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Current Trends in Private Higher Education in Malawi

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Current Trends in Private Higher Education in Malawi

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education in Malawi started in 1964 with the creation of the University of Malawi. Its first enrollment was in 1965, accommodating just 90 students from across the country (SARUA, 2018). Since then, public universities have grown in number and continue expanding, with the current number of universities being four – The University of Malawi, Mzuzu University, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Malawi University of Science and Technology.

However, this gradual increase in public universities, albeit to just four, has time and again failed to meet the rising demand for tertiary education in the country. This is because of a soaring population that currently stands at 18 million. The public universities do not have the capacity and resources to meet the ever-increasing demand for higher education. The enrolment rates in the public universities attest to this. Malawi's tertiary education enrollment rate, at less than 1%, is among the lowest in the world and well below the average for Sub-Saharan Africa. To illustrate the worsening situation, in 2009, while the overall gross enrolment ratio for Sub-Saharan Africa was about 7%, it was as low as 0.5% for Malawi (Teferra, 2014). Similarly, in 2011, Malawi had only 80 students enrolled in university per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 211

which is the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (Valeta, Sefasi, & Kalizang'oma, 2016).

The challenges related to access to tertiary education necessitated the need for a positive engagement with the private sector to help expand access. This was in line with current trends in higher education in many African countries. This continental trend was initiated by market-friendly reforms under structural adjustment programmes, deregulation policies, and financial crises of the state which encouraged an environment for the emergence of private universities on the continent (Varghese, 2004). It is in line with this that the Malawi government's education policies were skewed towards allowing for the existence of private institutions of higher learning. This led to the birth of several private universities across the country. The first notable private institution of higher learning to be established was the African Bible College which opened in 1988 (Sharra, 2018). It also came as the second university for both the public and the private sector, after the University of Malawi. The second private institution of higher learning was the University of Livingstonia (UNILIA) which was established in 2003 by the Church of the Central African Presbytery. This was followed by the birth of another private university, the Catholic University of Malawi (CUNIMA). Established in 2004 and starting its operations in 2006, it has become the cradle of private university education in the country, enrolling a substantial number of students who can manage to pay for their own education. As of 2016, enrolment in CUNIMA had increased from 126 in 2006 to 1,677 students (Henderson, 2016).

Private institutions of higher learning appeared much late in the education sector in Malawi due to government policies. Chiwara (2013) notes that before 1994 it was almost impossible for individuals or organizations to establish a private university due to strict government regulation. Mtumbuka (2010) cited in Chiwara (2013) also observes that the one-party government era spanning from 1964 to 1994 had strict policies primarily aimed at controlling the quantitative output of graduates so that the ideal numbers produced were easily absorbed by industry as well as quality concerns. However, with the softening of government policies in post-1994 Malawi, between 2003 and 2008, enrolment of students in private universities consistently and significantly rose, with a total student population of 1,001 students (Chiwara, 2013).

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Currently, there are ten accredited private institutions of higher learning in the country. These include the Catholic University of Malawi, the University of Livingstonia, Malawi Adventist University, Malawi Assemblies of God University, Daeyang University, Pentecostal Life University, Management College of Southern Africa, DMI St. John the Baptist University, Nkhoma University and African Bible College (NCHE, 2018). A greater number of these universities belong to religious institutions, while some belong to other private business corporations. The number of private universities keeps fluctuating depending on assessment and accreditation by the National Council for Higher Education. There are several other institutions awaiting accreditation, which still operate, albeit illegally, as their accreditation was only affected with NCHE's most recent (2018) assessment. Currently, there are nine other private universities that have been listed as unaccredited by NCHE, with reasons provided for their failure to earn accreditation. A further ten have been recognized as newly registered and still in the process of earning accreditation (NCHE, 2018).

