
Fourth - Fifth	9.1	10.9	9.6
Other	1.3	8.0	2.9

**Table 5: Teaching Methods in Both Private and Public Institutions**

Teaching Methods	Private Institutions					Public Institutions				
	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E
Lectures	1	3	5	21	69	1	2	5	17	76
Group Projects	33	21	20	18	9	61	13	11	11	5
Research Projects	36	22	19	17	5	58	15	16	8	4
Applied knowledge	35	15	17	25	8	57	14	16	10	3
Theories	40	18	18	15	9	54	13	14	13	6
Instructor as Main Source of Information	5	4	20	29	42	4	3	16	27	49
Problem Solving	54	14	15	13	4	59	15	14	9	3
Focus on analytical skills	52	16	16	14	2	58	15	17	9	3
Oral Presentations	44	16	19	18	3	56	14	16	12	2
Multiple Choice Questions	40	17	23	16	4	47	15	22	13	4
Writing Assignments	53	14	18	10	4	65	14	14	6	2
Use of technology	17	8	22	22	31	65	14	12	6	3

Source: A: Never; B: Rarely; C: Sometimes; D: Usually; E: Always

**Table 6: Students' Opportunity to Assess their Learning Experience during Education**

Did Your Institution Allow you to:	Graduates of Public Institutions	Graduates of Private Institutions	Total
<b>Assess professors</b>			
Yes	1.15	9.42	3.15
NO	98.85	90.58	96.85
<b>Participate in student satisfaction surveys</b>			
Yes	1	9.18	2.97
NO	99	90.82	97.03
<b>Participate in student exit surveys</b>			
Yes	0.84	5.8	2.04
NO	99.16	94.2	97.96

**Table 7: Maintaining connection with Alumni and Job Placement Support**

Did Your Institution Allow you to:	Graduates of Public Institutions	Graduates of Private Institutions	Total
<b>Join an alumni group</b>			
Yes	2.38	1.93	2.27
NO	97.62	98.07	97.73
<b>Job placement Service</b>			
Yes	1.77	2.9	2.04
NO	98.23	97.1	97.96

**Table 8: Graduates' Evaluation of the Suitability of the Education They Received**

<b>Do you believe that your higher education was suitable and helped you:</b>	<b>Graduates of Public Institutions</b>	<b>Graduates of Private Institutions</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>To get your first job</b>			
Not Suitable at all	36.64	26.57	34.21
Not Suitable	11.52	16.91	12.82
Relatively Suitable	17.13	22.22	18.36
Suitable	19.2	21.01	19.64
Very suitable	15.51	13.29	14.98
<b>Life-long learning</b>			
Not Suitable at all	35.56	28.26	33.8
Not Suitable	15.21	14.98	15.15
Relatively Suitable	17.13	20.53	17.95
Suitable	20.81	23.67	21.5
Very suitable	11.29	12.56	11.6
<b>Doing your current job</b>			
Not Suitable at all	34.02	28.5	32.69
Not Suitable	15.59	17.63	16.08
Relatively Suitable	17.13	19.81	17.77
Suitable	20.74	23.43	21.39
Very suitable	12.52	10.63	12.06
<b>Self-Development</b>			
Not Suitable at all	26.34	16.43	23.95
Not Suitable	13.98	14.01	13.99
Relatively Suitable	19.43	22.46	20.16
Suitable	25.5	28.26	26.17
Very suitable	14.75	18.84	15.73
<b>Creative Skills</b>			
Not Suitable at all	33.26	21.74	30.48
Not Suitable	14.75	13.29	14.39
Relatively Suitable	20.2	21.74	20.57
Suitable	18.43	24.88	19.99
Very suitable	13.36	18.36	14.57