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## Change and Development of Higher Education in Sudan

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### ABSTRACT

Education is instrumental in developing individuals to making them fully functioning in their society. The process to produce knowledgeable people in a society starts from lower education level, and continues to higher education level. In the modern society, higher education sector has been regarded as an important contributor to a country's advancement. It is expected to train workforce, generate knowledge, or nurture innovation, all are the core functions of a higher learning institution (HLI). It is considered as center of human resources development which leads to the development and change of a society to achieve effective economic and social progress. Besides this main function, higher education represents a major pillar of a nation's growth. HLIs in a country are supposed to undertake innovative and applied research, and to improve the quality of life that the community in the country is entitled to. In short, higher education sector contributes to the provision of important services to society in all its forms, through its involvement in research, applied research, education, training or consulting (Magboul & Ibrahim, 2015). The aim of this paper is to discuss the philosophy and objectives of higher education in Sudan. It also highlights the changes that have occurred in the policies of higher education in Sudan since its colonial time and until the National Salvation Revolution, 1989-2019. The paper also discusses the sources of higher education funding as well as the HE quality assurance. It identifies the scientific research programmes and innovation embarked by higher education institutions, too.

## Higher Education in Sudan

In Sudan, education was previously limited to the teaching of Quran and other religious subjects. At higher education level, there were some Sudanese citizens who enrolled in activities which could be classified as modern education when they went to Egypt and enrolled in al-Azhar University (Ali & Hassan, 2015). The so-called formal education in Sudan had started by the British colonial administration after the reconquest of the country in 1898. It has been reported that formal English education in Sudan started way back in 1902 when Gordon Memorial College (GMC) was established as a primary school. It was then expanded and upgraded to become high schools which provided post-secondary training, such as the Kitchner Medical School at Gordon College in 1924, the School of Agriculture, the School of

Veterinary Medicine in 1938, and the School of Engineering in 1940. Each school was affiliated with the government department (public administration). In 1944 these schools were merged except for the Kitchner School of Medicine at Gordon College. In 1951, both the college and the merged institutions have joined the University of London to become Khartoum University College. Graduates of Khartoum College received bachelor's degree from the University of London. By the year 1956, the college has been turned in the University of Khartoum. (Ali & Hassan, 2015).

The Cairo University of Khartoum Branch was established in 1955, in the premises of Farouk Secondary High School, as a gift from the Egyptian people to the Sudanese people in conjunction with the independence of Sudan. The university emulated the traditions and policies of the University of Cairo which was based on the traditions, policies and standards of French universities. The University conferred the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Law and Commerce (Ali & Hassan,2015). In 1961 the Higher Teachers Institute and the Intermediate Schools Training Institute were established. In 1966 the Omdurman Scientific Institute, which was awarded the international certificate equivalent to the certificate of Al-Azhar had been upgraded into the Islamic University of Omdurman. In 1965 Juba Training Centre had been upgraded to Juba University, and in 1975 Al Jazeera University was established but admission of students only began in 1978. In 1990, the Institute of Technical Colleges which was established in 1975, has been upgraded to Sudan University of Science and Technology (Ali & Hassan, 2015).

Throughout the years 1953-1970 there were no unified policies or standards for institutions of higher education. There have been different criteria and ways of admission among the universities and colleges. They were not governed by a standard requirement until the establishment of the Unified Admission Committee for Universities and Higher Institutes in 1971. The committee supervise the admission of students to the bachelor's degree only. The acceptance of the technical institutes was done at the acceptance office of Khartoum technical institutes (Ali & Hassan,2015).

In 1975, the law on the regulation of higher education has been passed and the National Council for Higher Education was established. This is the first period in which a unified institution of higher education has been established to set higher education policies and organize the work of higher learning institutions. A unified admission committee has been formed for all institutions of higher education (for universities and institutes) and remained under the chairmanship of the director of the University of Khartoum. It was then placed under the management of the academic secretary of the University of Khartoum. In 1979, it was made an independent body, functioning as the Office of Unified Admission (Ali & Hassan,2015).

