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Higher education and development: the role of private higher education institutions to accomplish fundamental purposes of the republic

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relations between higher education and development, focused on the investigation of the role of private institutions to achieve fundamental objectives of the Federative Republic of Brazil. It is analyzed the changes in the landscape of higher education in the country, as from the ascension of private institutions. It is also conducted an analysis of the powers of the Brazilian state as regulator of the sector, seeking subsidies that allow the assessment of the measure recommended intervention of the Ministry of Education, indicating some points which seem to be excessive and contrary to constitutional systematic.

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1. Introduction

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Nelson Mandela).

“Development” is a centerpiece issue since 70’s decade, and it has conducted Nations and international organizations overall into economic, juridical, social, historical, and cultural deep analysis, which aimed to the creation of favorable conditions to its full realization.

In Brazil, this issue was added to priorities roll, and reached specific constituting determination level which was 1988 Constitution. Besides establishing an extensive list of rights to population, it also prescribed fundamental objectives to be achieved, of which development played leading role. However, the simple reference in Constitution seemed not to be enough to its complete consummation, which infers country was not able to promote all necessary transformations and remains branded by social stress resulting from exclusion and privation of human satisfaction means.

Undoubtedly, there are several obstacles deriving from distinct orders that make even harder development effectuation and sustainable concretization of further Republic objectives. In face of such a challenger scenario, which reveals an expressive conjunct of demand and privation, superior education plays final role for the removal of barriers aiming to the termination of actual stage on behalf of a consistent step.

The latest years were marked by some significant evolutions on Brazilian teaching, most likely related to transformation of superior education institutions, which were philanthropic at origin, into social organizations and public entities of private nature with profitable purposes. This reconfiguration occurs since public system is not capable to absorb the superior education access high demand from population, in quantity and quality perspectives. As consequence, private institutions take leading role as social actors and must be ready to absorb this demand in order to improve social inclusion.
What is the role of private superior education institutions to the concretization of fundamental objectives of the Republic? The possible answers for this question are raised from the examination of relations between superior education and development, such as the analysis of Brazilian State role before this sector. This debate transits by the discussions about its regulation. In the midst of possible fundamental questions there is one that should be highlighted: at what degree is recommendable the intervention of Education Ministry at superior education market?

2. Higher education and development

“It is high time Brazil had the challenge to improve the quality of our education. Knowledge is decisive factor for the social and economic development, such as for sovereign affirmation. How many outstanding professionals Brazil misses because we did not give them proper access to education?” (Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, 2004)

It is undeniable that “the idea of development is in the midst of world vision that prevails at current era” (Furtado, 2000) and the classical conceptions (reference 4) have been replaced by humanity and social views (Locatelli, 2005). On the opposite, is equally indubitable that its promotion is a huge commitment that draws forth several hindrances from different orders. The societies are largely still incapables to appease conditions to the fulfillment of fundamental human needs. That issue maintains an unacceptable hiatus between achievable and accomplished in means of quality of life indicators. Thus, it is possible to conclude that development (or its lack) is one of biggest problems of this epoch, most likely in countries as Brazil, where its realization, by the way, turned into specific constitutional determination (Wald, 2011).

The Brazilian Constitution does not expressly determine which form of development desired and even the instruments to effective it. The interpretation of other devices merely assists the raise of relevant values by the constituent while in his pursue process (Locatelli, 2005). Thus, through a critical and systematic enshrined orders analysis on Constitution, it is possible to figure out that an adequate conception of Brazilian development indicates the need it gets social inclusion role. Also, it
is required development is equally distributed between country regions, and generate qualified jobs vacancies, which will make income and welfare gut feelings to population. A development that signals a brighter future, which would be able to reduce the unacceptable gap between the realizable and achieved in the field of fundamental rights, where higher education is of utmost importance, and should be considered a priority issue as "it is not possible to think of raise of citizens that would fulfill nation needs, or even the economic and social development that it requires without taking it into consideration, regardless of the model that has been proposed as a paradigm” (López, 2011).

As per Chaves (2012) thoughts, the regrets (as per previous reference) of former President Lula in 2004, at the time of National Education Counsel Team induction ceremony, remains alive and requires public and private politics that could break loose that block sustainable evolution and qualification level of education processes in Brazil. Upon the analysis of superior education indicators of Brazil it is inferred that country has about 12,5% of workers with superior education degrees, while in South Korea and Japan it reaches 40 e 45%, respectively. It also warns Brazil holds 6 engineers for each 100 thousand habitant while the US and Japan hold 24 and 25, respectively. Then it can be concluded “indicators are perverse and level of competition of country is quite low.”

