

Research note

Alignment of the Governance System for Private Higher Education in Indonesia

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Summary

With more than 3,000 private higher education institutions, and around 70 percent of all students in the country enrolled in them, Indonesia has a particularly large, dynamic, and diverse private higher education sector. The country's economic and political environment can be characterized as conducive to private institutions offering academic programs. At the same time, the higher education sector in the country faces enormous challenges — especially with respect to the difficulties to uphold academic standards on a broad basis. Providing a framework for this sector — one characterized by appropriate governance structures that ensure quality — is of particular importance for Indonesia. The governance-equalizer model, a well-established tool, was used to analyze how leaders of higher education institutions view governance structures in the sector in Indonesia: A survey was conducted asking them what kind of reform of governance in private higher education institutions they would suggest in order to make the system more effective. Rectors, vice rectors, and other academic leaders shared their perspectives on the role of government, stakeholders in higher education institutions, leaders of higher education institutions, and on academics as well as competition. The most important findings were a preference for the closer involvement of stakeholders and equally strong support for competitive forces within higher education too.

Keywords: private higher education, governance, Indonesia

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Introduction

In most countries around the world, the provision of higher education has traditionally been the responsibility of the public sector. The last few decades have been characterized by substantial changes in this respect (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009; Sanyal and Johnstone 2011: 163–164; Varghese 2015). The significant increase in the demand for and the supply of tertiary education has shifted the balance between the public and the private sector. In many countries, the state has been reluctant or unable to expand funding in line with the growth of the demand for higher education. Private higher education institutions have often been quicker and bolder than public ones in responding to these challenges. This is particularly true in Asia (Bjarnsaon et al. 2009; Asian Development Bank 2012; Varghese 2015: 13). In terms of the number of institutions and number of students, the private higher education sector in some Asian countries is now quantitatively more important than the public education one.

Indonesia is a case in point. The number of students enrolled in higher education there grew from 200,000 in 1975, to 2.5 million in 1995 (Nizam 2006: 36), to almost seven million in 2017. Some 68 percent of all students in the country are enrolled in private higher education institutions, a percentage figure only surpassed in Asia by South Korea and Japan (Asian Development Bank 2012). As of 2017 more than 95 percent of all Indonesian higher education institutions were private (PDDikti Kemenristekdikti 2017), the highest figure in all Asia. Given the size and importance of private higher education in Indonesia then, an effective framework for providing good-quality education is essential for the country's economic future.

Both external and internal factors play crucial roles herein: The external ones can be analyzed by using the well-known PESTEL framework. The internal perspective, meanwhile, can be captured by scrutinizing the governance system prevailing in higher education. This paper especially addresses the perception of needed changes in the overall governance of private higher education in Indonesia, as seen from the perspective of the leaders of the country's higher education institutions themselves. In a fast-changing external environment for private higher education and with frequent reforms of the governance system, leaders of higher education institutions represent important voices in the search for appropriate ways to establish a system ensuring the high performance of tertiary education. Understanding the kind of governance reforms that these leaders call for is of key importance for subsequent reform processes.

First, a short overview of the private higher education sector in Indonesia is given. This is followed by a discussion of the main challenges for private higher education institutions there. Hereafter, the external environment for private higher education institutions in the country is described. In the section that then follows, the governance-equalizer model is introduced as a theoretical framework for analyzing governance issues. The underlying concept and the results of an empirical study are then presented and discussed.

The private higher education sector in Indonesia — key features and trends

There are a large variety and diversity of higher education institutions in Indonesia. Different classifications help in dissecting this diversity: universities, institutes, and schools of higher learning offer academic programs, while polytechnics, academies, and the more recently opened community colleges exclusively offer vocational training. The vast majority of institutions are schools of higher learning (colleges), followed by academies and universities.

Tertiary education can generally be offered by public or by private suppliers. However, schools of higher learning and academies are exclusively private.