### ***Higher Education Revolution-Philosophy and Objectives***

The year 1990 is considered as a turning point for higher education landscape in Sudan, characterised by the birth of higher education "revolution". This has been championed by the National Salvation "revolution" that came to power in June 1989. This regime declared that the situation of higher education in Sudan had severely deteriorated in all aspects and there was an urgent need for "revolution" or reform (Elhadary, 2010).

The philosophy of higher education in Sudan spells out the essentiality to advance the society, fulfill their needs, and take care of comprehensive societal development through the rehabilitation of individuals who are capable of creativity and innovation. Higher education in Sudan also values close interaction between higher learning institutions with the community, and to uphold the society's spiritual and human values to reach the progress and development of the nation (MHESR,2017). Higher Education Revolution of 1990 adopted several major objectives (Elhadary, 2010), including (a) to increase student

intake at all institutions and reform admission policy, that is to enhance access among all members in the society instead of confining it to elite people; (b) to build universities in different states of Sudan including rural areas to avoid concentration of higher learning institutions in the capital; (c) to open chances for private higher education institutions; as well as to relate educational programmes with the local environment and the needs of the society; (d) to abolish student boarding and subsistence schemes; (e) to encourage all students studying abroad to continue their studies at Sudanese institutions; and (f) to use Arabic language as the language of instruction and research.

The introduction of higher education objectives in the 1990 higher education revolution has caused both public and private higher learning institutions in Sudan to undergo rapid expansion. The number of public higher learning institutions increased from five universities and one polytechnic in 1989, to 35 universities, and 21 colleges and institutions (Gasim, 2010). Regarding private higher learning institutions, the number increased from two in 1989 to sixteen in 1996 and to 26 in 2003 (El Tom, 2003). The number of private higher learning institutions has approached 48 universities and 85 colleges and institutions (see table 1). The expansion of higher learning institutions happened at a such high rate that its quality has not been accordingly regulated. The major role of universities in basic and applied research was neglected, and that academic activities did not consider the need of the country. This has led to the claim by academics that higher education “revolution” in Sudan has stronger political influence rather than substantiating the academic achievement (Elhadary, 2010).

*Table 1*  
*The number of HEIs before and after the “revolution” (Abu Al gookh,2015)*

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>2015</b>
Public Universities	5	35
Private universities	-	14
Public colleges and institutions	12	21
Private colleges and institutions	2	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>133</b>

Despite the positive side of the increase of the number of private institutions, there are negative sides. Geographically, 81% per cent of private higher learning institutions are in Khartoum and most of them are concentrated in one location. They are not well-prepared to address issues related to diversification. There were no major differences between disciplines offered by public and that of most new private higher learning institutions. It may be said that many of private institutions are based on profit rather than addressing the needs of the country for new specializations (see table 2) (Abd El Rhaim & El Taher, 2015).

*Table 2*  
*Programmes offered by specializations in higher education institutions*

Specialization	Programmes				Total
	Bachelor		Diploma		
	Governmental	Private	Governmental	Private	
Engineering Sciences	94	74	140	30	338
Health Sciences	85	87	24	33	229
Educational Sciences	165	3	5	-	173
Human Studies	112	59	35	3	209
Social Studies	93	136	135	93	457
Basic Sciences	57	-	34	7	98

Agricultural Sciences	94	-	21	1	116
Computer and Information Technology	51	67	129	32	279
Total	751	426	523	199	1899

In the years 1989-1990, about 5,000 students were enrolled in higher learning institutions (Gasim, 2010), 3000 of them had enrolled in private institutions. In 1994-1995, about 24,000 students enrolled in private higher learning institutions, while in 1999-2000, 38,623 students had enrolled in higher learning institutions, that is 68.8% of total applicants. Enrolment at both public and private higher learning institutions was about 40,000 in 2003 (El Tom 2003).

It is worth noting that the Sudanese Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research as part of its objectives has formulated a quarter-century plan (2003-2027) that is represented on the following points (MHESR,2017):

On knowledge, the plan envisions to

1. strengthen science education, emphasise the status of Arabic and English languages, and encourage the mastery of other languages.
2. invest in research to achieve economic and social goals, and take into consideration researches in basic sciences which are the starting point for future innovations while ensuring balance between them and applied research.
3. reformulate curricula and courses to combine between knowledge and skills of high level to be consistent with current and future state's trends and needs.
4. give priority to technical education and develop it to reach 60% of higher education provision.

On students, the plan envisions to

1. prepare graduates to become highly skillful workforce and responsible citizens who can meet the requirements of the development orientation in the country.
2. give special consideration to business creation skills, and build the entrepreneurial spirit of students to facilitate their employability after graduation so as not to remain mere job seekers, but to become active actors in job creation.
3. select potential researchers and prepare them in the framework of graduate studies, which must be taken care of and developed in all universities.
4. take care of the social welfare of the students, including their subsistence and housing.

On higher education sector, the plan envisions to

1. expand admission to universities so as to reach the global percentage of the expected age group enrolling in higher education.
2. enhance the participation of higher learning institutions in building a culture of peace as a guarantee of justice, based on the right to satisfy the basic needs of individuals.
3. encourage the establishment of civil and foreign education. Set standards and conditions to ensure its levels to participate in the spread of education, in accordance with international and local changes and developments, considering multilateral agreements of the World Trade Organization to open the way for investment in education and

liberalization of capital movement leading to the entry of foreign investors in education, individuals, or institutions.

4. develop universities to become centers of excellence in research and development, establishment of special units; and centers of future studies in order to provide knowledge and applications, leading to economic and social development programmes and projects.
5. help to serve the community and promote its values by developing education curricula at all levels and preparing teachers, and conducting educational research.
6. activate the role of the university and conduct research in universities to transfer knowledge to students and society through sustainable education.
7. promote international cooperation in higher education and scientific research, by the adoption of national policies and international arrangements about facilitating the permanent and unhindered return of scientists and researchers to the country.
8. diversify the sources of funding for higher education and scientific research, and the continuation of government funding, which will remain a key factor in ensuring the balance in the performance of scientific and social tasks.
9. Take care of the cultural, intellectual and sports activities of the students, and develop their mental abilities to prepare a generation capable of assuming responsibility for understanding, awareness, and awareness of the requirements of the next stage.
10. Provide opportunities for the increasing number of successful students who do not find place in universities, by liberalizing university education from temporal and spatial constraints, reducing the cost of higher education while minimizing the negative effects of the higher education revolution.

### ***Funding of HEIs***

Historically, funding of higher education in Sudan came from the government and this trend continued till the birth of higher education “revolution” in 1990. The rapid expansion of the HEIs has resulted in remarkable funding decline. Currently public HEIs in Sudan are funded by the Ministry of Finance by 2.1% of public expenditure (in the mid- 1990s it was 5.2%), through a grant distributed by the Finance Department of the Ministry of Higher Education according to specific criteria of government universities. The grant covers all or part of the first semester in accordance to the size of the university: (Abbas,2015).

There are other means of financing through self- generated income, which includes tuition fees, that faces a number of challenges that include difficulties to obtain the fees from students and lack of expenses imposed on students, attributed to the difficult economic situation experienced by most Sudanese families. There were situations when students were granted exemptions from paying tuition fees (example Students of Darfur province) (Abbas,2015). When the number of universities jumped from five to 35 universities, there had been enormous increase in university funding, causing certain extent of budget cut in financial allocation. Sudanese public universities responded to this financial cut by amending their admission requirements to increase student intake, and raise student fees. The struggle for funding has led to the negative consequences on the standard and quality of higher education (Elhadary, n.d).

Sudan has nearly 30 government universities, leading the Government to face shortage of fund in running the universities. The institutions have to, hence, find other means to cover the shortage of its

budgets. Many of the higher learning institutions generate income through investments, in that there have been many projects made by universities even though some universities have been hit by a number of obstacles such as its failure to secure letters of guarantees from the bank of Sudan. To illustrate, a university's project for investment requires the institution to get a guarantee letter from a bank which certifies that the institution has adequate money in its account to finance any planned projects. In some instances, the bank itself will help in financing the project but with certain agreed upon conditions. The obstacle occurs when a bank refuses to issue a guarantee letter, inhibiting a university to launch its planned project which in turn hampers its expansion and development.