According to Aurelio Portuguese Dictionary, to educate consists of “raising natural individual aptitude (...) developing his intellectual faculties (...), to instruct, to teach”. Thus, education, regardless of its level, as a mean to the development of psychic, intellectual, and moral capacities of a human being enlarges horizon of human knowledge and expand his potentialities. The higher education, as representat of most elevate level of education, palsy main role to the promotion of development. It can be straight linked to the process raise by Sen (1999), in the meaning of dilation of real freedom that people enjoy and the elimination of restrictions that are imposed, which reduces their choices and social, politic and economic opportunities of rational actions.

Plainly, reaching higher level of superior education means progress, evolution, integration, justice, welfare, quality of life, which also signifies the achievement of fundamental objectives of the Republic. Its accomplishment is closely related to the increase of opportunities that are granted to people to access superior education on quality and quantity basis. As consequence, it will incentive
the production of combined transformation that will afford people to experience dignity of life in its essence. In regards of this subject, it is stated by National Education Plan for 2001-2010 the following:

It is not possible for a country to aim to development and independence without rising up a rich superior education system. In a world where knowledge outweighs material resources as a factor of human development the importance of superior education and its institutions is quite relevant. In order to enable them to accomplish its educational mission, institutional, and social, public support is crucially needed. (National Education Plan. 2001-2010)

In Brazil, the development will depend on the establishment of an appropriate institutional framework, which reflects the operating efficiency of the education sector, making it virtuous to achieve the common good and general interest, in order to raise a definitive factor for the success or failure of the Brazilian model. This process should be guided by the collaboration between state and community, and between state and market (Schapiro & Trubek, 2012), which demand task force for the raise of a development strategy, in order to ensure higher levels of expansion of superior education public and private so that role of private superior education institutions is widespread as well as Public intervention on this sector. It can be inferred that State and private institutions are not antagonistic or substitutes, but essentially complementary.

All in all, the expansion of superior education is absolutely essential to a sustainable development, as well as for the achievement of major objectives of the Nation. Brazil will not take standout presence in the new international order whether its levels of education do not get improved, most likely taking into consideration superior education scenario, in which private educational institutions should be taken as one of the main actors of development. Therefore, these combined actions will generate social progress and evolution.

3. New institutions in higher education in Brazil

It would not be possible to figure out the current state of higher education in Brazil without checking facts and statistics related to indicators of their achievements and transformations over the past decades.
In 1970’s, 1/3 of the system was private, and 2/3 was public. In 1980’s, the reality changed to 77% covered by private sector, which reached over 78% in 1998 (by INEP / MEC data). The numbers for 2001 showed that 86.8% of the institutions were private, which reached 88.3% in 2010.

The quantity of higher institutions between 2001 and 2010 had a significant increase: 71%. This increase is affected due to growing number of private institutions (74%), whereas the increase in the number of public institutions was 52%.

In the period 2001-2010 there was about 110% enrollment increase in higher institutions, and, although there was also an increase in public institutions enrollments (74%), the most significant increase in private area entrance meets their grown movement referred above.

The admittance number in higher education institutions increased by 109% in 2000’s decade, of which almost 78% were covered by private institutions.

According to INEP (Anisio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies), enrollment is the sum of the student application to a higher course equal to attending and formed numbers, while the number of incomes is the sum of student bonds to a higher course that refers to the same year Census was raised, or 2010.

In terms of graduation, the 2010 Higher Education Census shows that there was an increase of 44% of graduates from public institutions, totalizing, in 2010, 973.839 graduates, while private schools achieved a 197% increase in the number of graduates, reaching 783.242 graduates in 2010, which represented 80% of graduates in general.

Given these numbers, which reveals significant growth of both graduates as well as registered and enrolled numbers, the role of education, ie, the higher education institutions - especially private ones -, can be considered a factor of social emancipation, in aid of construction of citizenship. The new private higher education institutions, public entities private in nature, should be seen not only as institutions that provide technical knowledge for the labor market, but also, and especially, as places
of empowerment and building of an including society, contributing to the formation of citizens capable of making their own circumstances.