The rise of private institutions in higher education has been recommended by several quarters, while cautioning on the need to ensure that quality remains uncompromised. However, there are still some challenges encountered in the provision of tertiary education by these institutions. The list of unaccredited institutions that are still in operation, as listed by the National Council for Higher Education, is evidence of the chaos characterizing the private sector in higher education. On the other hand, the inevitability of the need for private sector intervention in the provision of tertiary education has rendered it difficult for authorities to adopt a tough stance on the unaccredited institutions. Currently, there exist a lot of issues pertaining to the private higher education sector which render an assessment of the status quo complex. The main issues in private higher education relate to accreditation, the debate on access versus quality of education, and prospective steps to be taken in resolving current challenges facing private higher education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Private universities have been recognized as one way of minimizing problems of access to higher education which continue characterizing the education system in Africa. Tamrat (2017) observes that the growth of private higher education in Africa has been driven by factors such as a burgeoning demand that could not be met by the public sector and policy influences such as Structural Adjustment Programmes that have been promoting various modus operandi such as privatization. Research shows that the number of tertiary students in Africa almost trebled between 1999 and 2012, from more than 3.5 million students to more than

9.5 million (Odon, 2015). Odon (2015) also notes that there are differences regarding the models followed by the private institutions from country to country. For example, in countries such as Nigeria, the universities are owned by churches, business persons and even politicians. In Ghana, however, while the universities are established by various business and religious entities, management and accreditation remain the mandate of older public universities to which the various private institutions of higher learning are affiliated.

Although there is available literature on the development of private higher education on the continent in general, scholarly treatment on the same in Malawi has been so minimal. However, there are still some studies that treat the subject partially, mostly just in passing in studies that tackle other relevant areas of higher education in general such as access and quality, as well as various policies.

To begin with, dominating the discourse on private universities in the available literature has been matters regarding quality. A 2015 study on students' satisfaction with university lecturers in Malawian private institutions notes that one of the areas where private universities have been criticized on and that could lead to poor quality of education is the teaching personnel. The study confirmed fears by the public that most private universities have under-qualified lecturers, with instances of first-degree holders being the majority teaching in degree programmes (Msiska, 2015). Some of the private universities are understaffed and lack sufficient infrastructure among other reasons that contribute to a questionable quality of services rendered (Valeta, Sefasi, & Kalizang'oma, 2016). With doubts on whether private universities target increasing labor productivity through the programmes they offer, Kampanje (2014) warns of adverse regulation against the private institutions as the general public is ever demanding quality tertiary education.

Related to quality has been a particular focus on research capacity of the private universities through the availability of relevant resources such as library services. In a study on the collection development practices in some selected private university libraries in Malawi, Chaputula (2014) found that private universities fund their libraries on their own. As such, funding is not adequate as is the case with public university libraries which are funded largely by the government with the private sector coming in at times as it fulfills its corporate social responsibility. The study found that this adversely affects operations of the libraries such as collection development practices that include the purchase of materials and staff training (Chaputula, 2014). Since the library is a crucial component to research, this challenge weakens research capacity of private universities, again adversely impacting the output in the universities' programmes.

The literature on private universities has also often focused on the possibilities of increasing access to university education with the rising number of private institutions raising expectations of a widened access. Private universities are playing an increasingly important role in improving access and expanding the number of programs offered in Malawian higher education. For example, while enrollment in public universities increased from 7,644 to 10,219 between 2008 and 2011, equivalent to an increase of 33.7 percent, it was accompanied by a concurrent increase in private university enrollment from 731 to 1,404 - or 88.4 percent - over the same period (Mambo, Meki, Tanaka, & Salmi, 2016). Mambo et al. (2016) also observe that while enrollment in private universities is escalating off a low when compared with the public universities, the consistent expansion of enrollment in private universities is associated with expanded academic programmatic offerings at the Malawi Adventist University (MAU) and the Catholic University of Malawi (CUNIMA). Total enrollment at the University of Livingstonia (UNILIA) increased from 142 in 2008 to 213 in 2011, and CUNIMA's total enrollment increased from 372 in 2009 to 849 in 2011 (Mambo et al, 2016).

However, some scholars disagree with the notion that the existence of the private universities alone helps in increasing enrollment. They argue that the introduction of private universities is meeting an exponential rise in demand for higher education, with policies that restrict access even in the realms of private higher education. In 2009, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology instituted a deliberate policy of increasing access to tertiary education through Public-Private Partnerships (Kampanje, 2014). As the private universities commenced their operations in the country, they largely modeled their operations on public universities. For example, both the Catholic University of Malawi and University of Livingstonia started with on-campus accommodation of enrolled students, and the approach remains largely the same to date. The scholars therefore argue that this approach works against the notion of access expansion as enrolment into the universities is still largely based on available accommodation space, which is often limited due to insufficient resources. In a research on university policy steering, management and governance in Malawi, Shawa (2011) makes a similar observation. He notes that since private universities have to a large extent been following the traditional provision of guaranteeing accommodation to almost all students, it would seem unlikely that Malawi's university education would substantially increase access following the introduction of private universities.

III. METHOD

This is a qualitative study that relies on the review of available literature to advance and support its

argument. The paper examines published works in academic journals, books on private higher education, and essays in periodicals authored by scholars on the subject. Due to the lack of sufficient scholarly literature and the need to understand the public's perspectives towards private education in Malawi, the paper also analyzes discussions from non-scholarly platforms such as the print and online media. In addition to all that, authorial knowledge on the subject matter through personal experience is also of great importance to the paper. The sources of data for this study are largely on Malawian private higher education. However, there are a number of them which involve private higher education in Africa in general for a contextualized discourse on Malawi's status.

IV. POLICY AND PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAWI

Matters of policy with regards to private higher education in Malawi revolve around both the history and current trends in the field of higher education. However, the issues are very crucial as they directly relate to other critical areas such as access, quality, and equity in the provision of private higher education. Policy formulation around private higher education hinges a lot on quality assurance in attempts to ensure that the education provided in the private institutions is of high standards equal to or above public universities.

First, it is worth noting that private higher education in Malawi is not as developed as the public university education although numbers of private institutions are much higher than public ones. This in part stems from the fact that private university education only established itself much late, in the early 2000s. Before that, there was only one private university in 1988, the African Bible College, whose programmes were not as fully fledged as they are now. The reasons for this were largely political. Sharra (2018) concurs with Mhone (1992) who observes that after independence, Malawi's first president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda was not keen on too many Malawians attaining university education. Mkandawire (2010) makes a similar observation, noting that the deliberate anti-education policies were meant to stifle political opposition to his regime (Mkandawire, 2010). In place of education, the government focused much on agriculture in its policies. The development policies of the early post-independent years put agriculture at the center, and a common understanding was that the sector did not need highly educated farm workers. 'The World Bank complicated matters when it declared that developing countries needed basic education more than they needed higher education, leading to cuts in funding to post-secondary education' (Sharra, 2018). With the government deliberately ignoring university education, it was an almost impossible endeavor to plan for, let alone,

embark on the establishment of private universities. The Catholic Church, for instance, intended to establish a university as far back as 1964 but it was not possible (Chivwara, 2013). The consequence for this was that private higher education mushroomed much later with a minimal impact towards widened access to higher education in the country.

The discourse on policies regarding private university education in Malawi entered the public domain especially in 2008. In its attempts to deal with problems of access to higher education, the Malawi government through the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) came up with a goal to increase access to university education by putting in place strategies that would help in the expansion of access to higher education. Msiska (2016) notes that according to the NESP, as part of the policy targeting the increase of access to tertiary education, the plan was to double enrolment of normal entry students into public universities in ten years with a focus on critical academic areas'. Pertaining to private higher education, the NESP proposed encouraging private universities to expand their operations to enroll more students within the same period that enrolment in public universities was to be doubled too (Msiska, 2016). Suffice to say the 2008 NESP was realized years after a few private universities had already been established.

Each private university in the country was established through charters accredited by the state. As Mambo et al. (2016) note, entities that establish the private universities are tasked with articulation of the university charter and obtaining approval from government. And, for church-based universities, the entities referred to are the dioceses/synods under which a university falls while for the other private universities, the entities are usually a group of investors who often constitute the Board of the university (Mambo et al, 2016). However, the private higher education sector continues to face criticism over several issues related to quality assurance. This led to the introduction of a regulatory body for university education in general – the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE).

A NCHE Bill was approved by Parliament and assented to into law by the president in 2011 and was appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Act. The council's main functions are to regulate higher education institutions through the promotion and coordination of education provided by higher education institutions; the registration of such institutions; the selection of students into public universities; the design and recommendation of institutional quality assurance systems for higher education; and the provision of guidance on terms and conditions for the awarding of grants and scholarships to students at public higher education institutions (Mambo et al, 2016). The council is made up of six persons with high professional standing in higher education, appointed by the minister.

The council includes two Vice Chancellors who represent public universities; one Vice Chancellor to represent private universities; the chief executive officer of the council; and several ex-officio members (Mambo et al, 2016).