### **Research in HEIs**

Despite the increase in the number of universities in Sudan, the increasing number of faculty members and research centers in universities, scientific research is lagging technological progress. There has been a decline in quantity and quality of research in recent years due to weak research capacity, lack of training for human resources development, and limited financial resources. Expenditure on higher education and scientific research includes government support, which is currently limited to paying wages and salaries, and a small amount of expenditure on facilitation, rarely covering research fund in universities (Abu Al gookh, 2015). There are several combined factors that directly affect the level of the outputs of scientific research in the Sudanese universities, including (Abu Al gookh, 2015):

1. Lack of detailed plans for scientific research at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.
2. Absence of research plans in most higher learning institutions.
3. Weak funding, the global rate is 2-3.5% of national income, while in Sudan it is only 0.2%.
4. Difficulty in publishing locally as a result of financial difficulties, and globally for the inability to keep pace with the requirements of publication in international journals.
5. Weak use of the results of scientific research due to absence of coordination between universities and the beneficiaries of those researches, as well as the absence of the appropriate mechanism to benefit from the outputs of scientific research.
6. The migration of many of academics abroad to improve their life conditions.

*Table 3*

*Number of researches conducted in Sudanese Universities, (Abu Al gookh, 2015)*

Year	Doctorate degree	Master Degree	Diploma	Researches of Professors	Total
2006	670	3311	957	314	5252
2007	969	3532	841	819	6161
2010	742	2073	415	145	3384
2014	1.681	5.835	662	1.470	9.648

### **Quality assurance in HEIs**

Considerable efforts have been made over the past few years to develop an effective national framework for quality assurance. Part of these efforts have resulted in the establishment of the Evaluation and Accreditation Commission in 2003 as a specialized authority to create and encourage a

culture of quality assurance and accreditation within all Sudanese universities, and to check out that the universities are accountable and effective in delivering academic programmes and services (Abdalla, 2016). A study by Abdalla (2016) has been based on detailed review of quality dimensions coupled with some descriptive and inferential statistical methods indicates that there is a quality gap between intended and actual quality assurance practices within all Sudanese universities.

### **Discussion**

This paper has shown that the number of public and private HEIs has increased dramatically due to the slogan of higher education “revolution” adopted by the Government. It is fair to argue that there was an urgent need to expand Sudan’s higher education institutions due to the huge cost associated with sending students abroad for a developing country like Sudan, and to the growing population. The distribution of universities in the states through Sudan has helped to reduce cost of travelling and accommodation in towns or in Khartoum. Due to that, the percentage of female enrolled for higher education in relation to male jumped from 16 per cent in 1975 to 53 per cent in 2003 and today it is approaching 60 per cent (El Tom, 2003). In addition, the “revolution” has made higher education accessible for all regardless of socio-economic status and constraints. Accessible higher education has been made possible by the opening of non-conventional education such as distance education which also serves as a response to the growing social demand for more diverse academic programmes. (Elhadary, n.d.)

### **Conclusion**

The increased number of higher learning institutions in all the states of Sudan has led to the increased number of female students and reduction of the socio-economic cost to study in the capital and main towns. On the negative side, this paper highlights that unplanned expansion has led to degraded quality of higher education institutions in terms of production of poor graduates and research output. Critics of the higher education revolution argue that horizontal expansion occurred at the expense of intermediate stage education, as most newly established colleges and universities outside the capital city were opened in buildings that were formerly intermediate schools. The change in elementary education from 12 to 11 years (from 6+3+3 to 8+3) gave the government an opportunity to facilitate its policies by transforming many intermediate schools into public universities. Unlike their predecessors from the 1960s to the late 1980s, most of the higher education instructors were educated in non-western countries. The Immigration of many professors and instructors abroad in search for better economic conditions is considered another grave mistake from higher education financial policies towards academic staff. As natural result, the country and top public universities witnessed the largest “brain drain” since Sudan gained independence.

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