4. The role of private higher education institutions in achieving the fundamental purposes of the Republic: inwards new paradigms of corporate social responsibility

As per Sen and Kliksberg (2010), the role that should be played by private institutions in contemporary society is under constant changing in recent years, evolving from a vision which defended the purpose of generating profit for its owners - only to whom it would might concern - in direction to its responsibility, in a perspective that goes far and indicates a paradigmatic rupture in relation to previous conceptions, in regards of their high social responsibility.

In the Brazilian Constitutional Law, the social function of the company was raised to the status of constitutional principle, by the recognition of increasing importance exerted by particular that begins to be seen as relevant instrument for the achievement of the fundamental purposes of the Republic. On the other hand, free enterprise needs to be reconciled with the other principles and values enshrined in the Constitution (Amaral, 2008). Certainly, this concept transforms individuals into social actors in the development process and gives them relevant papers, which go beyond the mere pursuit of their own economic interests, in favor of the ability to meet increasingly social demands remarked in Brazilian society on daily basis. In other words, free enterprise must remain committed to ethical values, and focused on the preservation of human life in all its fullness.

In this sense, one of the biggest challenges to private higher education institutions is the decentralization of its campuses, in both locally and regionally national perspective. The presence throughout the national territory is a vision which consolidates the ideal solution for expanding the opportunities of access to higher education, previously restricted to the main centers, for significant
portions of society in places hitherto excluded. When approaching higher access possibilities to people, logistical issues related to difficulties and costs of displacement, rather an almost insurmountable barrier, fall considerably. Decentralization undeniably contributes to one of the main needs of the country: the reduction of social and regional inequalities. It also collaborates to its links with society.

Another of its commitments is focusing on quality, with solid training models, tailored to the needs of education and specialization, and focused on research and scientific initiation. By the way, with no quality, it is clear that near location and low price will not work. However, it is also correct to affirm that if quality is achieved, but there is missing location and prices Brazil will not win the new heights of development, so it will not be "open" to anyone who wants to access higher education. Once maintained as determinant, enhanced by offering courses with the same standard of quality in different locations, shifts and schedules that maximize resources and manpower available, the gains of its decentralization will be aligned with the fundamental purposes of Republic, in accordance, therefore, with the roles which they should play.

It is also important to highlight the pursuit of employability of its students in a competitive world by new sensibilities and skills. The covenants are essential in order to allow the pick-up of students and graduates, respectively, for internships or jobs related to their fields of knowledge, thus linking the study with work, and enhancing the activities performed by its students and alumni in society.

All of these challenges, and others, should guide the actions of private institutions in their commitment to higher education in Brazil, as from the recognition that they should not only meet their particular interests, but also the interest of the whole society.

5. The regulatory intervention of the Ministry of Education and the challenges to concretization of fundamental purposes of the Republic
In Brazil, there are currently a number of problems that generate negative impact on the pursuit of development, among which excessive regulatory intervention by the State which, under the pretext of searching for education qualification, has mistakenly imposed unjustified barriers to the sector in some cases, focusing on their analysis, merely rhetorical discourse, instead of taking into account Brazilian reality.

In the field of higher education, the intervention is performed by SERES - Department of Regulation and Supervision of Higher Education - which is a department from the Ministry of Education that is in charge of regulating and supervising public and private institutions. That regulatory public agency imposes some limitations which aim to combine and harmonize their activities with collective interests.

Regardless of the technique to be used, state intervention is legitimate only when directed to the achievement of public interest, and with a singular purpose which is the persecution of social welfare. In other words, it is imperative that the role of the government aims to guarantee effect to the values enshrined by the Constitution. Thus, the question which arises is the intensity of such an intervention, as well as raise of its fair measure, in order to adjust it to the value of freedom, which is an inviolable right granted by Democratic State Law.

In an education perspective, the intervention of the Ministry of Education at some restricted sectors seems to be excessive and contrary to constitutional systematic, especially regarding some issues related to the evaluation of higher education institutions.

5.1. Evaluation of the evaluation: for a fair appraisal of higher education system.

The evaluation of higher education institutions has been one of the most significant points of intervention in educational sector. It was established by the Ministry of Education to infer the quality and excellence of the courses in general. It is particularly important not only for the consequences set out in the parameters created by the Government, but mainly for the impact on the expansion of
higher education in Brazil, from which it is emerged the need for permanent reflections and discussions about its progress.