One of the important functions of the NCHE is the registration and accreditation of institutions of higher education. As Jimu (2017) notes, the council issues accreditation certificates to institutions that fulfill quality assurance standards set by the minister on the recommendation of the NCHE. The council is very crucial for registration of private universities and upon its establishment, it set conditions some of which include suitable facilities that meet minimum standards for higher education set by the council; sufficiently qualified teaching staff; and financially capable institutions to satisfy its obligations to students among others (Jimu, 2017). The NCHE has the power to advise the minister to revoke the charter of a private university if the council establishes that the institution has failed to carry out its objectives; has breached its charter in any material respect; is not carrying out its functions properly; and/or that it is in the general interest of higher education in Malawi for the charter to be revoked (Mambo et al, 2016).

V. WIDENED ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The establishment of private universities raised expectations of expanded access to university education in the country. This was because of the insufficient space in public universities to meet the rising demand for higher education. This expectation is in certain ways being met. For example, although university enrolment data is not readily available in the country, the total student population in Malawian public and private universities can be estimated to be between 40,000 and 50,000 (Sharra, 2018). Out of this, Sharra puts the number of students enrolled in the country's four public universities at 20,000. This implies that the remaining half – or more than that – is enrolled in non-public institutions, which are privately owned. It should be noted that Sharra (2018) counts students enrolled in all the registered universities, which are 28, and not just the ten accredited ones at present. Although the numbers are insignificant compared to the exponential growth of population and the resulting demand for higher education in the country, it is still commendable, noting that in the absence of private universities, the enrolment numbers would be cut by half.

However, scholarly opinion is split on the impact of high fees on the relationship between widened access and equity in the private sector. Havergal (2015) notes that some researchers argue that private universities are "playing a key role in closing class inequalities", stating that the majority of students at most institutions are from working-class backgrounds.

Butas stakeholders commend the role of private universities in widening access to higher education, there is an aspect of equity that is not being taken care off. With private university education in Malawi, access is a matter of one's economic background. Private universities often charge exorbitantly for tuition compared to the services they render largely because they rely on the fees for their very operations. This means that students in need of higher education but with poor socioeconomic statuses have no chance to study in these private institutions even when they have been left out of the public universities.

This is where matters of equity in the provision of private higher education arise. Further, Msiska (2015) notes that although there are more private universities than public ones, the majority of the students are enrolled in public universities, citing a 2010 World Bank study which states that private universities contributed only 12.4% of the total university enrollment in 2008. Msiska argues that this could partly be attributed to the high fees that private universities charge, affirming the debates over equity versus access. 'In terms of fees, private universities charge more than double and in other cases triple the fees in public universities' (Msiska, 2015). For example, while tuition ranges from MK350,000 to MK500,000 for the government-owned University of Malawi in the 2018/2019 academic year, it is at MK 615,000 at the Malawi Assemblies of God University, MK690,000 at Nkhoma University and ranges from MK734,000 to MK1,015,000 per academic year at the Catholic University of Malawi. In some instances, the tuition might not necessarily be much higher than in public universities, but when compared to the quality of education provided in the private institutions, it may be considered unnecessarily exorbitant.

VI. A COMPROMISE IN QUALITY

Critics of private higher education decry how access to tertiary education in private universities often compromises quality. To illustrate this, as of 2016, Malawi had four public universities and sixteen private universities registered with the National Council for Higher Education yet none of the universities was highly ranked in the global ranking systems for higher education institutions (Valeta, Sefasi, & Kalizang'oma, 2016). Such poor ranking is often a result of limited research and publications, limited funding, poor infrastructure, non-industry oriented curriculum and compromised quality of education. The concerns of the public arise from the various challenges that appear unresolved in the universities despite their intent to continue enrolling students into various programmes offered in the institutions. Low quality education in private universities manifests itself in several aspects.

First, private institutions of higher learning in Malawi have become a harbor for under-qualified

academic staff. In most of the universities, lecturers are often mere holders of a bachelor's degree. In institutions where the number of lecturers with postgraduate qualifications is significant, such staff members usually belong to other institutions and are employed by the private university on part-time basis. 'Private universities tend to rely heavily on part-time lecturers, who often hold permanent positions at public universities at the same time, potentially diverting staff time away from public institutions' (Havergal, 2015). In the same manner, these part-time employees do not reach their maximum potential in their delivery of services in the private institutions as their time is often divided between the private and public institutions they work for. In a research on student satisfaction with lecturers where the case under study was an accredited private university in Lilongwe, Msiska (2015) found that the university had inadequate lecturers to effectively carry out their teaching duties and that some of them did not have necessary qualifications to teach at university level. Predictably, the study also established that most of the teachers at this university were part-time. This is characteristic of many private universities in Malawi because of their inability to attract qualified full-time lecturers due to poor remuneration packages (Msiska, 2015).

Further, some private universities in Malawi appear to be profit-oriented. Most of them tend to employ under-qualified staff as a means of minimizing costs while maximizing profits from the tuition collected. In addition to that, they do not invest heavily in infrastructure for the same reason. As Amponsah and Onuoha (2013) note, when private universities become profit-oriented, the true welfare of their "customers" might be relegated to the background. Most researchers acknowledge that many private universities may be less interested in knowledge generation and lack a specific focus on development (Havergal, 2015). This adversely contributes to the quality of education offered in the sense that recruitment targets relatively cheaper academic staff (usually the under-qualified), resources are sometimes kept at a minimal level where spending does not exceed earnings, and the infrastructure is generally not very developed. Havergal (2015) equally observes that private institutions, particularly for-profit ones, tend to offer courses that require limited infrastructure investment and are cheaper to deliver. He cites the World Bank as noting that this is a trend "that is unlikely to provide the knowledge and core skills needed if African nations are to boost competitiveness and growth".

In addition to this, another dimension of private higher education that compromises quality is the lack of distinct research. Research is not a focus for most private institutions; they are, in the words of Varghese, "teaching shops" (Havergal, 2015). This is mostly the case because most of the private institutions rely on

tuition fees for their quotidian undertakings, which makes it harder for them to allocate funds to research. As Mambo et al. (2016) note, at private institutions the funding of research activities is sourced almost entirely from tuition fees, with the exception of the Catholic University of Malawi which receives research funding from the Catholic Relief Services.

Attempts by government to regulate quality have come in at a late stage and an unsatisfying pace. This confirms the observation by Materu (2007) that quality assurance systems are a relatively recent development in Africa, but that the concept is gaining momentum as a result of the growing importance of private tertiary institutions whose activities need to be regulated. In the country, it was only in 2011 that the NCHE Bill was raised and passed into an Act, and it only started its operations two years after its establishment.

Demonstrating the need for its existence, the NCHE has repeatedly conducted assessment and evaluation campaigns that have led to some private universities being rendered unaccredited. The evaluation and accreditation campaigns follow the council's mandate to carry out such an activity every university programme cycle (Magombo, 2016). In a 2016 exercise, the council denied accreditation to the Blantyre International University, African Bible College, Exploits University, Malawi College of Accountancy and the Columbia Commonwealth University among others. It also deregistered the African University of Guidance Counseling and Youth Development. A similar exercise raised controversy earlier in 2018 when 17 private universities were shut down, with the institutions accusing the council of prejudice against private higher education while bemoaning underrepresentation in the council (Malekezo, 2018).

The 2018 closure of private universities brought another dimension to the quality assurance discourse in Malawi: the legality of the National Council for Higher Education. Blantyre International University, one of the universities that lost accreditation (again, after the 2016 experience), sued the council. In March, High Court ruled that any decision carried out by the council was not legally binding as its board of directors had not been gazetted by Minister of Education as per requirement of the NCHE's Act in Section 4 (4) (Chitsulo, 2018). Chitsulo (2018) argues that this meant that based on the ruling, the institutions that had lost their accreditation had automatically regained it, along with their unaccredited programmes. This development has led to concerns among some education experts who argue that since students will continue enrolling in these institutions, they will be exposed to less protection by the state once the council is gazetted. However, the Ministry of Education still regards the unaccredited institutions as such: unaccredited. In an interview with *The Nation* newspaper, the ministry's spokesperson Lindiwe Chide said:

In as far as the ministry is concerned, those universities that were accredited remain with that status and those that were not will remain the same until a fresh accreditation [process] takes place. But as to how long it is going to take for the council to be gazetted I cannot speculate (Kasakura, 2018).

This legal battle has been a setback to quality assurance in higher education in the country. It leaves stakeholders in an ambivalent position as parents and students are not sure whether to continue with enrolment in the universities. However, what has to be noted is that the nullification of the council's decision was only based on its technical composition and not necessarily factors that amounted to its denying accreditation to the institutions. As such, it might be only a matter of time before the NCHE pounces on the institutions again once it gains the legal mandate to execute its duties.

VII. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

As regards to the main issues surrounding private higher education in the country, there are a number of propositions that might be considered by all the relevant stakeholders for a progressive future in higher education. To begin with, matters of policy regarding private higher education have to be looked into carefully. There is need for effective implementation of higher education and quality assurance policies by the Ministry of Education. It is also imperative that the current stand-off between the National Council for Higher Education and some private institutions be addressed as soon as possible. This will help parents, students and other relevant stakeholders make well-informed decisions pertaining to enrolment of their wards in the various private institutions of higher learning.

In relation to this, the private universities must work on achieving and maintaining the minimum standards set by the National Council for Higher Education. The current tension between some of the private universities and the NCHE reveals prejudice against the council by the private universities. As such, when the council conducts its accreditation exercises, instead of soul-searching, the universities lash out at the council for bias – a conundrum easily avoidable if the institutions were to satisfy the demands of the council. The other institutions have to learn from the currently accredited private universities, which stand at 10 currently as noted earlier.

Second, while private universities are helping in the expansion of access to higher education, issues of equity have to be addressed with urgency. To ensure that this access is not only limited to students with a powerful socioeconomic background, it is important that the Loan Board, which grants loans to public university students en masse, considers its extension of services

to the private universities with a relatively substantial allocation. In the Higher Education Students' Loan Bill crafted in 2013, it is commendable that government introduced the concept of extension of loans to students in both public and private institutions (University World News, 2013). In the past, it was only students in public universities who had access to the loans. However, the loans are not granted to a lot of students in the private institutions as is the case with public universities. This means access to private university education is still restricted, indirectly, to those who can afford it. As such, the celebration about widened access is submersed in concerns of equity as students from the poor quintile largely remain out of the private institutions of higher learning.

Further, as Odon (2015) observes, although governments do not fund private universities, they do have an important role to play in building, supporting and monitoring the sector. They need to regulate private institutions so that they offer good quality education and qualification – which the Malawi government is trying to do through the NCHE. However, there is more that can be done. The government has the authority to bring public and private institutions to the same table and help them to establish productive partnerships as is the case in Ghana where private universities are affiliated to old and reputable public universities, which are mandated with accreditation and other quality-related issues of the private universities (Amponsah & Onuoha, 2013). There is need for government to foster partnerships between public and private universities for collaboration in various fields such as research projects and quality assurance. This would be very beneficial to the private universities as they stand to learn a lot from the established public institutions in various practices.

Lastly, the onus is also on the private institutions themselves to rise to the expectations of the public. There is still prejudice in the public with regards to the quality of education offered in private institutions of higher learning. This is because of the several factors that have been highlighted in the paper. However, most of the challenges facing private higher education are solvable if the stakeholders of the institutions are serious and ready to take their institutions to greater heights. For example, with sufficient resources, they would be able to attract highly qualified lecturers, establish competitive and relevant programmes, and produce graduates that will be in high demand not only because they would settle for anything – and they are exploitable – but because they belong to universities that have been transformed into institutions of high repute. It is in the same regard that an element of research in the private universities has to be treated seriously as well. Research is one of the core functions of an institution of higher learning. As such, depriving their own institutions of this core part renders the universities less relevant with

regards to contribution of knowledge to the scholarly world and other relevant dimensions of development.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In summation, it is noticeable that private higher education in Malawi arrived a little late than public university education. This was due to several reasons, mostly politics which influence higher education policies. However, at present, the importance of private institutions in higher learning in Malawi cannot be overemphasized. Relevant as it is, private higher education grapples with quality, access and equity issues which have to be looked into as urgent as possible. While government and other key stakeholders have to work on favorable higher education policies, the private institutions of higher learning must also do soul-searching and aim at achieving quality standards set by the NCHE not only to earn the trust of the public but to discharge honorable service to the country. The paper concludes that government must initiate productive partnerships between public and private institutions of higher learning to foster improvement in terms of quality and other services rendered to the country by the private institutions, for the betterment of higher education in the country. It also urges private universities to indulge in and take research seriously for a positive contribution of knowledge to the country.

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