Table 1: Number of Higher Education Institutions (Year 2017) in Indonesia and of Students Enrolled at Each (Numbers in Brackets)

	University	Institute	School of higher learning	Academy	Community college	Poly-technic	Grand total
Public	63 (1,970,988)	13 (91,049)	-	-	3 (451)	43 (149,180)	122 (2,211,668)
Private	492 (2,769,248)	65 (178,977)	1,431 (1,394,902)	1,007 (270,475)	12 (569)	147 (98,672)	3,154 (4,712,843)
Total	555	78	1,431	1,007	15	190	3,276 (6,924,511)

Sources: Government of Indonesia (2017); Higher Education Statistical Year Book (2017).

Table 1 shows that private institutions make up 96 percent of all higher education ones registered in Indonesia. A considerable number of these institutions are religiously affiliated, either in the public or more prevalently in the private sector (Logli 2016). These institutions typically offer a wide range of programs, meaning they are not limited to religious or social issues. Taking the frequently used classifications of higher education institutions as “elite,” “semi-elite,” “religious/cultural,” or “non-elite and demand-absorbing” as a reference point, most private higher education institutions can be characterized as non-elite and demand-absorbing (Varghese 2015; Logli 2016; OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015: 189). The average size of the institutions differs considerably: While public higher education institutions in 2017 on average had 18,128 students, the equivalent number for private ones was just 1,495. This small size has important implications for their operations.

Private institutions are particularly active in the social sciences and education, and less so in the natural sciences (Logli 2016: 570). They generally draw their students from all social strata. However, empirical studies show that students whose parents are well-off find it easier to be accepted at public higher education institutions (Logli 2016: 571).

Challenges for private higher education in Indonesia — an overview

Private higher education institutions in Indonesia are important with respect to filling the gap left by the unwillingness or inability of government to provide public funding for the burgeoning higher education sector. They have played a key role in managing “massification” and absorbing the increased demand. Private tertiary institutions are seen as challenging the status quo, introducing innovation and driving change. They are said to offer programs highly relevant for the labor market (Varghese 2015). There is substantial evidence that graduates of higher education programs are successful in finding employment and receiving above-average wages (Rosser 2018; Negara and Benveniste 2014).

However, those who locate the responsibility to provide higher education clearly in the public sphere see both their growth in the past and their quantitative importance now negatively. Many criticize these developments as the “commercialization of higher education” (see Logli 2016: 568; Rosser 2018: 16). The inherent inequity of offering only privately financed programs for the majority of students is often addressed. Because of the difficulties for low-income groups to afford tuition fees, the system is seen as lacking equity in terms of access to higher education — both in terms of social income group and region of origin (OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015: 191; Nizam 2006).

The provision of quality instruction is widely seen as the major challenge for private higher education (Rosser 2018: 3; Hill and Wie 2012). While the top private institutions are seen as offering a similar quality hereof as the good public universities (OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015: 188), a more skeptical picture regarding the vast majority of private higher education institutions can be painted. Taking institutional accreditation as an overall signal for quality, the difference in the extent of this across the two sectors is significant: while 74.6 percent of public higher education institutions are institutionally accredited, the respective figure for private ones is only 46.4 percent (BAN-PT 2018).

The same picture emerges when looking at some of the detailed figures: The percentage of instructors at higher education institutions who hold advanced degrees is low. In 2017 only 5.2 percent of all instructors at private higher education institutions (PHEI) held a PhD, while the respective figure for public ones was 29 percent (PDDikti Kemenristekdikti 2017; Government of Indonesia 2017: 138; Rosser 2018: 11). Many instructors are said to lack experience with modern teaching approaches (Wicaksono and Friawan 2011). The practice of some of the teaching staff having a second job outside the institution is still prevalent (Logli 2016: 573; Welch 2007: 674). The contribution to research — which the Indonesian government, as a matter of principle, requests all higher education institutions to make — is low (Logli 2016: 574). Because of their small average size, many institutions have difficulties to provide an environment that fosters academic exchange and excellence (OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015).

Economies of scale cannot be exploited, challenging the business model that they rest on. More recently the government has closed down some private institutions because of them not meeting minimum quality standards. In 2018 a moratorium was declared on founding new private higher education institutions. In reaction to the small average size of the institutions and resulting problems, the government initiated in 2018 a new policy to push for mergers between private higher education institutions (Ministry of Research Technology and Higher Education 2018).

An analysis of the external environment — enabling and limiting factors

The large size of the Indonesian private higher education sector is the result of private organizations' willingness to offer academic programs as well as of also the government's interest in the sector offering them (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009: 75; Levy 2010: 27; Welch 2007: 673). The government has been supportive of such programs' growth for many decades in fact: The overall policy approach by the Indonesian government with respect to private suppliers of higher education can be described as enabling and supportive (OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015: 184; Rosser 2018: 4). The government created a framework that allowed private organizations to run higher education institutions as long as they met minimum quality standards.

Economic conditions have overall been enabling for the development of private higher education institutions in Indonesia. There is generally a good job market for graduates of higher education (Rosser 2018). Unemployment among graduates from higher education institutions is lower than for those with lesser qualifications. For graduates, the financial returns from investment in tertiary education are (still) high (Negara and Benveniste 2014). The readiness of individuals and families in Indonesia to invest in human capital is considerable. There are some government schemes to financially support private universities employing qualified staff (Bjarnason et al. 2009: 38; Varghese 2015: 13). The willingness of companies to allocate resources to higher education as a way to gain direct access to talented students has been an advantage for the development of private higher education in the country. Some companies consider spending on higher education part of their corporate social responsibility.

In terms of social framework conditions, the most important factor in Indonesia is the growing population and hence the size of the youth demographic — especially with the increased interest of young people in entering higher education. The transition rate from high school to higher education has increased (OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015: 194), which has led to a constant rise in the number of school graduates seeking enrollment in higher education programs. With regard to environmental factors, the topography of Indonesia in fact favors a decentralized form of higher education: the country's population is dispersed across thousands of

different islands. Meanwhile traffic conditions in the big cities reduce the accessibility of institutions situated just a few kilometers away, putting a premium on decentralized offers.

The legal framework has been quite favorable for private institutions. The main provisions for the operation of higher education institutions can be found in the 1945 Constitution and in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 22 of 1961 concerning higher education institutions. Today, the most important rulebook for higher education institutions and the governance architecture is the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 12 of 2012 Dated 10 August 2012 concerning Higher Education. This law spells out government policy toward good governance across public and private higher education institutions. It addresses a typology of institutions in higher education, standards for the provision of higher education, principles of operation, and responsibilities of the various actors involved. It contains regulations concerning quality assurance in higher education institutions. It regulates funding matters and issues relating to foreign institutions.

Of particular importance is Indonesian Government Regulation No. 4 of 2014 on the Performance of Higher Education and the Management of Higher Education Institutions. There are further specific regulations, such as Indonesian Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Regulation No. 51 of 2018 concerning the Establishment and the Dissolution of Universities. Some other regulations specifically address related matters, such as the challenge of quality assurance (Indonesian Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Regulation No. 62 of 2016), the conduct of private higher education institutions (Indonesian Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Regulation No. 3 of 2018), and the specification of the discretionary spaces for the formulation of statutes for private higher institutions (Indonesian Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Regulation No. 16 of 2018).

The various laws regulating higher education in Indonesia generally allow for innovation and for openness toward private actors. The government has in recent years opened up funding lines originally preserved for public universities to private institutions (Varghese 2015: 13). There is financial support available for some of the expenses of private higher education institutions, especially when it comes to recruiting highly qualified staff. These institutions can apply for competitive programs, and are increasingly succeeding in obtaining funding (OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015: 208). Students at such institutions can apply for government-funded scholarships meanwhile (Wicaksono and Friawan 2011).

In sum, there is a positive framework in place for private higher education institutions overall. It is highly likely then that they will continue to play a key role in Indonesia's education provision.

Addressing the challenge — the importance of the governance system and the dimensions of it

Whether organizations are able to respond to challenges and how they do so are not only the result of factors associated with the external environment, but also of the powers influencing the inner workings of those organizations too. The concept of “governance” describes the institutional arrangements existing across the autonomous and semiautonomous actors involved in the workings of a given organization. Institutions can be broadly understood as being constituted by formal and informal norms and regulations (North 1990: 3). A sound and well-calibrated governance structure addresses the behavior of agents within cooperative or competitive arrangements, helps in ensuring accountability by addressing problems such as information asymmetries, opportunism, and moral hazards, and provides for incentives to make an organization effective and efficient with respect to its goals (Menard 2008: 283–284).

The nature of the governance of the Indonesian higher education sector has been a recurrent theme in many related studies and documents. But these articles mainly refer to governance within the public sector — which is, however, the much smaller sector in terms of number of institutions and number of students (OECD/Asian Development Bank 2015). Less attention has been paid to governance within the private sector meanwhile. But given the size of the latter, its governance structure is of central importance for the overall performance of the higher education sector in Indonesia. It is therefore important to address the issue of the most appropriate form of governance for this sector: In terms of governance, what overall direction should the country’s private higher education institutions take? What kinds of regulations are needed to clarify the allocation of roles and tasks between the foundation or the association of foundations on the one side and the leadership of private universities on the other? In which ways should the government prescribe standards for the statutes of universities? Is the government needed to push for the modernization of institutions? Should there be standards with respect to stakeholders’ roles in such organizations, like via board of trustees? Should there be requirements in terms of making the voice of academics heard in senates or similar bodies? Should there be more competition for resources, or is competition an inappropriate mechanism for higher education?

A useful tool for analyzing the governance structure within the higher education sector in general was developed in the 1990s by scholars in Europe. Looking mainly at the dominant model of public universities on that continent, they identified five dimensions to the governance mechanism. Between them, they determine the decision-making process within academic organizations (Westerheijden et al. 2010):

- “State regulation” refers to the authority vested in the state. The state can determine in broad or very detailed form the operational activities of higher education institutions.

- “Stakeholder guidance” refers to the role of players such as industry, communities, and students.
- “Academic self-governance” refers to the power of academics to determine the affairs of the institution.
- “Managerial self-governance” concerns the powers given to the leadership of the higher education institution, meaning to rectors, presidents, or deans.
- “Competition for scarce resources” refers to the importance attached to having access to the best students, to the best personnel, to having the highest prestige, and to the allocation of funds.

A higher education system can be described as having a specific mix of these various dimensions. This tool was originally used to analyze the higher education systems in most European countries by reflecting on the status quo and the shifts in their governance dimensions. Studies of the trends for the last two decades show that, overall, European countries have opted for less state regulation, more stakeholder guidance, less academic but more managerial self-governance, and more competition (Westerheijden et al. 2010; De Boer et al. 2007). Because of this overall trend of convergence in institutional arrangements, the model became known as the “governance-equalizer” one.

The model has typically been used to discuss, as noted, the nature of the institutional mechanisms of public universities. But it can also be used to reflect on governance with respect to private higher education institutions. When mainly discussing the latter, however, it is useful and indeed necessary to introduce a sixth dimension: the role of the owner(s) of the institution. The owners take over some of the roles that the government plays in public universities (such as providing funds, influencing the overall mission, and similar). However, the nature of their relationship with the university is different as compared to the relationship between government and a public university. Owners cannot substitute for the role of the government in terms of determining the rules that higher education institutions must follow. The government remains the key rule-setting agent, and thus needs to be considered separately in the analysis of the architecture of university governance in Indonesia.

The following sixth dimension is therefore added:

- “Influence of owner(s)” refers to the power of the owners to determine the overall affairs and the day-to-day management of financial and academic affairs.

Aligning the governance structures for private higher education institutions — the perspectives of their leaders

Empirical research based specifically on the governance model described above was conducted wherein rectors, vice rectors, and other academic leaders from both

private and public tertiary institutions in Indonesia were asked what the most desirable changes in the allocation of powers would be. Leaders were asked whether the current allocation of power should stay the same or be adjusted. Data was collected via an online survey, with the concerned individuals invited to answer a questionnaire. The sample collection was carried out by using nonprobability sampling. A virtual snowball sampling method was used, with a minimum target number of forty respondents. Questionnaires were circulated by using a Google Doc via the network of the Association of Private Higher Education Institutions of Indonesia (APTISI). Data collection was conducted for four weeks, from October 9 to November 9, 2018.

For each of the six dimensions, respondents were asked to comment whether the level of power allocated to the state, owners, stakeholders, academics, the managerial leadership, and to competitive forces should stay the same, be increased, or be decreased:

Question 1: Should the level of state regulation be increased, stay the same, or be reduced?

Question 2: Should the influence of owners (i.e. the foundations) be increased, stay the same, or be reduced?

Question 3: Should the role of stakeholders such as community representatives, students, or industry representatives in terms of guiding institutions be increased, stay the same, or be reduced?

Question 4: Is more, the same, or less influence by academics on the management of the affairs of the institution desirable?

Question 5: Should the power of leaders of the institutions such as rectors, deans, or heads of departments be increased, stay the same, or be reduced?

Question 6: Is more, the same, or less competition in terms of that for the best students, the best instructors, for funding, etc. desirable?

It was hypothesized that rectors or vice rectors of private higher education institutions would like to see the system develop in terms of less state regulation, a claim often formulated by representatives of private institutions all around the world. It was also hypothesized that academic leaders would prefer a governance system that leaves less space for the influence of the owners of private higher education institutions. It was further hypothesized that these leaders would be in favor of more influence by stakeholders. This was based on the assumption that leaders would see the importance of their stakeholders' ideas being articulated, and the gains from mutually beneficial relationships. It was assumed that leaders would partly look at stakeholders as countervailing the state's and the owners' influence. With respect to the effect of academics on the managing of the institutions, it was hypothesized that — similar to the debate in Europe and the United States —

leaders would call for less such influence. It was further hypothesized that leaders would see benefits in more power being allocated to the managerial leadership of these institutions. With respect to competition, it was hypothesized that leaders would see such pressure positively, and as a chance to excel.

The results of the survey

In total, 456 academic leaders from private higher education institutions ultimately responded and filled out the questionnaire. Of these, 59 percent were rectors, 14 percent were vice rectors, while the remaining 27 percent had other functions like deans or heads of department. Table 2 shows the results for the six identified governance dimensions.

Table 2: Results of the Survey of Academics Leaders in Indonesia (Year 2018)

	Influence and power (as a %)		
	Should be increased	Should stay the same	Should be decreased
State regulation	25	56	19
Influence of owners	18	44	38
Role of stakeholders	93	6	1
Role of academics	52	46	2
Academic leaders	75	20	5
Role of competition	94	4	2

Source: Authors' own compilation.

A majority considered the level of state regulation appropriate, with around 25 percent being in favor of more and 19 percent in favor of less. With respect to the influence of the owners of private higher education institutions, 38 percent of respondents wished for a reduction of their influence. Some 93 percent were in favor of more influence for community representatives, students, or industry representatives meanwhile.

A further significant finding is that 98 percent of those asked would like to see the influence of academics stay the same or be increased, which is quite different to the discourse in Europe — where many leaders of higher education institutions would like to see it reduced. The leaders who replied wanted to see their own influence be increased or stay the same. The survey furthermore revealed strong support for more competition — for the best students, the best instructors, for funding, and similar — with 94 percent being in favor hereof.

Discussion

Most of the results are in line with the hypotheses formulated. Some of the findings are very clear and unambiguous, especially with respect to the involvement of

stakeholders and the assessment of competitive forces. Those concerning the role of academic leaders and academics are quite strong as well.

A 56 percent majority considered the current level of regulation by the state as adequate, while 25 percent would like to see more and 20 percent less. The satisfaction expressed by more than 50 percent of respondents with the current level of regulation can be interpreted as a validation of the Indonesian government's chosen course to provide a legal framework that allows for growth. The survey results concerning the power of owners can be interpreted as some kind of preference for less such influence. Some well-established private institutions report little influence by their foundation (i.e. the owner), leaving the academic leadership space to develop the institution. However other organizations, possibly especially young institutions, seem to occasionally receive clear instructions on operational — mostly financial management — details.

One important finding is the strong support for more stakeholder involvement. An increase herein has been an important feature of ongoing international discussions about the future of higher education. It is in the same light that Indonesian higher education experts and leaders emphasize the benefits of close collaboration between universities and their stakeholders in terms of additional funding for the development of higher education institutions, for additional scholarships for students, and for internships. Close contact can facilitate access to experts from outside the academic world, to share their knowledge with university students and staff. The closing of the gap between theoretical work within the academic environment and the practical world is seen as an important advantage, one helping to keep the employability of graduates high. Stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and their stakeholders, be they industry, community, or other groups, is strongly supported by government. Such an approach of involving stakeholders in the development of new institutional arrangements has been influential for the practice of accreditation. The term “triple helix” to describe the cooperation of government, the business community, and universities has become a catchword for describing the need and the avenue toward the interplay of stakeholders. In order to emphasize the requirement to involve civil society or other players, the term “quadruple helix structure” is sometimes used as well. Despite the potential challenges arising from involving many different stakeholders in the governance architecture, it seems that currently there is a very strong perception of the potential positive sides of such close collaboration.

The leaders who participated in the survey would not prefer, as had been hypothesized, a reduced role for academics. Rather, maintaining the status quo or an increase in their own influence was wished for. This is an interesting discovery, one that deviates greatly from the discourse in Western Europe — where academics' influence was strong in the past but came to be seen critically when the New Public Management philosophy gained ground. In Indonesia, there seems to be an appreciation for the positive impact of getting academics involved in the

development of the institution. Given the low number of PhDs held among staff, the small size of some of the institutions, the lack of research done, and the simultaneous need to develop an academic culture as well as to increase output, this preference might be based on the realization that such results are only possible with more say for academics.

Managerial self-governance is seen positively by leaders themselves. This is not a surprising result, being one observed in most countries around the world. Over 90 percent of respondents were in favor of even more competition. Private higher education institutions are typically quite entrepreneurial, and therefore appreciative of dynamic conditions. The setting of the framework conditions in Indonesia has allowed private agents to become strong players, in terms of the number of institutions and number of students. It is therefore consistent that leaders see liberal conditions as positive. There seems to be quite some trust within the sector that rules for competition are such that related forces push for more effectiveness and efficiency, innovation, and quality, and will finally lead to public recognition of universities' repute.

Conclusion

The article has highlighted the important role that the private higher education sector plays in Indonesia. Given the size of it, the importance of institutions operating effectively is crucial. The overall performance of the higher education sector in the country depends to a considerable extent on that of the private higher education sector. External environmental conditions and the governance system for private higher education are therefore of key importance.

In Indonesia, both that external environment and governance system are constantly changing and undergoing reform. The leaders of higher education institutions are key players, with their perspectives on and their proposals for change vital to the public debate. The results of the survey that we compiled show that leaders of Indonesian higher education institutions have a strong preference for the more powerful role of stakeholders and a strong competitive framework. They would like to see more discretionary power given to leaders, but are equally supportive of more influence for academics.

When the government and indeed the various stakeholders in the higher education sector look at ways to optimize how it is managed, and to engineer legal and political rules for higher education, the results of our study will be helpful in directing attention to core issues, needs, and considerations.

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