The main mechanisms for evaluating higher education institutions created by the Ministry of Education are the index of courses – which is called IGC – and the preliminary concept of course - the CPC -, which have been raised as key indicators to the state and, by extension, to media and market. Through the IGC, the Government grades educational institutions, ranging from 1 to 5, with "feathers" as accreditation of institutions, closure of courses, and restricted spaces. The CPC is resulted from a calculation that takes into account issues such as the performance of the students (55%), the infrastructure and organization of the course didactics (15%), and faculty members (30%). According to this criterion, whether doctors attendance in courses reaches 15% (+7.5% related to the physical attendance by of masters +7.5% for teachers in full devotion), they will represent over 50% of the assessment of faculty members.

As per Chaves (2013), these criteria lead to inconsistencies while evaluating 6.8 million undergraduate students in the face of such an important attribute assigned to doctors. Taking into account the synopsis of higher education in 2011, which states 30,400 undergraduate and 1700 doctoral courses, as well as 107,000 of docent doctors (30% of total), of which 70.9 million (66.3%) are in public universities, it is highlighted that private higher education institutions, with 4.9 million enrollments (73.7% of total enrollment), and only 36,000 doctors available (0.7% of their undergraduates), would face an inevitable trend of low valuation of its faculty, as consequence of the very impossibility of meeting the parameters imposed by the Ministry of Education. The author also criticizes the National Assessment of Higher Education - SINAES – in regards of its determination concerning differences between Universities and Colleges, as well as regional inequalities in economic and social perspectives, which failed while considering that states as Acre and Roraima have no Ph.D. courses available. In addition, there are some states as Amapá and Rondônia that hosts only one doctorate in ecology and parasitology, respectively. Mr. Chaves warns that in the entire northern region it is held 56 doctoral programs, while only the University of São Paulo holds 147. To make
general scenario even worse, there are other states as Alagoas, Sergipe and Piauí that do not hold any doctorates in management, law, physical and IT subjects.

He also points out the need for more doctors graduations by public universities side. This lack is drastically missing in most poor states. Meanwhile, it could not be filled by private higher education institutions because they would get even lower grades in those states that doctoral graduation is not in place so far. As result, private institutions would be subject to “reprobation” by the Ministry of Education, what would affect their reputation as educational institution. Thus, the establishment and maintenance of criteria evaluation, which should be consonant with current reality concerning formation of doctors in Brazil is urged. It is mandatory that huge social and economic differences between regions of country are taken into consideration, followed by the concentration of doctors in southern regions of Brazil, which reaches 75.5% of total number of doctors of the country.

The author concludes that the evaluation is essential to qualification permanent process, especially when referred to higher education because of its importance for development. However, the same quality that is required from evaluated parties should be also requested by the instruments raised for their evaluation. Given the absence of fairer parameters, the evaluation is distorted, confused and, therefore, do not properly qualify institutions. On the opposite, it constituted an obstacle to the achievement of fundamental purposes of the Republic.

6. Conclusions

The statistics and data presented in this paper demonstrate a reconfiguration in Brazilian higher education sector, since its activities became to be exercised primarily by the private sector. The role of these institutions as means of development factor grows in importance with definitive scope in the concretization of further purposes of the Republic. This relevant role requires from the institutions highest levels of commitment, ethics and social responsibility at all. It requires that their activities have to be stimulated permanently. Besides, this initiative must be understood as national project,
and State should act as inductor of the new order, aiming to the raise and maintenance of such an institutional arrangement that suits to sustenance of development purposes.

In the face of this scenario, it should be put in place permanent reflections on regulation and supervision of sector, given the importance of private institutions for the development. It is unquestionable that State plays an important role as regulator. In this sense, it is imposing that Brazil revaluates some aspects of intervention under the pretext of searching for qualified education. In some cases, it is erroneously imposed unjustified barriers to the sector, which is distorted focused on their analysis that is a mere rhetorical discourse that is far from Brazilian reality. It is clear that it plays a reverse role to the development and realization of other fundamental purposes of the Republic. It is essential that regulation contributes to maximization of potential of the private higher education, and supports the achievement of most important interests and needs of society.

The Brazilian regulatory model should be conciliator in its essence. It should guarantee elementary basis to the promotion of indispensable intervention that should be ruled by the following premises: i) just the most elevated level of access to higher education will be able to promote the evolution and welfare feeling in overall country; ii) the concretization of fundamental purposes of the Republic should not dispense the effective participation of private higher education institutions. All in all, they do play definitive role for the achievement of constitutional purposes, and also for the social practice of value projects of Brazilian society in general.

References:


